

Maryland

Maryland Wellness Policies & Practices Project
 State of Maryland Feedback: 2012-2013 School Year



Introduction

The Maryland Wellness Policies & Practices Project is an inter-agency initiative¹ with the goal of enhancing opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity for Maryland students by helping schools and school systems create and implement strong and comprehensive written wellness policies.

Since September 2006, federal legislation has required that all schools participating in federal school meal programs have written wellness policies. Wellness policies have the potential to improve food choices, dietary intake, and physical activity among school children². These policies are more likely to be implemented when strong language is used³, and wellness policies need to be implemented to be effective.



The Maryland Wellness Policies & Practices Project team evaluated the strength and comprehensiveness of written wellness policies and the implementation of wellness policies and practices among school systems and schools throughout Maryland in the summer of 2013. This report includes an overview of wellness initiatives in schools and school systems⁴ throughout the State of Maryland and specific recommendations school systems. All recommendations are built around three common themes: ***Build- Communicate- Monitor.***

Contents	Page #
Section 1: Strength and Comprehensiveness of Written Wellness Policies.....	2-3
Section 2: Statewide School System Implementation of Wellness Policies and Practices.....	4-5
Section 3: School-Level Implementation of Wellness Policies and Practices.....	6
Section 4: School-Level School Health Councils.....	7
Section 5: Summary of Recommendations.....	8
Acknowledgements, Contact Information.....	8

¹ Partners include the Institute for a Healthiest Maryland, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, University of Maryland School of Medicine, University of Maryland College Park, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

² Metos J and Murtaugh M. *Words or Reality: Are school District Wellness Policies Implemented? A Systematic Review of the Literature.* Childhood Obesity. 2011;7(2):90-100.

³ Schwartz MB, et al. *Strength and Comprehensiveness of District School Wellness Policies Predict Policy Implementation at the School Level.* J Sch Health. 2012; 82:262-267.

⁴Data in this report are presented in aggregate per our agreement with survey participants.

Section 1: Strength and Comprehensiveness of Written Wellness Policies

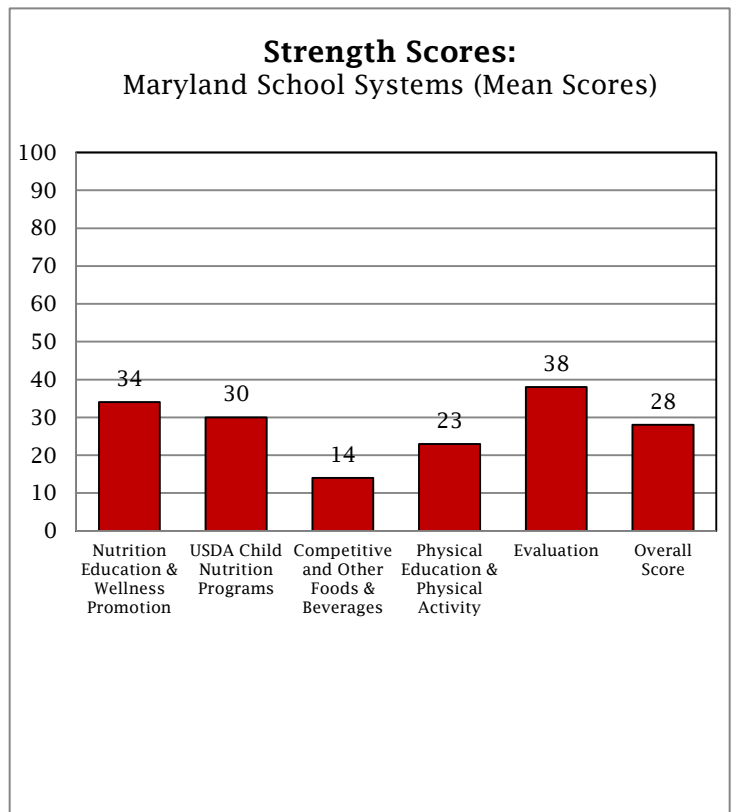
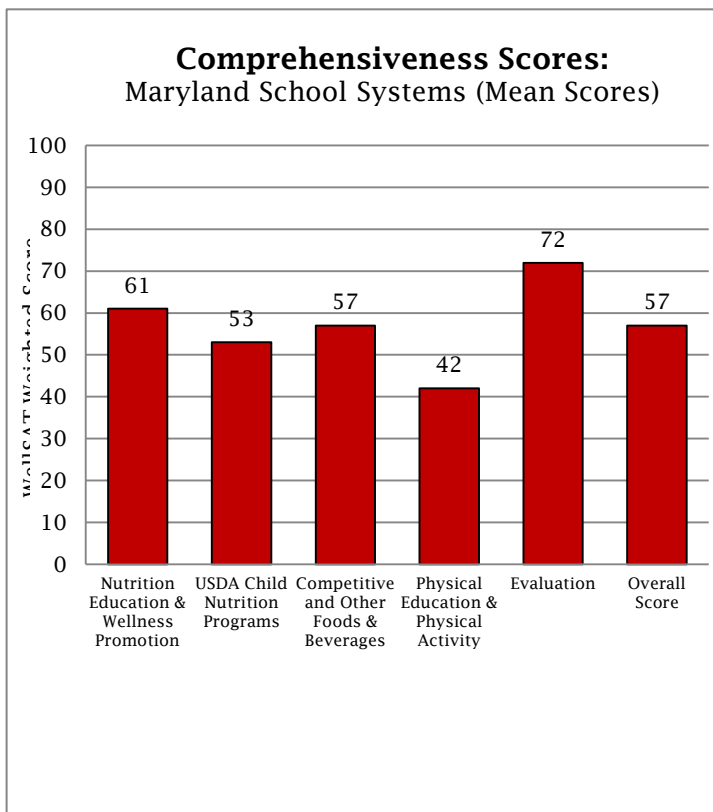
We evaluated each school system's written wellness policy using the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellsAT)⁵. The WellsAT, developed at the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University, is an online standardized method of comparing wellness policy statements to best practices or model language recommended by an expert working group.

