

School Wellness Policy

Support Materials and Resources



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Produced by:



Web site: www.actionforhealthykids.org



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Process for School Wellness Policy Development

The following eight-step process for developing school wellness policies is recommended as a best practice. It has been adapted from the United States Department of Agriculture's Team Nutrition web site.

1 Homework

At a minimum, your school district's new wellness policies must be in compliance with the federal statute requirements, and all relevant state and district requirements.

2 Form a Team

The law requires (1) parents, (2) students, (3) representatives of the school food authority, (4) the school board, (5) school administrators, and (6) the public be involved in the process. Make sure you involve everyone who will be affected by the policy.

3 Assessment^a

Determine your school district's needs. The Iowa online assessment tool is recommended to help do this. Schools can enter building-level data, then a districtwide report will be compiled at the request of the district. The tool is available at: <http://www.fshn.hs.iastate.edu/schoolnutrition/homepage.htm>

4 Draft a Policy

The law states the policy must address:

- nutrition education goals,
- physical activity goals,
- other school-based activities that promote student wellness goals,
- nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each campus, and
- a plan for measuring implementation.

5 Build Awareness and Support

Educate and inform your stakeholders (parents, students and community) and use the media to create awareness and build support^b.

6 Adopt the Policy

Get approval from the school board.

7 Implement the Policy

The policy can be phased in or put in place all at once.

8 Maintain, Measure, Evaluate

Establish a plan for measuring implementation of the wellness policy, including designation of one or more person(s) in the district or at each school with responsibility for ensuring the school meets policy requirements. Evaluation and feedback are very important in maintaining a wellness policy.

^a This step is recommended as a best practice but is not required by federal law as part of the school wellness policy legislation.

^b The Iowa Medical Society and Iowa Medical Society Alliance have made school wellness a priority with their "Focus on Fitness." Society members would be excellent community committee members. Contact your county medical society for additional information. Other community members could come from the organizations that are members of Iowa Partners: Action for Healthy Kids. Visit the Action for Healthy Kids web site, www.actionforhealthykids.org, for a membership list.

Sample Policy Goals

The following goals are adapted from the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA) and divided among the five categories required by the wellness policy legislation: (1) Nutrition Education, (2) Physical Activity, (3) Other School-Based Activities that Promote Student Wellness, (4) Nutrition Guidelines for All Foods Available on Campus, and (5) a Plan for Measuring Implementation. School districts may implement one or all of the goals from each section, alter them to meet local needs, or create their own.

I. Nutrition Education and Promotion

Schools should provide nutrition education and engage in nutrition promotion that:

- is offered at each grade level as part of a sequential, comprehensive, standards-based program designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and protect their health;
- is part of not only health education classes, but also classroom instruction in subjects such as math, science, language arts, social sciences and elective subjects;
- includes enjoyable, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant participatory activities, such as contests, promotions, taste testing, farm visits and school gardens;
- promotes fruits, vegetables, whole-grain products, low-fat and fat-free dairy products, healthy food preparation methods and health-enhancing nutrition practices;
- emphasizes caloric balance between food intake and energy expenditure (physical activity/exercise);
- links with school meal programs, other school foods and nutrition-related community services;
- teaches media literacy with an emphasis on food marketing; and
- includes training for teachers and other staff^o.

^o The staff responsible for nutrition education will be adequately prepared and participate regularly in professional development activities to effectively deliver an accurate nutrition education program. Preparation and professional development activities will provide basic knowledge of nutrition, combined with skill practice in program-specific activities and instructional techniques and strategies designed to promote healthy eating habits.

• Nutrition education information will be reviewed by a qualified, credentialed nutrition professional (e.g. school food and nutrition specialist (SFNS) or registered dietitian (RD) who is specialized in school-based nutrition).

• The school cafeteria serves as a “learning laboratory” to allow students to apply critical thinking skills taught in the classroom.

• Nutrition education will involve sharing information with families and the broader community to positively impact students and the health of the community. This suggestion is from the School Nutrition Association. Resources for teacher training include the Iowa Dietetic Association and ISU Extension nutrition and health field specialists.

