

The Child Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires that **every** U.S. school district that participates in the National School Lunch and/or Breakfast Program develop and put into practice a local, district-wide “wellness policy” by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. The goal of this ruling is to help protect and improve children’s health through adequate levels of physical activity and proper nutrition during the school day. Congress recognizes that each community is unique and has different needs; as a result, it requires that the policies be developed on a district-by-district basis. Also, the law requires parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school’s Board of Education, school administrators, and the public be involved in the process to develop and implement the policy.

What are the requirements of a district’s wellness policy?

As outlined in the Act, wellness policies must address specific school-based nutrition and physical activity areas, in addition to meeting the Federal and State school meal regulations. Specifically, the policy must:

- Include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness;
- Provide nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages available on school campuses during the school day;
- Ensure that local guidelines for reimbursable school meals meet federal requirements and nutrition standards;
- Involve a broad group of members of the community;
- Include a plan for measuring implementation of the wellness plan; and,
- Designate a person(s) to insure fulfillment of the local wellness policy.

Why is there a need for a wellness policy in our school districts?

“Developing a comprehensive local school district wellness policy is essential to the academic success and lifelong wellbeing of students in Wyoming....Schools play a critical role in creating healthy environments to promote the wellbeing of children. These environments can help prevent childhood obesity, eating disorders, health problems related to poor nutrition and a lack of physical activity, and to the unfair treatment of children based on body size or shape.” (Source: Wyoming Action for Healthy Kids)

- ✓ Our school children are facing a weight, nutrition, and health crisis which may have far-reaching consequences.
- ✓ Schools play a central role in creating solutions to this national crisis because of their persuasion in each community and their influence on children.
- ✓ There were 4 times the number of overweight children in 2002 than there were in the 1960s. (More than 9 million children between the ages of 6 and 19 are considered overweight.)
- ✓ The number of overweight teens has more than tripled during the same time period.
- ✓ Being overweight is an academic issue (more school absences for overweight children, lower quality of life for and more frequent teasing of overweight children).
- ✓ Being undernourished is an academic issue (affecting performance and IQ scores, brain function, cognitive learning).
- ✓ Nutrition and fitness help kids behave well at school.
- ✓ Nutrition and fitness improve academic performance.
- ✓ Fit, healthy children are happy, successful children.

How should schools go about forming a wellness policy?

It is in the district's best interest to involve a wide representation of students, parents, teachers, school board members, school administrators, medical professionals, coaches, school food and nutrition service personnel, and the general public in developing a school wellness policy. Schools should appoint at least one person at the school district level or in each school with the responsibility for seeing that the policy is carried out. Many schools may already have an existing school health council under the Coordinated School Health Program. If a school has such a team already in place, it may only have to expand the scope a bit to incorporate a wellness policy.

What five components must a wellness policy include?

- 1. Nutrition Education:** The primary goal of nutrition education is for students in grades K-12 to receive behavior-focused nutrition education that is interactive and teaches the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors they need to adopt healthy and enjoyable eating habits that last a lifetime. State and district health education curriculum standards and guidelines are met or exceeded.
- 2. Physical Activity:** The primary goal for a school's physical activity component is to provide opportunities for every student from K-12 to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be able to regularly participate in physical activity, and to enjoy the short and long-term benefits of a physically active and healthful lifestyle. State and district physical education curriculum standards and guidelines are met or exceeded.
- 3. Nutrition Standards for All Food Available on Each School Campus during the School Day:** Students' lifelong eating habits are greatly influenced by the types of foods and beverages available. Schools must ensure that reimbursable meals are easily available to all students, and that the foods sold or served to students outside of the school meal program provide a positive contribution to the students' diet. These standards should focus on increasing nutritious foods such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods while decreasing fats and added sugars.
- 4. Other School-Based Activities Designed to Promote Student Wellness Goals:** Policies established under this category create a school environment that provides consistent wellness messages that promote healthy and pleasurable eating, enjoyable physical activity and respect for body-size differences. The entire school environment, not just the classroom or cafeteria, should be aligned with healthy school goals.
- 5. Maintain a District Wellness Advisory Council and Monitor and Review the Policy:** The goal of the council is to involve parents, students, school food service, teachers, administrators, and the public in the development of a healthy school nutrition environment; to assess the needs; to effectively use resources; and to establish a plan for development, implementation, and measurement of the policy.

(Source: Wyoming Action for Healthy Kids Wellness Policy Toolkit 2005)

School districts do not have to "reinvent the wheel" to develop a wellness policy to fit their particular needs. Available through the Wyoming Action for Healthy Kids is a "Wellness Policy Toolkit" which includes everything needed from guidelines for implementing a school wellness policy to templates for the actual writing and wording of such a policy. This booklet also has documentation, resources, and numerous websites to assist districts in developing and implementing their wellness policy. This toolkit was written by a team of Wyoming experts in various fields including early childhood, nutrition, nursing, health, and education. For more information or materials, call the Wyoming Action for Healthy Kids at 1-307-472-1830.

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