



Putting Local School Wellness Policies into Action:

Stories from School Districts and Schools

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health





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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Population Health thanks the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to this document:

Tyra McKinney

Danya International, Inc.
Atlanta, Georgia

Jeff Slutz

Danya International, Inc.
Atlanta, Georgia

Erika Pijai, MS, RD

Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture
Alexandria, Virginia

Mary Frances Nettles, PhD, RD

National Food Service Management Institute, The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Mildred M. Cody, PhD, RD, LD

Associate Professor Emerita
Department of Nutrition, Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia

For more information, please contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health
School Health Branch
1600 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30333

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

cdcinfo@cdc.gov

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/bam>

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Schools play an important role in the overall health of children and adolescents. About 95% of the nation's children and adolescents are enrolled in schools, and they typically spend 6 hours a day for up to 13 years in school.^{1,2} Schools have been identified as some of the most effective settings in the community to address preventable health problems, such as obesity among children and adolescents.³⁻⁵

Schools can give children and adolescents more chances to

- Consume nutritious meals, snacks, and beverages.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Learn about the importance of lifelong healthy behaviors.⁶

Researchers have linked healthy eating and physical activity with better academic performance and classroom behavior,^{7,8} such as concentration, attentiveness, and time-on-task. For example, eating a healthy breakfast has been associated with improvements in memory, mood, and academic performance, as well as fewer absences from school.⁹⁻¹⁴ School-based physical activity has been associated with improved academic achievement, including higher grades and standardized test scores, as well as better cognitive skills, attitudes, and academic behavior.¹⁵

Policy changes at the federal level have helped make it possible for schools to play a leading role in preventing obesity. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and, more recently, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, required that all local education agencies that participate in the National School Lunch Program or other child nutrition programs create a local school wellness policy with goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school activities designed to promote student wellness and set nutrition standards for all foods available on school campuses.¹⁶

Although most school districts have a wellness policy, the strength of these policies, the level of compliance with federal requirements, and the implementation process have not been consistent.¹⁷ The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires schools to evaluate their wellness policies and report this information to the public.¹⁸

Taking Action

To better understand the steps and strategies that schools and school districts have used to implement their wellness policies, staff from the Food and Nutrition Service of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the US Department of Education collaborated with Danya International, Inc. to identify stories from schools and districts. These stories were chosen using input from school health professional organizations and by consulting the list of schools that received the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge Gold Award of Distinction.

The goal was to highlight schools that had taken action in key areas, such as improving school meals and increasing physical activity levels among students. To ensure a diverse collection of stories, the workgroup looked at the setting of each school or district (urban, suburban, or rural) and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

The information in each story was self-reported and based on interviews with key contacts in each school or district. Stories were collected from March 2012 through February 2013. The resulting 11 stories provide examples of the steps some schools have taken to implement various aspects of the wellness policy, with special attention to how activities were designed to accomplish specific goals. They identify the key supporters, wellness champions, partners, and resources used in these settings.



Common Themes

Each school or district is unique. Many different factors contributed to implementing a school wellness policy⁶ or created challenges that arose. Taken together, these stories provide many practical ideas for any school or district to consider when assessing how to improve the health of its students.

These 11 stories highlight some major themes that were important for implementing these schools' and districts' wellness policies:

A “wellness champion” served as the driving force for developing and implementing the wellness policy.

A single wellness champion—such as a school nurse, district superintendent, or community member—led the process in many schools and districts. This champion played a critical role in starting the process and keeping it going when challenges arose.

Creating a wellness council to lead implementation efforts was a critical step.

Many schools and districts set up wellness councils to develop their wellness policies and to implement programs and activities. These councils included various stakeholders, such as school and district leaders, school staff, community partners, parents, and students. They helped schools and districts implement wellness policies by providing leadership, accountability, and structure. They also provided the support and resources needed to face challenges as they emerged.

Students generally responded well to activities designed to improve health and wellness.

School officials reported that many students were excited about new health and wellness activities, especially when they were given an active role in making decisions. For example, students responded better to new menu items in school lunches when they could taste and give feedback on recipes. They also liked lessons on nutrition that included hands-on experience, such as planting and tending fruits and vegetables in school gardens.

Inviting parents to help set wellness goals and plan activities helped to ensure support and participation.

When parents were able to be involved in developing and putting wellness policies into practice, they were more likely to accept and support new activities and changes in the schools. Some schools also reported that, when parents were involved, health and wellness lessons carried over to students' homes.

Partnering with community groups provided resources for wellness activities.

Finding resources for new wellness activities was difficult for schools and school districts. Many addressed this challenge by partnering with community organizations that could provide some of the resources needed. These partnerships also allowed more community involvement in the efforts to improve student health.

External funding helped schools and districts accomplish many of their wellness activities.

Most schools and districts sought and received grants to fund the implementation of their wellness policies. These grants were critical to the launch of many of the activities featured in the stories. However, relying on external funding can make the sustainability of wellness activities challenging. For example, schools and districts might need more training and support to create processes to ensure that these activities can be continued after external funding expires.

Evaluating and monitoring wellness activities was a challenge for many schools and districts.

Many schools and districts provided anecdotal and qualitative evidence of the success of their wellness policies. However, little quantitative data existed to show the results of new activities and whether student health and wellness had improved. Schools and districts may need additional technical assistance to develop evaluation systems that more accurately identify results and areas that need improvement.



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TAKING ACTION: Stories from School Districts and Schools

Academy for Global Citizenship

Chicago, Illinois

School Overview

- The Academy for Global Citizenship (AGC) is a Chicago Public Charter School, and currently serves 300 students in grades K–6.
- The school is located in an urban neighborhood, and 81% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Create and serve school meals that meet the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) recommended nutrition standards in all areas.
- Teach gardening as part of the core curriculum and engage students in planting, harvesting, preparing, serving, and tasting foods grown in the school garden.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

In 2008, the AGC established a taskforce to develop, implement, and evaluate a new wellness policy designed to reflect the school's values. This taskforce included a food service manager, executive director, the school's director, teachers, students, and parents. It set goals including daily recess, made-from-scratch meals, morning yoga for all students, and extracurricular activities.

The taskforce also set standards for evaluating wellness activities and created a comprehensive website to collect data, including students' test scores, students' heights and weights, monthly participation in the school meal program, financial information for the previous fiscal year, and partnerships with community organizations to support its wellness policy.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

School Meals

To ensure that all school meals met the IOM's recommended nutrition standards, the AGC partnered with its food service management company to revise

its lunch menus. It used funding from a small grant to teach cafeteria staff how to make meals from scratch with fresh ingredients. Staff members prepared meals using foods that did not contain trans fats or artificial preservatives, colors, or sweeteners and worked with local farmers to buy fresh, locally produced eggs, fruits, and vegetables.

Before new food items were put on the menu, the school chef took samples to classrooms so students could taste the items and ask questions. If students did not like a new food, the chef worked to revise the recipe and find creative ways to promote it. For example, before introducing tofu to the menu, the school chef invited a local tofu maker to come to the school and talk with students about how tofu is made, share nutritional facts, and give students samples to taste. This approach has often helped to get students excited about a new food item and increased the chances that they would try it.