II. Physical Activity

Daily Physical Education

Schools should provide physical education that:

- is daily (or its equivalent of 150 minutes a week for elementary school students and 225 minutes a week for middle and high school students);
- is for all students in grades K-12 for the entire school year;
- is taught by a certified physical education teacher;
- includes students with disabilities, special health-care needs and in alternative educational settings;
- will not allow substitution for meeting the physical education requirement by student involvement in other activities involving physical activity (e.g., interscholastic or intramural sports); and
- engages students in moderate to vigorous activity during at least 50 percent of physical education class time^d.

Daily Recess

Elementary schools should provide recess for students that:

- is at least 20 minutes a day;
- is preferably outdoors;
- encourages moderate to vigorous physical activity verbally and through the provision of space and equipment; and
- discourages extended periods (i.e., periods of two or more hours) of inactivity.

When activities, such as mandatory school-wide testing, make it necessary for students to remain indoors for long periods of time, schools should give students periodic breaks during which they are encouraged to stand and be moderately active.

Physical Activity Opportunities after School

Elementary, middle and high schools should offer extracurricular physical activity programs, such as physical activity clubs or intramural programs. All high schools, and middle schools as appropriate, will offer interscholastic sports programs. Schools will offer a range of after school physical activity opportunities that:

- meet the needs, interests and abilities of all students; and
- include boys, girls, students with disabilities, and students with special health-care needs.

After-school child care and enrichment programs will provide and encourage—verbally and through the provision of space, equipment and activities—daily periods of moderate to vigorous physical activity for all participants.

Physical Activity and Punishment

Teachers and other school and community personnel should not use physical activity (e.g., running laps, pushups) or withhold opportunities for physical activity (e.g., recess, physical education) as punishment.

^d Healthy Iowans 2010 extends these characteristics of quality physical education programs to specify adequate facilities and equipment and appropriate student-to-teacher ratios.

Safe Routes to Schools

The school district will:

- assess and, if necessary and to the extent possible, make needed improvements to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school;
- when appropriate, work together with local public works, public safety or police departments in those efforts;
- explore the availability of federal “safe routes to school” funds, administered by the state department of transportation, to finance improvements; and
- encourage students to use public transportation when available and appropriate for travel to school and work with the local transit agency to provide transit passes for students.

Use of Facilities Outside of School Hours

School spaces and facilities should be available to students, staff and community members before, during, and after the school day, on weekends, and during school vacations. These spaces and facilities also should be available to community agencies and organizations offering physical activity and nutrition programs. School policies concerning safety will apply at all times.

III. Other School-Based Activities that Promote Student Wellness

Integrating Physical Activity into Classroom Settings

For students to receive the nationally recommended amount of daily physical activity (i.e., at least 60 minutes per day) and for students to fully embrace regular physical activity as a personal behavior, students need opportunities for physical activity beyond physical education class. Toward that end, schools will:

- offer classroom health education that complements physical education by reinforcing the knowledge and self-management skills needed to maintain a physically active lifestyle and to reduce time spent on sedentary activities;
- discourage sedentary activities, such as watching television;
- provide opportunities for physical activity to be incorporated into other subject lessons; and
- encourage classroom teachers to provide short physical activity breaks between lessons or classes, as appropriate.

Communication with Parents^e

The district/school will support parents’ efforts to provide a healthy diet and daily physical activity for their children. The district/school will:

- offer healthy eating seminars for parents, send home nutrition information, post nutrition tips on school web sites and provide nutrient analyses of school menus;
- encourage parents to pack healthy lunches and snacks and to refrain from including beverages and foods that do not meet the above nutrition standards for individual foods and beverages;
- provide parents a list of foods that meet the district’s snack standards and ideas for healthy celebrations/parties, rewards and fundraising activities;

^e The Parent Teacher Association and Parents Action for Children have developed *Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School*. This resource has been mailed to every PTA president. More information is available online at www.PTA.org.

- provide opportunities for parents to share their healthy food practices with others in the school community;
- provide information about physical education and other school-based physical activity opportunities before, during and after the school day;
- support parents' efforts to provide their children with opportunities to be physically active outside of school; and
- include sharing information about physical activity and physical education through a web site, newsletter, other take-home materials, special events or physical education homework.

Food Marketing in Schools

School-based marketing will be consistent with nutrition education and health promotion.

Schools will:

- limit food and beverage marketing to the promotion of foods and beverages that meet the nutrition standards for meals or for foods and beverages sold individually¹⁰;
- prohibit school-based marketing of brands promoting predominantly low-nutrition foods and beverages¹¹;
- promote healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products; and
- market activities that promote healthful behaviors (and are therefore allowable) including: vending machine covers promoting water; pricing structures that promote healthy options in a la carte lines or vending machines; sales of fruit for fundraisers; and coupons for discount gym memberships.

