
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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News for School Clients

Implementing a School Wellness Policy

By July 1, 2006, every school district participating in a federal meal program was required to implement a school wellness policy meeting the requirements of Section 204 of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-265). Although the deadline will not be strictly enforced, school boards that have not yet developed and implemented a policy should do so now. Section 204 applies to any school participating in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program or Special Milk Program, including private, parochial and charter schools. Schools within a school district that do not participate in any federal school meal program are not required to implement a wellness policy. For the sake of consistency, however, a school board may wish to adopt a district-wide policy and require all schools within the district to implement the policy, even those schools that do not participate in any federal school meal program.

Section 204 does not dictate the specific content of the wellness policies, but does require that the policy address five main areas: (1) setting district policy goals; (2) ensuring that the policy guidelines comply with other federal guidelines for reimbursable school meals; (3) establishing school-wide nutrition guidelines; (4) designing a district implementation plan; and (5) encouraging community involvement in the development, implementation and evaluation processes.

Policy Goal Setting. Every board must set

district policy goals for three specific topics: nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based wellness initiatives. Although Section 204 does not dictate specific requirements for each of those three topics, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has issued certain recommendations.

It is recommended that nutrition education goals address ways to provide students with the knowledge and skills to make healthy food choices. Districts may consider posting nutrition information in the cafeteria and throughout the school, and work to ensure that consistent nutrition messages are also received in students' homes and the community. Nutrition education can be interactive and provide students with an opportunity to practice newly-learned skills.

The USDA also recommends that physical activity goals address ways for all students to maintain their physical fitness, participate regularly in physical activity, and understand the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle. Physical activity may be incorporated through physical education classes, daily recess periods for elementary students and integration of physical activity into the academic curriculum. Districts may also provide opportunities for physical activity through extracurricular programs, such as intramural sports, interscholastic athletics and activity clubs.

Finally, the USDA recommends that other school-based wellness initiatives address ways to create a total school environment conducive

to healthy eating and physical activity. Examples include creating a clean, safe, enjoyable dining environment with adequate time to eat healthy foods; discouraging staff from using food or physical activity as a reward or punishment; and creating ways for students to safely walk or bike to school.

Reimbursable School Meals. The wellness policy must include guidelines for the reimbursable school meals (i. e., meals that are reimbursed pursuant to one of the federal meal programs) that comply with the program requirements and nutrition standards that the federal government has established for reimbursable school meals.

Nutrition Guidelines. Wellness policies must also establish standards and guidelines that apply to *all* foods and beverages sold and/or served to students, including those available outside of the school meal programs. Wellness policies must set guidelines for foods and beverages sold in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and on-campus concession stands, and for refreshments served at events during the school day. The standards and guidelines that must be established for foods and beverages *other than* reimbursable school meals need not meet the specific requirements and nutrition standards that apply to reimbursable school meals. It is recommended that nutrition guidelines be based on meeting nutrition goals, rather than maximizing profit.

Implementation Plan. Each school board must establish a plan for implementing the wellness policy and measuring its effectiveness. While

developing the policy, the board may want each school in the district to conduct an assessment of the school's existing nutrition and activity environment and identify areas for potential improvement, so that the policy can address the identified needs in the way most appropriate for the district. Once the policy is developed, each school within a district must designate one or more person(s) with operational authority to ensure that the school is complying with the policy. The district also may wish to assess student, parent, teacher, and administration satisfaction with the new policy and update or amend the policy as necessary.

Community Involvement. Each district must form a team of community members, including parents, students, school board members, representatives of the group responsible for administering the schools' meal programs, school administrators, and members of the general public as part of the wellness policy development process. The most effective team members will demonstrate interest in improving nutrition and physical activity in schools, be effective communicators and team players, have policy-related experience in the district and understand the district's procedural requirements for implementing policies.

Additional resources, including strategies for implementing a wellness policy and samples of existing policies, are available on the USDA website, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>, and from the National School Boards Association, website, <http://www.nsba.org/schoolhealth>.

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