Parents were also invited to attend afterschool "Taste of AGC" events where they could taste and vote on new items for the school lunch menu. Other activities provided information about the importance of healthy eating for their families.

Nutrition Education

The AGC used nutrition education programs to teach healthy habits and sustainable lifestyles. These programs included teaching students about gardening and giving them opportunities to plant, harvest, prepare, serve, and taste foods grown in the school's garden.

Through the school's garden and small chicken farm, students

- Discovered the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables.
- Learned how to become good stewards of the earth.
- Developed self-confidence, discipline, and other skills needed to collaborate with others.

Teachers oversaw maintenance of the garden, but students were responsible for planting, weeding, tilling and testing the soil; watering the plants; and harvesting the produce when it was ready. Many of



Photo courtesy of AGC.

the foods that students ate at school were grown in the garden, which encouraged students to be actively involved in the food production process. The school chef led the garden project and used it to teach students about where food comes from and how it can be prepared for different meals.

The garden was also used to enhance academic lessons and homework assignments. For example, students were asked to take home a fruit or vegetable from the garden and learn how to prepare it with their families.

The AGC teachers were asked to model positive nutrition practices and to include nutrition education in their lessons plans. For example, when students in fourth grade were learning about fruits and vegetables that grow in the rainforest, teachers asked cafeteria staff to serve rainforest fruits like bananas and pineapple to help students learn about the subject.

Accomplishments

Since implementing its wellness policy, the AGC became the first school in the Midwest to receive the Gold Award of Distinction from the USDA as part of its HealthierUS School Challenge.

The AGC also participated in the Chicago Public Schools' healthy food pilot program. Components of the program, such as school gardens, have since been adopted by the school system and are now reaching more than 400,000 students.

As a result of the school's wellness policies, AGC students have opportunities to be physically active at schools every day, eat healthy foods, and learn about health and sustainability. School lunch participation increased to the highest rate in the district.

Many parents have also reported that these activities motivated them to plant their own gardens and make healthier food choices.

Because of these achievements, educators from around the world have visited the AGC to learn about its experiences implementing a comprehensive school wellness program.

"Without healthy bodies and minds, kids cannot learn and explore in an efficient manner. We believe that knowing about healthy food, eating healthy food, exercising, and living a sustainable life encourages and enables healthy brain development, the desire to learn, and the motivation to make the world a better place."

—Anne Gillespie, Principal, Academy for Global Citizenship

Learn More

Academy for Global Citizenship:

<http://agcchicago.org>

Chicago Botanic Garden:

<http://www.chicagobotanic.org>

FamilyFarmed.org: <http://www.familyfarmed.org>

Burlington School District

Burlington, Vermont

District Overview

- The Burlington School District serves 3,600 pre-K through grade 12 students and comprises four elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, an arts academy, a continuing education center, a technical center, and an early education center.
- The district serves an urban area, and 51% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Connect with local organizations and businesses to promote health and wellness more comprehensively to students and their families.
- Provide nutrition education to students.
- Provide professional development for school food service staff to support nutrition education.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

The Burlington School District used CDC’s coordinated school health framework to improve its school health policies and practices and to tailor their programs and practices to their self-identified needs.

In 2010, the Burlington School District created a wellness team whose members represented each of the key areas of the coordinated school health framework. The team included parents, teachers, one school principal, the district’s food service director, a school board member, a registered dietitian, a nutritionist, school nurses, a representative from the Vermont State Department of Health, and community members. The district’s wellness coordinator recruited team members by inviting people from throughout the community to help the district revise its wellness policy.

The team started by using CDC’s School Health Index, a self-assessment and planning tool, to conduct a needs assessment. Team members also reviewed data from CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System to determine what behaviors needed to be addressed in the district’s wellness policy. They used several resources to write the new policy, which was then approved by the school board. These resources included the coordinated school health framework,



Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities, Grade Expectations for Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities, and the Vermont Nutrition and Fitness Policy Guidelines.

To implement the new wellness policy throughout the district, each school formed a wellness team that included parents, teachers, school staff, and representatives from area nonprofit organizations. These teams met once a month to review the implementation process and to monitor, evaluate, and update programs as needed. The district’s wellness coordinator attended these meetings and led discussions on how to implement policy components.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Community Partnerships to Reach Students and Families

To achieve its goal of working with local organizations to promote health and wellness, the district partnered with the City Market, Onion River Co-op (a community-owned food cooperative); Shelburne Farms; and Vermont FEED to create the Burlington School Food



Project (BSFP). The BSFP’s mission is to connect students and their families with fresh, local foods to improve the health of the overall community. As Vermont’s largest Farm to School program, the BSFP is a model for the rest of the state and the country.

Each partner made a different contribution to improving student health. For example, a Farm to School program that provided fresh, nutritious foods daily to all district’s schools was sponsored by the Vermont Community Garden Network’s Healthy City Youth Initiative and local farmers. The Healthy City Youth Initiative also coordinated the Healthy City Summer Program, which gave teens a chance to learn job skills as they maintained and harvested school gardens throughout the district.

Vermont FEED worked with the BSFP to organize the Jr Iron Chef Vermont contest. This cooking competition gave middle and high school students a chance to learn how to cook nutritious food, make healthy eating choices, and learn more about fresh produce.

Another essential partner was the Burlington Kids Afterschool Program. This joint program between the district and the City of Burlington Parks and Recreation Department provided healthy snacks to afterschool programs throughout the district. It was funded by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 as part of the National School Lunch Program.

Professional Development and Nutrition Education

The district partnered with the City Market, Onion River Co-op to host weekly cooking classes for school food service staff and the public. Topics included seasonal cooking on a budget and ethnic recipes. Food service staff who attended the classes learned new recipes that they could use in school meals. Students responded well to many of the new recipes and food items, even asking for them to be featured more often.

The co-op also offered cooking classes, nutrition activities, and tours for students. These activities, which typically included a math theme, took place several times a year as field trips or as optional afterschool activities. For example, students learned to make hummus with either dried beans or canned beans and then calculated and compared the costs of each. They also learned to draw maps to compare the distance that different varieties of apples had traveled to get to the co-op.

Accomplishments

The district formed community partnerships that have expanded Farm to School initiatives, improved nutrition education, and provided essential training for school nutrition services staff. Through the BSFP, the district was able to teach staff new food preparation skills and buy equipment and food items that the district could not afford alone. Since healthier meals were introduced, participation in the district’s school meal program has more than doubled. Ongoing nutrition education has helped students be more receptive to meal changes and take an active role in their health and wellness.

As a result of these efforts, eight Burlington School District schools received the Bronze award in the USDA’s HealthierUS School Challenge. Burlington’s schools were the first in Vermont to win this award.

“The full support of the Burlington School District superintendent and school board helped to cultivate a ‘culture of wellness’ in the district. The implementation of wellness activities and the support of staff in the schools helped make the wellness policy a success, and we believe it will only get better from here.”