Examples: Marketing techniques include the following: logos and brand names on/in vending machines, books or curricula, textbook covers, school supplies, scoreboards, school structures, and sports equipment; educational incentive programs that provide food as a reward; programs that provide schools with supplies when families buy low-nutrition food products; in-school television, such as Channel One; free samples or coupons; and food sales through fundraising activities.

Staff Wellness

Schools will value the health and well-being of every staff member and will plan and implement activities and policies that support personal efforts by staff to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Each district/school should:

- establish and maintain a staff wellness committee composed of at least one staff member, school health council member, local hospital representative, dietitian or other health professional, recreation program representative, union representative and employee benefits specialist;
- develop, promote and oversee a multifaceted plan to promote staff health and wellness developed by the staff wellness committee;
- base the plan on input solicited from school staff and outline ways to encourage healthy eating, physical activity and other elements of a healthy lifestyle among school staff; and
- distribute its plan to the school health council annually.

VI. Nutrition Guidelines for All Foods Available on Campus

School Meals

Meals served through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs will:

- be appealing and attractive to children;
- be served in clean and pleasant settings;
- meet, at a minimum, nutrition requirements established by local, state and federal statutes and regulations;
- offer a variety of fruits and vegetables¹;
- serve only low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk² and nutritionally equivalent non-dairy alternatives (to be defined by USDA); and
- ensure that half of the served grains are whole grain.^{2, 3}

Schools should:

- engage students and parents, through taste-tests of new entrees and surveys, in selecting foods sold through the school meal programs in order to identify new, healthful and appealing food choices; and
- share information about the nutritional content of meals with parents and students. (The information could be made available on menus, a web site, on cafeteria menu boards, placards or other point-of-purchase materials.)

Breakfast

To ensure that all children have breakfast, either at home or at school, in order to meet their nutritional needs and enhance their ability to learn, schools will:

- operate the School Breakfast Program, to the extent possible;
- arrange bus schedules and utilize methods to serve school breakfasts that encourage participation, including serving breakfast in the classroom, “grab-and-go” breakfast or breakfast during morning break or recess, to the extent possible;
- notify parents and students of the availability of the School Breakfast Program, where available; and
- encourage parents to provide a healthy breakfast for their children through newsletter articles, take-home materials or other means.

Free and Reduced-Priced Meals

Schools will make every effort to eliminate any social stigma attached to, and prevent the overt identification of, students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals⁴. Toward this end, schools may:

- utilize electronic identification and payment systems;
- provide meals at no charge to all children, regardless of income;
- promote the availability of school meals to all students; and
- use nontraditional methods for serving school meals, such as “grab-and-go” or classroom breakfast.

Summer Meals

Schools in which more than 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals will sponsor the Summer Food Service Program for at least six weeks between the last day of the academic school year and the first day of the following school year, and preferably throughout the entire summer vacation.

Meal Times and Scheduling

Schools:

- will provide students with at least 10 minutes to eat after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch;
- should schedule meal periods at appropriate times, e.g., lunch should be scheduled between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; should not schedule tutoring, club or organizational meetings or activities during mealtimes, unless students may eat during such activities;
- will schedule lunch periods to follow recess periods (in elementary schools);
- will provide students access to hand washing or hand sanitizing before they eat meals or snacks; and
- should take reasonable steps to accommodate the tooth-brushing regimens of students with special oral health needs (e.g., orthodontia or high tooth decay risk).

Qualification of School Food Service Staff

Qualified nutrition professionals will administer the school meal programs. As part of the school district's responsibility to operate a food service program, schools will:

- provide continuing professional development for all nutrition professionals in schools; and
- provide staff development programs that include appropriate certification and/or training programs for child nutrition directors, school nutrition managers and cafeteria workers, according to their levels of responsibility⁵.

Sharing of Foods

Schools should discourage students from sharing their foods or beverages with one another during meal or snack times, given concerns about allergies and other restrictions on some children's diets.

Foods Sold Outside the School Meal (e.g. vending, a la carte, sales)

Elementary schools: The school food service program will approve and provide all food and beverage sales to students in elementary schools. To this end:

- food in elementary schools should be sold as balanced meals, given young children's limited nutrition skills; and
- foods and beverages sold individually should be limited to low-fat and non-fat milk, fruits and non-fried vegetables.