—Ginger Farineau, District Wellness Team Member, Burlington School District

Learn More

Burlington School District: <http://www.bsdt.org>

Burlington Kids Afterschool Program: <http://www.enjoyburlington.com/Programs/BurlingtonKidsformerlyCityKids.cfm>

Burlington School Food Project: <http://www.burlingtonschoolfoodproject.org>

City Market, Onion River Co-op: <http://www.citymarket.coop>

Vermont Community Garden Network: <http://vcgn.org>

Jr Iron Chef Vermont: <http://www.jrironchefvt.org>

Vermont FEED: <http://www.vtfeed.org>

Clinton Public School District

Clinton, Mississippi

District Overview

- The Clinton Public School District serves 4,637 students, and comprises four elementary schools, two junior high schools, one high school, a career complex, and an alternative school.
- The district is located in a suburban area, and 46% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Provide school meals that meet nutrition standards set by the USDA and the Mississippi Department of Education's Office of Child Nutrition.
- Enhance and improve the district's physical education (PE) curriculum.
- Increase students' physical activity levels throughout the day.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

When Dr. Phillip G. Burchfield became superintendent of the Clinton Public School District, the administration received more than just an academic leader—they received a wellness champion. Dr. Burchfield took it upon himself to ensure that the district had a wellness policy that could empower students, staff, and the community to live healthier lives.

In 2008, Dr. Burchfield formed and led a district health council that included principals, teachers, parents, and community partners such as police officers, members of the clergy, and health professionals. The council used CDC's School Health Index, which is a self-assessment and planning tool, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the district's current wellness policy and practices. The results were used to develop an action plan for improvement.

The district's school board adopted the revised wellness policy and action plan, which were based on CDC's coordinated school health framework. This framework helped the district create a district health council that included parents and community members. The district health council continues to meet 3 times a year to review the wellness policy and make improvements to programs and activities as needed.

The new wellness policy requires each school to set up a health council to coordinate and implement its wellness activities. At the beginning of each school year, these councils look at school club and athletic calendars to find ways to make health and wellness activities a part of upcoming events. Principals work with event coordinators to add activities such as health screenings and cooking demonstrations to fundraisers and other school events.

The school health councils reported on the progress of their action plans to the district health council, which then reported to the school board annually. The district health council created a schedule for



Photo courtesy of USDA.



following up on key results from the School Health Index assessment as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

School Meals

To meet the goal of improving school meals, the district provided several training sessions for cafeteria staff to get their support and prepare them for the upcoming changes. Training topics included how to reduce salt and sugar in recipes and how to use herbs and spices to make school meals more flavorful. Staff also learned different ways to cut, prepare, and arrange foods to make them more appealing to students. The trainings included cooking demonstrations and gave staff opportunities to prepare new recipes.

School officials conducted taste tests of new recipes with students and used student feedback to choose menu items. New foods were also featured during National School Lunch Week. School officials reported that students were more accepting of the changes when they were part of the decision-making process, and that they liked the healthy recipes and the increased amounts of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

District officials also hosted a student recipe contest to get students excited about healthy eating. Students were encouraged to submit low-fat, low-sodium recipes that could be added to school lunch menus. The contest generated many new ideas, including chicken roll-ups, barbecue chicken pizza, and Mexicali soup. The top recipes from each school were featured on the menu during National School Lunch Week.

Physical Education and Physical Activity

To improve the district's PE curriculum, students were surveyed to find out what physical activities most appealed to them and what they would enjoy doing every week. A committee of PE instructors, parents, and principals was set up to review the existing curriculum. District officials used the survey data and curriculum analysis, along with information about best practices for teaching PE, to revise their curriculum. They also encouraged PE teachers to seek professional certifications and improve their skills.

Several schools also added extra programs to increase students' physical activity levels throughout the day. For example, students in fourth and fifth grade at one elementary school participated in a program called Fuel Up to Play 60. This program is designed to empower students to take charge of their health and fitness by getting 60 minutes of activity every day.

In addition, students and teachers throughout the district participated in the Move to Learn initiative, which is designed to help teachers increase physical activity in the classroom. Teachers were given easy-to-use tools and resources, such as short videos that promote physical activity in the classroom. The videos have catchy music and are easy for students to follow.

Accomplishments

The Move to Learn initiative was so successful that elementary school students in the district were featured in a video project that showcased how schools in Mississippi have added physical activity to their classrooms.

"I think the most influential factor in the success of the wellness policy was strong support from district leadership. District Superintendent Phillip Burchfield informed principals and teachers about the challenges as they occurred and made them feel like they were part of the decision-making process. Staff felt like it was a team effort to strive for excellence in student health."

—Keba Laird, Child Nutrition Supervisor II,
Clinton Public School District

Learn More

Clinton Public School District:

<http://www.clintonpublicschools.com>

Fuel Up to Play 60: <http://www.fueluptoplay60.com>

Move to Learn: <http://www.movetolearnms.org>

Downingtown Area School District

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

District Overview

- Downingtown Area School District (DASD) has 12,600 students, and includes ten elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools.
- The district is located in a suburban area outside Philadelphia, and 6% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Provide school lunches that meet USDA requirements.
- Provide students with opportunities to get at least 60 minutes of age-appropriate physical activity on all or most days of the week.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

The district superintendent served as the coordinator for the DASD Wellness Advisory Committee, which developed the local school wellness policy. The committee's structure is based on CDC's coordinated school health framework and includes

- Parents, teachers, and principals.
- Representatives from the district's finance, human resources, public relations, pupil services, and food services departments.
- A representative from a parent teacher organization.
- Representatives from several community organizations.
- Members of the DASD school board.

Under the committee's direction, each school created a school health council to implement the district wellness policy. The councils started by using CDC's School Health Index, which is a self-assessment and planning tool, to assess each school's current health policies and practices. The resulting data were used to develop school health improvement plans that included activities to support the district's wellness policy.

The plans also addressed the known risk behaviors of school-aged youth. These risk behaviors were

identified by reviewing data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, which assesses substance use and abuse, risk factors, and protective factors among students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. All health improvement plans were submitted to the committee for review.

The councils used specific physical activity and healthy eating goals from the district's wellness policy to monitor and evaluate initiatives in their improvement plans. When schools met a specific goal, they received apple-shaped recognition stickers, which could be put on Healthy School Zone banners displayed in school buildings.

Principals lead the school health councils, and one member from each council attended district meetings throughout the year to share updates, resources, successes, challenges, and concerns. The councils also submitted annual reports to the committee, which maintained a database of all wellness goals, outcomes, strategies, and successes. This information was compiled into an annual report for the DASD school board.

The district actively promoted the wellness policy to students, teachers, and staff through its community e-newsletter and website, on individual school websites, and at school board meetings. Parents and the public could also review the DASD's annual wellness reports.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

School Meals

The DASD made several changes to improve its school lunches even before the new meal patterns were required to be implemented through the





Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act. For example, DASD schools began providing only fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) dairy options; lean protein choices; and access to a variety of fruits and vegetables, assorted whole-grain products, and 100% fruit juice and water.

The district's food service management company worked with food, bread, and milk suppliers to create menus that met or exceeded nutrition requirements. A special menu was pilot tested in 2012 to get student input to ensure that the new menu was student-friendly and that it met new federal requirements.

To gain support from students, parents, and the community, the DASD used its website, mass e-mails, and phone calls to parents to send out regular updates about the changes. It also promoted new menu options through materials shared at Back-to-School Night, trainings for food service staff, signs in all food service areas, and K–12 lesson plans for health and PE teachers. Frequent updates were sent to the entire DASD community in the district's e-newsletter. In addition, a wellness education center was set up in each school to provide monthly nutrition tips, informational resources, and menu messages that highlighted nutrition and wellness facts for parents and students.

The DASD's food service director used the USDA Foods Toolkit, plus food production records and point-of-sale daily reports to monitor and evaluate school meals. Information was collected on product availability, recipes, and nutritional information, including serving size, calories, fat, sugar, and sodium. The director compared these data with the district's wellness policy goals and then sent a list of approved products and recipes to schools.

Physical Activity

To help students get at least 60 minutes of age-appropriate physical activity a day, the DASD added several activities. For example, Recess Mileage Clubs were set up to encourage elementary school students to walk on the playground several times a week during recess. Parent volunteers, health and PE teachers, and classroom aides helped students track how much they walked. For every 5 miles walked, students received a Toe Token to put on a shoelace or necklace.

DASD schools also offered afterschool running programs through a partnership with the YMCA. One program, Girls on the Run, helped girls aged 8–13 years get in shape for a 5K run. Trained volunteers—usually teachers or parents—led the program on school campuses, and the YMCA provided assistance,

training, and materials. Another YMCA program offered at DASD schools was STRIDE, a running program for boys in grades 3–5.

Teachers also began using Energizing Brain Breaks, which are classroom exercises and quick 1–2 minute activities that get students moving and more energized for class.

Accomplishments

During the 2011–2012 school year, 15 school health councils with a total of 145 members were set up in the DASD. Schools earned 291 recognition badges for meeting wellness goals, and new wellness activities reached 11,786 students and 1,495 staff members.

“Resistance to the school wellness policy was overcome through multiple channels of consistent communication and responsiveness to students, parents, and school personnel. It also helped that the school health councils were led by school principals, because it set the stage for change and adoption of the wellness policy.”

—Dr. Larry Mussoline, School Superintendent,
Downingtown Area School District

Learn More

Downingtown Area School District:
<http://www.dasd.org>

Energizing Brain Breaks:
<http://energizingbrainbreaks.com>

Girls on the Run: <http://www.girlsontherun.org>

Pennsylvania Youth Survey: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_youth_survey/5396

Recess Mileage Club: <http://www.fitnessfinders.net/Mileage-Club-s/3.htm>

STRIDE: <http://www.ymcabwv.org/youth-programs/STRIDE>

USDA Foods Toolkit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-foods-toolkit>

YMCA of the Brandywine Valley:
<http://www.ymcabwv.org>

DREAM Charter School

New York, New York

School Overview

- DREAM Charter School serves 300 students in grades K–5.
- The school is located in an urban community, and 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Provide students and families with nutrition education opportunities.
- Provide students with 150 minutes of physical activity each week.
- Provide all students with 90 minutes a week of physical education (PE) with a licensed PE teacher.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

To guide the implementation of its wellness policy, staff at DREAM used CDC's School Health Index, a self-assessment and planning tool, to evaluate the school's health policies and practices. A DREAM Charter Wellness Council was formed that included the vice principal, the director of family engagement, the lead health and wellness specialist, the school nurse, the school food coordinator, and parents. The council also included representatives from community organizations, such as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Adelphi University, New York Academy of Medicine, New York Restoration Project (Gardening), and Bubble EATS, a farm-to-table nutrition education program.

The council developed an action plan and timeline to address the areas for improvement identified by the School Health Index assessment and to build on the school's strengths. The revised wellness policy called for including wellness activities in all school initiatives. It was reviewed and approved by the New York City School Board.



Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

In 2011, the DREAM Charter Wellness Council worked with the DREAM Family Action Council (composed of parents and community partners) and the school principal to pass a school nutrition policy that meets federal school meal requirements; prohibits parents from bringing fast food to students during the school day; and allows only plain, unflavored, nonfat (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk, water, or 100% fruit juice in breakfast and lunch meals.

The school used the Bubble EATS curriculum in its health education classes to introduce the new nutrition standards and educate students about the health benefits of these changes. Students learned about food choices and the effects these choices have on their health. They also participated in field trips to the local farmers' market, where they sampled fresh produce and learned how fruits and vegetables are farmed.

The curriculum covered how food is grown, where it comes from, and what it looks like in its original form. It was taught initially by Bubble EATS representatives and local chefs, nutritionists, farmers, and gardeners. To make these efforts more sustainable, teachers at the school also learned how to teach the curriculum.

DREAM partnered with Cornell University Cooperative Extension to provide families access to free nutrition classes at the school. Cornell's community nutrition



educator taught the classes, took families on educational trips to the farmers' market, and provided coupons from the state health department that could be used to buy produce.

Families received a health and wellness newsletter throughout the year that reported on student health and wellness at DREAM and wellness opportunities in the community. The newsletter also highlighted examples of local families participating in wellness activities outside the school.

Physical Activity and Physical Education

Weekly PE classes for all students, daily activity breaks, and afterschool physical activities helped DREAM students meet the goal of getting at least 150 minutes of physical activity every week. School officials reported that 80% of the students participated in the afterschool activities throughout the year, and all students participated in PE and daily activity breaks. DREAM also partnered with community organizations to make sure students had safe places to play and opportunities to be physically active outside of school. For example, the New York City Department of Education helped the school transport students to a variety of activities in the community. Students in first grade could play rugby through Play Rugby USA, which offers a flexible curriculum that can be taught inside or outside. Second graders could get tennis lessons from the Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program, and third graders could get weekly tennis classes from SPORTIME NY.

In addition, all students attended REAL Kids, part of the Harlem Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities afterschool program, where they received 30–60 minutes of additional physical activity. DREAM also provided two field trips for students each year—ice skating in Central Park and strawberry picking in Newburgh, New York.

Accomplishments

Before DREAM revised its wellness policy, students were not able to participate in PE classes during bad weather. They had to stay in their classrooms or sit in the auditorium. On these days, teachers reported that students argued with each other more often and caused behavioral problems that took away from instructional time.

To overcome these problems, the school transformed its auditorium into a space that could be used for track, bowling, hula hooping, and jumping rope.

The school also hired a physical education and wellness specialist to help teach PE classes and to show teachers how to add more activity breaks to their classrooms. Teachers reported that these changes resulted in fewer student arguments and more class time focused on learning.

As a result of the school's outreach efforts to families, parents reported that they were cooking healthier meals and visiting farmers' markets to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Students also reported that they preferred healthy meals and were learning healthier habits.

"We see physical activity as requisite to academic achievement. We know that physically healthy children achieve more in the classroom. Children learn by doing, and learning activities that incorporate movement will drive student achievement."