Secondary schools: In middle/junior high and high schools, all foods and beverages sold individually outside the reimbursable school meal programs (including those sold through a la carte [snack] lines, vending machines, student stores or fundraising activities) during the school day, or through programs for students after the school day, will meet the following nutrition and portion size standards:

Beverages

- **Allowed:** water or seltzer water⁶ without added caloric sweeteners; fruit and vegetable juices and fruit-based drinks that contain at least 50 percent fruit juice and that do not contain additional caloric sweeteners; unflavored or flavored low-fat or fat-free fluid milk and nutritionally equivalent nondairy beverages (as defined by the USDA).
- **Not allowed:** soft drinks containing caloric sweeteners; sports drinks; iced teas; fruit-based drinks that contain less than 50 percent real fruit juice or that contain additional caloric sweeteners; beverages containing caffeine, excluding low-fat or fat-free chocolate milk (which contain trivial amounts of caffeine).

Foods

A food item sold individually:

- will have no more than 35 percent of its calories from fat (excluding nuts, seeds, peanut butter and other nut butters) and 10 percent of its calories from saturated and trans fat combined;
- will have no more than 35 percent of its *weight* from added sugars;⁷
- will contain no more than 230 mg of sodium per serving for chips, cereals, crackers, French fries, baked goods and other snack items; will contain no more than 480 mg of sodium per serving for pastas, meats and soups; and will contain no more than 600 mg of sodium for pizza, sandwiches and main dishes; and
- will include a choice of at least two fruits and/or nonfried vegetables for sale at any location on the school site where foods are sold.

Examples: Food items could include, but are not limited to, fresh fruits and vegetables; 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice; fruit-based drinks that are at least 50 percent fruit juice and that do not contain additional caloric sweeteners; cooked, dried or canned fruits (canned in fruit juice or light syrup); and cooked, dried or canned vegetables (that meet the above fat and sodium guidelines)⁸.

Portion Size

Limit portion sizes of foods and beverages sold individually to those listed below:

- One and one-quarter ounces for chips, crackers, popcorn, cereal, trail mix, nuts, seeds, dried fruit or jerky;
- One ounce for cookies;
- Two ounces for cereal bars, granola bars, pastries, muffins, doughnuts, bagels and other bakery items;
- Four fluid ounces for frozen desserts, including, but not limited to, low-fat or fat-free ice cream;
- Eight ounces for non-frozen yogurt;
- Twelve fluid ounces for beverages, excluding water and milk^f; and
- The portion size of a la carte entrees and side dishes, including potatoes, will not be greater than the size of comparable portions offered as part of school meals. Fruits and non-fried vegetables are exempt from portion-size limits.

Fundraising Activities

To support children's health and school nutrition-education efforts, school fundraising activities will not involve food or will use only foods that meet the above nutrition and portion size standards for foods and beverages sold individually. Schools will encourage fundraising activities that promote physical activity. The school district will make available a list of ideas for acceptable fundraising activities.

Snacks

Snacks served during the school day or in after-school care or enrichment programs will make a positive contribution to children's diets and health, with an emphasis on serving fruits and vegetables as the primary snacks and water as the primary beverage. Schools will assess if and when to offer snacks based on timing of school meals, children's nutritional needs, children's ages and other considerations. The district will disseminate a list of healthful snack items to teachers, after-school program personnel and parents.

^f Milk is not included in the NANA recommendations.

If eligible, schools that provide snacks through after-school programs will pursue receiving reimbursements through the National School Lunch Program.

Rewards

Schools will not use foods or beverages, especially those that do not meet the nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold individually, as rewards for academic performance or good behavior,⁹ and will not withhold food or beverages (including food served through school meals) as a punishment.

Celebrations

Schools should limit celebrations that involve food during the school day to no more than one party per class per month. Each party should include no more than one food or beverage that does not meet nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold individually. The district will disseminate a list of healthy party ideas to parents and teachers.

School-Sponsored Events

Foods and beverages offered or sold at school-sponsored events outside the school day will meet the nutrition standards for meals or for foods and beverages sold individually.

Food Safety

All foods made available on campus adhere to food safety and security guidelines.