—Rose Gelrod, Physical Education and Wellness Specialist, DREAM Charter School

Learn More

Adelphi University: <http://www.adelphi.edu>

Alliance for a Healthier Generation: <https://www.healthiergeneration.org>

Bubble EATS: <http://welcometobubble.org>

Cornell University Cooperative Extension: <http://www.cce.cornell.edu>

DREAM Charter School: <http://www.dreamschoolnyc.org>

Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program: <http://www.hjtep.org>

New York Academy of Medicine: <http://www.nyam.org>

New York Restoration Project (Gardening): <https://www.nyrp.org/about/programs/education>

Play Rugby USA: <http://www.playrugbyusa.com>

REAL Kids Summer and After-School Program: http://www.harlemrbi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=79

SPORTIME NY: <http://www.sportimeny.com>



Farmington Area Public Schools

Farmington, Minnesota

District Overview

- Farmington Area Public Schools serves 6,773 students and includes five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.
- The district is located in a suburban area, and 16.1% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Incorporate nutrition education into the curriculum in a hands-on, interdisciplinary manner.
- Ensure that all school foods, including school meals and competitive foods sold outside the school meal program, meet the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) recommended nutrition standards for school meals and competitive foods.



Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

The district's wellness committee consisted of representatives from each school, including parents; teachers; and staff in food service, community education, health services, and human resources. The committee also included a representative for the county health department and a representative from the district's health insurance provider. One county school board member and an assistant superintendent attended committee meetings and shared information with the rest of the school board. The committee also met with students as needed.

To update the district's wellness policy, each school completed a baseline assessment created by the Dakota County Public Health Department. Health department staff then helped the wellness committee set goals and develop an implementation plan for improving school environments based on the assessment. The revised policy was reviewed and approved by the school board in 2011.

The health department also worked with the district to get a Smart Choices grant, which was used to provide stipends for committee members to actively promote and implement wellness policy initiatives. This grant came from the Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Program and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota through its Prevention Minnesota Initiative.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

To increase nutrition education for its students, the district's food service department contracted with a local farmer to make presentations to students. It organized taste tests at several schools during National Nutrition Month and held a competition at the elementary schools to encourage students to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.

In the secondary schools, students learned about the benefits of healthy snack choices such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. Students were also able to sample healthy snacks, such as mini yogurt parfaits and hummus.



To enhance their nutrition education activities, two elementary schools partnered with Valley Natural Foods co-op to organize creative, healthy fundraising and community events. The co-op donated \$1,000 to each school for activities such as cooking demonstrations, scavenger hunts, and food tastings. The co-op staff also worked with the district's parent teacher associations to promote healthy fundraising options, such as selling fruit boxes or holding fun runs.

In addition, some schools presented TV segments on healthy cooking during their morning announcements. Students planned and performed segments that mimicked the Food Network and featured healthy foods like fruit kebobs and mini English muffin pizzas. One elementary school even had a mystery fruit and vegetable trivia contest during its morning announcements.

To identify which programs were having a positive effect on students, the local health department helped the district evaluate the nutrition education activities in each school.

School Meals and Competitive Foods

The district's food service director and assistant director were members of the wellness committee and were very involved in implementing the new wellness policy. The food service department worked with administrators and school nurses to plan high-quality meals that met IOM's 2009 recommendations for school meals. These recommendations included increasing the amount and variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; setting minimum and maximum levels of calories; and focusing more on reducing saturated fat and sodium.

The district held fruit and vegetable taste tests to give students an active role in developing the lunch menu. Elementary school students were able to taste nine different fruits and vegetables throughout the school year and then vote on their favorites. The result was more variety of fruits and vegetables in school lunches.

The district also gradually added more healthy options to vending machines, school cafeterias, school snack shops, and meals and snacks available before and after school. Students who worked at the high school snack shop were actively involved in this transition. They reviewed nutrition labels to make sure all snacks met IOM's recommendations for competitive foods.

Accomplishments

One of the most successful and innovative initiatives that the district undertook was transforming its high school snack shop. Students in the school's marketing class operate the snack shop, and they worked with Catalyst, a youth advocacy group, to add healthier food choices. Throughout the district, snack carts in elementary schools offer 100% healthy options, and the vending machines in middle and high schools offer close to 100% healthy options. A registered dietitian from the district is helping schools meet the goal of 100% healthy options in the vending machines.

The district also received a Center for Excellence award from Chartwells, a food service management company. This award recognized the district's high-quality food products and services and designated it as a training, research, and development site for other districts.

"We have made great improvements in creating a healthier school environment through the wellness policy. We also know that the work of changing a culture is slow and requires patience and persistence. But we are positioned for the long run to continue to make changes."

—Gail Setterstrom, School Nurse, Farmington Schools

Learn More

Catalyst: <http://www.bethecatalyst.org>

Dakota County Public Health:
<http://www.co.dakota.mn.us>

Farmington Area Public Schools:
<http://www.farmington.k12.mn.us/>

Valley Natural Foods:
<http://www.valleynaturalfoods.com>

High Point Academy

Aurora, Colorado

School Overview

- High Point Academy is a charter school serving 750 students in preschool through grade 8.
- The school is located in an urban area, and 48% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Ensure that all students attend wellness classes with a nutrition education component 2 days a week, and provide health activities and events for students and families.
- Provide physical education (PE) classes to students 3 times a week.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

In 2012, High Point Academy formed a coordinated school health team to assess and implement the school's wellness practices. This team included eight staff members, six parents, and three community members who worked in food service or health services.

Team members used CDC's School Health Index, a self-assessment and planning tool, to identify which of the school's current practices were working and which needed improvement. For example, they found that students did not have enough time to eat their lunch, so the school lunch period was extended. The team meets monthly to review whether the school is implementing the wellness policy.

Parent involvement in shaping and supporting wellness activities at the school was an important part of ensuring successful implementation of the wellness policy. Parents received weekly updates through the school newsletter and from a monthly newsletter that goes to the entire school community. Parents were encouraged to provide feedback and recommendations on improving the school's wellness activities.



Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

All students attended wellness classes with a nutrition education component 2 days a week. The curriculum taught students how to make healthy choices in many areas of their lives by focusing on healthy eating, cooking, and nutrition education. For example, students in kindergarten through grade 5 learned about portion size through the USDA's MyPlate tool, which shows the five food groups that make up a healthy diet. The wellness teacher used homemade play dough to show students how to make plates with a variety of healthy food items.

The school also built a school garden where students could plant seeds, watch plants grow, and learn about fruits and vegetables. Students had their own work stations in the garden, and they participated in physical, hands-on learning in different parts of the garden.

The school partnered with Slow Food Denver to organize youth farmers' markets each fall to teach students how to set up a market stand and sell produce from the school garden and local farms. The wellness teacher coordinated the markets, and parent and student volunteers ran the stands. Students in grade 6 practiced math and customer service skills by guiding customers through the stands and recording what they bought. Students also learned about marketing, business and financial management, and which foods are in season at different times of the year.

The farmers' markets gave High Point Academy families a chance to buy fresh, affordable produce at their child's school. All profits were reinvested in the school garden.

Physical Activity and Physical Education

All students attended physical education classes 3 times a week. Elementary school students participated in the SPARK PE program, which was designed to make PE classes inclusive, active, and fun. The middle school curriculum rotated different lessons each quarter, focusing on lifetime fitness, personal fitness, team sports, and adventure sports. Students were also encouraged to be physically active during daily recess.

In 2012, the school installed an indoor climbing wall that is 20 feet wide and 10 feet tall and features 125 handholds and a 3-inch cordless mat locking system. The wall was paid for by the school's parent teacher organization. During PE class, students could climb the wall horizontally rather than vertically, which eliminated the need for ropes or harnesses. Climbing walls can help students improve physical skills like

strength, balance, and coordination; interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution; and cognitive skills like planning, problem solving, and decision making.

High Point Academy offered yoga classes to students as a way to reduce stress and increase physical fitness. A nonprofit organization called the Wellness Initiative provided an instructor to teach yoga classes to students in kindergarten and grades 1, 4, and 6 throughout the week.

Accomplishments

The involvement of parents and community members on the wellness committee created a strong wellness culture at High Point Academy, and the school won several local awards for its activities. It also received the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge Bronze Award. Parents have reported that the school's initiatives are helping their children make healthier choices at home. Parents also reported changes in their own behaviors, such as parking farther away from the school and walking to meet their children after school.

"We believe that it is essential to have a person on your staff, like a health and wellness teacher, who is excited about the wellness policy because this person will be continually focused on wellness, which makes it harder to push it to the back burner."

—Stacey May, Health and Wellness Teacher,
High Point Academy



Learn More

High Point Academy: <http://highpointacademy.net>

High Point Academy School Wellness Policy:
https://www.coloradogives.org/?downloadFile=1&table=organizations_documents&field=fileName&check=9df960521ff1597e9d78fd3941b59c03&key=14493

Slow Food Denver: <http://slowfooddenver.org>

SPARK PE: <http://www.sparkpe.org>

The Wellness Initiative:
<http://www.wellnessinitiative.org>

Jennings School District

Jennings, Missouri

District Overview

- Jennings School District serves 2,600 students in grades K–12.
- The district is located in North St. Louis County in an urban area, and more than 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Partner with community groups to provide hands-on nutrition education.
- Provide annual professional development for all physical education (PE) teachers.
- Ensure that students are physically active for at least 50% of PE class time.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

After seeing many of his patients diagnosed with obesity, Dr. Nadim Kanafani, a pediatrician at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Medical Center and a professor of pediatrics at Saint Louis University, sought funding to address this community health problem. He received a grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health to address childhood obesity and adolescent smoking in the Jennings School District.

The district hired a full-time health and wellness coordinator and gave each school \$3,000 to initiate health and wellness activities.

The Schools and Communities in Partnership Project (SCIPP) was created to link the district with community supporters who could help make policy and environmental changes in the district and the surrounding community.

Although the district had a wellness policy, it did not include goals for increasing PE and physical activity, increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, or decreasing exposure to tobacco on school property. Dr. Kanafani formed a team to work with the school district to develop, implement, and evaluate a revised wellness policy.

The team consisted of Dr. Kanafani, two registered dietitians provided by SCIPP, the district’s health and wellness coordinator, and representatives from

Transtria, LLC, a public health research and consulting company. The team used the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT) to assess the district’s current policy and researched best practices used by other schools. A revised wellness policy was then submitted to the district’s school board for approval.

The team helped the district connect with partners through community networks. For example, when officials at one elementary school expressed an interest in community gardens, Dr. Kanafani contacted a colleague who served with him on the board of the Healthy Youth Partnership. This colleague was the executive director of HopeBUILD, a nonprofit organization that helps underserved communities plant community gardens. Their partnership helped to create a community garden at the school.

SCIPP initiated partnerships such as these to ensure that the district’s wellness policy was fully implemented and sustainable. To support these efforts, the district set up a health and wellness committee to guide wellness activities across the district.

This committee was led by the district’s health and wellness coordinator and included school administrators, Jennings City Council members, community members, the local health department, local community organizations, the district’s food service director, and other district staff (nurses, PE teachers, counselors, social workers, a parent liaison, and the chief financial officer). The committee met 6 times a year.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

To help give students hands-on nutrition education, district officials worked with HopeBUILD to create a community garden at one elementary school. The school promoted the garden to the community through flyers distributed to students, on the school’s website, and through the local media. It also invited city council members to visit the garden.

HopeBUILD led the community garden project. It also provided nutrition education to students, parents, and school staff and maintained the garden during the summer. Students and parents planted seeds, watered the garden, and harvested the crops during the

school year. The city council provided topsoil and wood to build beds. The parent liaison also provided seeds for the garden and plans to recruit high school students to help maintain the garden in the summer.

Physical Education

To help make sure that students were physically active for at least 50% of physical education (PE) class time, the health and wellness coordinator organized training sessions on the SPARK PE curriculum for district staff, including PE teachers, school nurses, social workers, and counselors. Transtria conducted the sessions, which were offered during school hours on a professional development day. Teachers used the detailed lesson plans from the SPARK PE program to add new games and activities to their classes. They also used the SPARK music CD to increase students' excitement and interest in PE activities.

Accomplishments

The school garden is a model for how community partners can come together with school officials to provide hands-on nutrition education for students. After they began using the SPARK PE curriculum, PE teachers in the elementary schools reported that students were less disruptive because they were busy participating in inclusive, active, and fun activities. Before this change, students were not very active in PE class because they were receiving instructions, waiting for their turn to participate in an activity, or getting in trouble for bad behavior. Now students have more time to be physically active during the entire class period.

“Communicating with neighboring school districts to hear about their challenges and how they overcame them has been extremely helpful. We all have so much to learn from one another. We also gain so much from sharing and realizing that we are not alone in the struggle!”

—Monique Norfolk, School Health Professional,
Jennings School District

Learn More

- Healthy Youth Partnership:** <http://healthyyouthpartnership.org>
- HopeBUILD:** <http://www.hopebuild.org>
- Jennings School District:** <http://www.jenningsk12.org>
- Missouri Foundation for Health:** <http://www.mffh.org>
- SOFIT:** <http://activelivingresearch.org/sofit-system-observing-fitness-instruction-time>
- SOPLAY:** <http://activelivingresearch.org/soplay-system-observing-play-and-leisure-activity-youth>
- SPARK PE:** <http://www.sparkpe.org>
- Transtria:** <http://www.transtria.com>
- WellSAT:** <http://www.wellsat.org>



New Albany Elementary School

New Albany, Mississippi

School Overview

- New Albany Elementary School is located in a small, rural town in Mississippi and serves about 1,100 students from pre-K to grade 5.
- About 64% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Use nutrition education activities and promotional activities to encourage students to make healthy food choices.
- Provide students with 150 minutes each week of activity-based instruction.
- Provide students with a planned, sequential physical education (PE) curriculum.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

In 2007, the state legislature passed the Mississippi Healthy Students Act, which required schools to provide 150 minutes a week of activity-based instruction and 45 minutes a week of health education for students in kindergarten through grade 8.

This law helped New Albany Elementary School get support and resources to improve the school's health policies and practices. For example, the school received a Healthy Lifestyles grant and mini-grants from the Mississippi State Department of Health's Bureau of Community and School Health and the Mississippi Office of Healthy Schools. This funding was used to enhance the school's physical activity building and to buy physical activity equipment and nutrition education materials.