- All foods made available on campus comply with the state and local food safety and sanitation regulations. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plans and guidelines are implemented to prevent food illness in schools⁹.
- For the safety and security of the food and facility, access to the food service operations are limited to child nutrition staff and authorized personnel. For further guidance, see the USDA food security guidelines⁹. This policy suggestion is from the School Nutrition Association.

V. Plan for Measuring Implementation

Monitoring

The superintendent or designee will ensure compliance with established district-wide nutrition and physical activity wellness policies.

In each school:

- the principal or designee will ensure compliance with those policies in his/her school and will report on the school's compliance to the school district superintendent or designee; and
- school food service staff, at the school or district level, will ensure compliance with nutrition policies within school food service areas and will report on this matter to the superintendent (or if done at the school level, to the school principal).

In each district:

- the school district will report on the most recent USDA School Meals Initiative (SMI) review findings and any resulting changes. If the district has not received a SMI review from the state agency within the past five years, the district will request from the state agency that a SMI review be scheduled as soon as possible;

⁹For food safety guidelines, visit the USDA web site at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/servingsafe_chapter6.pdf

- the superintendent or designee will develop a summary report every three years on district-wide compliance with the district's established nutrition and physical activity wellness policies, based on input from schools within the district; and
- the report will be provided to the school board and also distributed to all school health councils, parent/teacher organizations, school principals and school health services personnel in the district.

Policy Review

To help with the initial development of the district's wellness policies, each school in the district will conduct a baseline assessment of the school's existing nutrition and physical activity environments and policies¹². The results of those school-by-school assessments will be compiled at the district level to identify and prioritize needs.

Assessments will be repeated every three years to help review policy compliance, assess progress and determine areas in need of improvement. As part of that review, the school district will review our nutrition and physical activity policies; provision of an environment that supports healthy eating and physical activity; and nutrition and physical education policies and program elements. The district, and individual schools within the district, will, as necessary, revise the wellness policies and develop work plans to facilitate their implementation.

Appendices

Additional Information

- **National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity:** www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org
- **Iowa Online Assessment Tool:** <http://www.fshn.hs.iastate.edu/schoolnutrition/homepage.htm>
- ***Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn* from National Association of School Boards:**
http://www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/Sample_Policies/Sample_Policies.html
- **School Nutrition Association School Wellness Policies:**
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Index.aspx?id=1075>
- **United States Department of Agriculture and TEAM Nutrition School Wellness Policies:**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>

National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity References

¹ To the extent possible, schools will offer at least two non-fried vegetable and two fruit options each day and will offer five different fruits and five different vegetables over the course of a week. Schools are encouraged to source fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers when practicable.

² As recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*.

³ A whole grain is one labeled as a “whole” grain product or with a whole grain listed as the primary grain ingredient in the ingredient statement. Examples include “whole” wheat flour, cracked wheat, brown rice, and oatmeal.

⁴ It is against the law to make others in the cafeteria aware of the eligibility status of children for free, reduced-price, or “paid” meals.

⁵ School nutrition staff development programs are available through the USDA, School Nutrition Association, and National Food Service Management Institute.

⁶ Surprisingly, seltzer water may not be sold during meal times in areas of the school where food is sold or eaten because it is considered a “Food of Minimal Nutritional Value” (Appendix B of 7 CFR Part 210).

⁷ If a food manufacturer fails to provide the *added* sugars content of a food item, use the percentage of weight from total sugars (in place of the percentage of weight from *added* sugars), and exempt fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods from this total sugars limit.

⁸ Schools that have vending machines are encouraged to include refrigerated snack vending machines, which can accommodate fruits, vegetables, yogurts, and other perishable items.

⁹ Unless this practice is allowed by a student’s individual education plan (IEP).

¹⁰ Advertising of low-nutrition foods and beverages is permitted in supplementary classroom and library materials, such as newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and similar media, when such materials are used in a class lesson or activity, or as a research tool.

¹¹ Schools should not permit general brand marketing for food brands under which more than half of the foods or beverages do not meet the nutrition standards for foods sold individually or the meals are not consistent with school meal nutrition standards.

¹² Useful self-assessment and planning tools include the *School Health Index* from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Changing the Scene* from the Team Nutrition Program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and *Opportunity to Learn Standards for Elementary, Middle, and High School Physical Education* from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

School Wellness Policy Committee

These support materials and resources were compiled and selected by the Iowa Partners: Action for Healthy Kids and Iowa Association of School Boards. Committee members are:

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