Officials at the school set up a school health council whose members represented each component of CDC's coordinated school health framework. The council included parents, school administrators, teachers, the food service director, community leaders, local business owners, and students. The council used CDC's School Health Index, which is a self-assessment and planning tool, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school's current

policies and practices. The assessment helped the council identify which areas had been overlooked or lacked resources and how the school could best meet state requirements for physical activity and health education.

The council revised the wellness policy and presented the new policy to school leaders to gain their support. The policy called for specific programs and activities, which were to be overseen by the health services coordinator and the school health council. The council continued to meet 3 times a year to share successes and address any problems with implementing the policy.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

New Albany Elementary School added a comprehensive nutrition education curriculum to its health education classes to encourage students to make healthy food choices. The curriculum was based on the results of the School Health Index assessment, which was used to define what type of nutrition education students needed. The health services coordinator, school administrators, and the health education teacher worked together to develop the curriculum and decide how to add it to existing classes.



Each week, teachers provided at least one nutrition education lesson. For example, during National Nutrition Month, students learned the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and how eating breakfast provides energy and improves memory throughout the day. They received fun work sheets and watched a video called *The OrganWise Guys: Breakfast Skipping Blues*. The school also sent information to parents to emphasize the connection between eating a healthy breakfast and doing better in school.

These efforts were supported by activities planned by food service staff, school nurses, and health and PE teachers, such as daily menu announcements, weekly school newspaper articles, and monthly posts on the school's website.

Physical Activity and Physical Education

In 2010, the health services coordinator and several teachers at New Albany Elementary found that students did not have enough time in the school day to be physically active and that the school's PE curriculum needed to be improved. The school applied for and received a Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant from the US Department of Education. This grant was used to hire a full-time, certified PE teacher to increase physical activity during PE class and introduce activity breaks in the classroom.

To help students get 150 minutes a week of activity-based instruction, teachers attended a professional development workshop led by Mike Kuczala, co-author of *The Kinesthetic Classroom*. In this workshop, teachers learned how to motivate their students to be active and move more in the classroom. They learned activities that could be easily adjusted to any subject area or unit of study.

As a result, teachers better understood the link between academic achievement and movement and the ways movement enhances brain function, refocuses attention, reduces sitting time, and keeps students engaged.

To improve the school's PE curriculum, New Albany Elementary implemented the SPARK PE program. This program provides resources that include a highly active curriculum, on-site training for teachers, and equipment that matches the curriculum.

Accomplishments

The percentage of New Albany Elementary School students eating breakfast increased from 43% during the 2008–2009 school year to 48% in the fall of 2012. The percentage eating lunch increased from 76% in the 2008–2009 school year to 79% in the fall of 2012. The school also received the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge Silver Award.

"When implementing, monitoring, and evaluating our local wellness policy, we used a team approach, with a health services coordinator taking the lead. We found that it is important to have someone who is passionate about school health leading the process."

—Tammie Reeder, School Nurse,
New Albany Elementary School

Learn More

Carol M. White Physical Education Program:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed/index.html>

John D. Bower School Health Network: http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/initiatives/Bower.htm

Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and Learning Through Movement:

<http://www.michaelkuczala.com/books.html>

Mississippi Healthy Students Act:

http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/MShealthystudentsact.htm

Mississippi Office of Healthy Schools:

<http://www.healthyschoolsms.org>

Mississippi State Department of Health:

<http://healthymms.com>

New Albany Elementary School:

<http://www.naelementary.com>

OrganWise Guys: <http://www.organwiseguys.com>

SPARK PE: <http://www.sparkpe.org>

Oakland Unified School District

Oakland, California

District Overview

- Oakland Unified School District serves over 45,500 students and includes 59 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, 19 high schools, and 4 alternative education schools.
- In this diverse, urban district, 71% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Teach students about nutrition and healthy choices for lifelong health.
- Give students experience with planting, harvesting, preparing, serving, and tasting foods.
- Provide foods and beverages that promote good health.
- Work with community organizations to provide comprehensive nutrition education and increase access to healthy foods for students and their families.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

In 2012, the district formed a school wellness council to revise its wellness policy. The council included district staff, school staff, parents, and community partners from various fields (nutrition, physical education, behavioral health, and health services) who were divided into four subcommittees. Longstanding partners like the Alameda County Department of Public Health and the University of California Cooperative Extension also provided guidance on the policy.

Because of the large size of the school district, council members recognized that individual leaders were needed at each school to direct and implement health and wellness activities. The district set up a program that supported a staff member at each school to be a wellness champion and to promote healthy eating and fitness using a variety of health messages to students, their families, and other staff members.

The wellness champions received stipends through Kaiser Permanente and the SD Bechtel, Jr. Foundation to implement wellness initiatives at their schools. They identified resources and created action plans for programs and activities throughout the year. They also met as a group each quarter to share experiences and best practices, participate in wellness activities, and learn about new programs and initiatives.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local School Wellness Policy Goals

Nutrition Education

The district partnered with the Alameda County Public Health Department's office of Nutrition Services to set up the Oakland Eats Garden Fresh program. Through this program, students in grades K–8 received nutrition information that directly related to the produce served in their schools. Nutrition coordinators from the health department gave schools both materials and activity ideas that fit their schedules and curricula. Some schools were visited regularly by nutrition coordinators, while others received handouts for students.

Teachers received materials that focused on the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and the consequences of unhealthy snacking. These materials included colorful classroom posters, flyers, and handouts for both students and parents. Recommended classroom activities took only 15 minutes, so they were easy to incorporate into the curriculum. The Oakland Eats Garden Fresh program was implemented in 35 schools throughout the district.





Students also participated in activities and events that introduced them to seasonal produce through the state’s Harvest of the Month program. This program gave students a chance to plant, harvest, prepare, serve, and taste new foods. Nutrition Services coordinated events such as cooking demonstrations, school garden activities, and taste tests. These activities allowed students to taste fresh produce, learn about it in class, and see it throughout the school—in gardens, in the cafeteria, and on bulletin boards.

The Harvest of the Month program also provided promotional materials such as menu templates, newsletters, and press release templates. The menu template allowed school staff to advertise breakfast and lunch menus alongside activities that tested memory and motor skills, and reinforced what students were learning in the classroom. It also included information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables.

The press release template gave the district a way to promote activities in different schools. It could be posted on district or school websites, sent home to parents, or dropped into existing community or school newsletters.

School Meals

The district partnered with the state’s Community Alliance with Family Farmers to implement Farm to School activities. District officials worked with the district’s food service director, local farmers, and the produce industry to add more local fruits and vegetables to school meals. A grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture helped the district identify local produce along with vendors and farmers to supply these products. Through this program, the district has increased the amount of fruits and vegetables offered to students while keeping its food costs low.

Community Partnerships

The district worked with community partners to set up the Oakland Fresh School Produce Markets, where local families could buy food from local farmers and other distributors once a week at 22 elementary schools. Partners included the county health department, the nonprofit East Bay Asian Youth Center, and parents.

The markets offered fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, eggs, grains, beans, and other healthy foods at

affordable prices. They also taught students and their families about community supported agriculture, which is a member-based system in which people can buy shares of produce from local farmers. This program was funded by the California Endowment, a private health foundation. Markets at each school were run by one paid staff member and adult volunteers.

Accomplishments

The district’s efforts resulted in more access to healthier food options for students and their families. The Farm to School program significantly increased the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in Oakland schools and allowed 56 schools to add salad bars in their cafeterias. The Oakland Fresh School Produce Markets gave students and their families access to affordable and nutritious food.

“The wellness champions program is one way that we were able to overcome challenges. It also helped us to increase our activities with students because the wellness champions were always thinking of new ways to engage students in health and nutrition.”

—Michelle Oppen, District Wellness Council Member,
Oakland Unified School District

Learn More

Alameda County Public Health Department:

<http://www.acphd.org>

California Department of Food and Agriculture:

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov>

Community Alliance with Family Farmers:

<http://caff.org>

Kaiser Permanente:

<http://www.kaiserpermanente.org>

Oakland Eats Garden Fresh: <http://www.healthylivingforlife.org/healthy-teachers.php>

Oakland Unified School District:

<http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us>

SD Bechtel Jr Foundation:

<http://www.sdbjrfoundation.org>



Salida School District

Salida, Colorado

District Overview

- Salida School District serves 1,000 students and includes one elementary school, one middle school, one high school, one early childhood center, and one alternative school.
- The district is located in a rural area, and 45% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Local School Wellness Policy Goals and Activities

- Ensure foods and beverages sold or served at school will meet the nutrition recommendations of the US Dietary Guidelines for Americans and all state and federal guidelines.
- Integrate nutrition education across the K–12 curriculum.

Setting the Stage: Establishing the Local School Wellness Policy

In 2008, when a new school nurse began working in the Salida School District, most employees were unaware that the district had a wellness policy. The original policy was written and adopted in 2006, but the district did not have a wellness committee to implement programs and activities. The new school nurse took the initiative to set up a wellness committee with the goal of developing a new policy that could meet the needs of the district's schools.

The new committee included parents, teachers, principals, the district superintendent, school nurses, and community members. They started by asking schools to complete CDC's School Health Index, a self-assessment and planning tool, to evaluate their existing health policies and programs. The committee used the results of these assessments to update the district's wellness policy and submitted it to the school board for approval.

At the same time the district's wellness policy was being revised, the Colorado Health Foundation gave the city of Salida a grant to educate its residents about healthy eating and to enhance and promote the local food system and community food resources. These efforts inspired the school district's wellness

committee to include goals of adding more fresh fruits and vegetables to school meals and building a school garden. To help meet these goals, the district applied for and won a Garden-to-Cafeteria grant to hire a food service director and build a school garden.

The grant was funded by LiveWell Chaffee County, the Colorado Garden Foundation, the City of Salida, the Chaffee County government, Nestle USA, the Colorado Parks and Recreation Association, the Captain Planet Foundation, and Safeway, Inc. The Salida School District, City of Salida, Chaffee County, and several residents and local businesses also made in-kind donations.

The district also partnered with LiveWell Colorado, a nonprofit organization committed to reducing obesity in Colorado. Representatives from this organization served on the wellness committee and helped review and revise the new wellness policy.

Taking Action: Activities to Meet Local Wellness Policy Goals

School Meals

To ensure that all foods and beverages provided on school grounds met or exceeded federal standards, the district's food service director created a 2-year plan. This plan aligned with the wellness policy's call for school meals that would include age-appropriate portion sizes, local fresh fruits and vegetables, and at least one serving of whole-grain food on 3 or more days a week.

To prepare for these changes, the food service director arranged for his staff to participate in a 2-year, college-level culinary apprenticeship program. Every 4 weeks, a new set of cooking skills was introduced to the staff to teach them how to cook meals from scratch.

Salida schools also added salad bars at lunch every day and began serving whole-grain pastas, made-from-scratch chicken nuggets, and homemade soups made with vegetables from the school garden. The food service director's creativity and passion helped the district add a variety of new healthy food items to school meals, and students have been supportive of the changes.



Nutrition Education

The district’s Garden-to-Cafeteria program helped create an ideal environment for nutrition education. The program started in 2012 as a collaboration between LiveWell Chaffee County, Guidestone (an organization that promotes local food), and the Southwest Conservation Corps. It used the Salida Middle School garden to teach environmental and agricultural education. Additionally, fruits and vegetables from the garden were used in school meals.

The middle school’s quarter-acre garden has 10 raised beds, 8 inground beds, 10 fruit trees, a pumpkin patch, a gourd tunnel, and winding pea trellises throughout the site. Middle school students and children from the early childhood center are the most active in the garden because of its location, but students from across the district are invited to participate.

During the summer, students who participate in district-sponsored recreational activities are also asked to sign up to learn about the garden. Students can watch the foods grow and see the raw foods transformed into healthy, colorful meals in the cafeteria. Extra produce is sold at a local farmers’

market to provide additional funding for the garden program. District partners are raising funds from other sources so the garden can be expanded in the future.

The district also partnered with Guidestone to create an education program that integrated garden-based lesson plans into the curriculum for grades K–12. Science, health, and fitness teachers used these lesson plans to teach students about nutrition.

Accomplishments

The district’s food service director stopped the sale of potato chips, ice cream, and other unhealthy à la carte items in the middle and high school cafeteria and replaced them with salad bars. These changes and others, such as the culinary apprenticeship program and the addition of fruits and vegetables from the school garden, have increased participation in the school meal program. For example, the average daily number of elementary school students who are eating lunch at school has grown from 180 to more than 300.

“What the Salida School District found in implementing the wellness policy is that the most effective change comes from staff members who are wellness champions. The staff helped tremendously in educating their coworkers, the community, and parents about the policy.”

—Cari Beasley, School Nurse, Salida School District

Learn More

Colorado Health Foundation:

<http://www.coloradohealth.org>

Guidestone: <http://guidestonecolorado.org>

LiveWell Chaffee County: <http://www.chaffee-hhs.org/chaffee-county-public-health/health-promotion-2>

LiveWell Colorado:

<http://movement.livewellcolorado.org>

Salida School District: <http://salidaschools.com>

Southwest Conservation Corps: <http://sccorps.org>



APPENDIX: Resources

The following websites provide additional information about organizations and resources cited in several of the success stories.

Choose MyPlate

US Department of Agriculture
<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

Coordinated School Health

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010

US Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm>

Farm to School

Food and Nutrition Service,
US Department of Agriculture
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool>

HealthierUS School Challenge: Smarter Lunchrooms

Food and Nutrition Service,
US Department of Agriculture
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthierus-school-challenge>

Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

Food and Nutrition Service,
US Department of Agriculture
http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/cnr_2010.htm

National School Lunch Program

Food and Nutrition Service,
US Department of Agriculture
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/slp>

Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way Toward Healthier Youth

Institute of Medicine
<http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth.aspx>

School Health Index

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/shi/index.htm>

School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children

Institute of Medicine
<http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2009/School-Meals-Building-Blocks-for-Healthy-Children.aspx>

SPARK Physical Education Program

<http://www.sparkpe.org>

USDA Foods Toolkit

Food and Nutrition Service,
US Department of Agriculture
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/healthy/Toolkit.htm>

WellSAT 2.0

UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity
<http://wellsat.org/>

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>