WellsAT generates scores ranging from 0 to 100 for both the *comprehensiveness* and *strength* of the policy language. *Comprehensiveness* refers to how well recommended content areas are covered in the policy, and *strength* refers to how strongly the content is stated. Policies with both recommended content and specific and directive language receive higher scores. You can learn more about the WellsAT, or evaluate a school system's wellness policy through their website: <http://www.wellsat.org>.

School wellness policies in Maryland were evaluated based on the degree to which they addressed 50 policy items, categorized into five sections:

- Nutrition Education & Wellness Promotion (9 items)
- USDA Child Nutrition Programs & School Meals (7 items)
- Competitive and Other Foods & Beverages (16 items)
- Physical Education & Physical Activity (14 items)
- Evaluation (4 items)

Each policy item is rated as "0" (not included in the text of the policy), "1" (weak, item mentioned, but statement vague, unclear, or confusing), or "2" (strong, item mentioned and specific/ strong language is used, indicating that action or regulation is required).



⁵ Schwartz MB, et al. *A Comprehensive Coding System to Measure the Quality of School Wellness Policies*. J Am Diet Assoc. 2009;109:1256-1262.

The scores shown in the graphs above are weighted summary scores for each of the five sections and for the WellSAT overall. A complete copy of each school system's written wellness policy evaluation based on all 50 WellSAT items has been provided to each school system as a supplement to their Wellness Policies and Practices Project feedback report.

Below are example policy items from the WellSAT, along with examples of weak and strong language pulled from school systems' current wellness policies in Maryland.

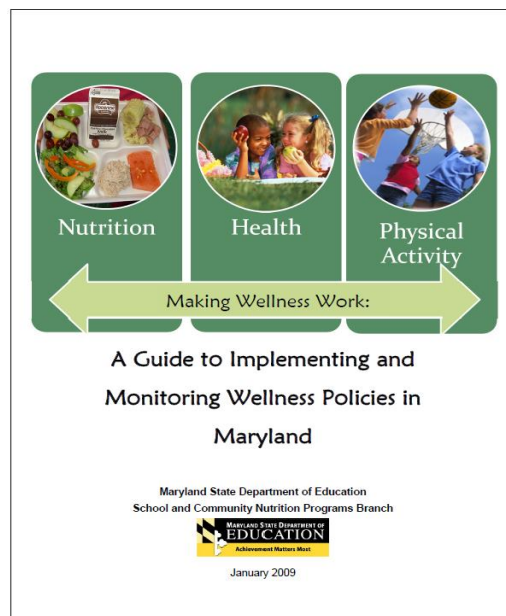
WellSAT Policy Item	Example Weak Language	Example Strong Language
<u>Competitive and Other Foods and Beverages:</u> "Addresses food not being used as a reward"	"Principals will work with teachers and school organizations to minimize the use of candy and other food as a reward system for students."	"Use of food as a reward or as a punishment is prohibited"
<u>Physical Education and Physical Activity:</u> "Addresses provision of daily recess in elementary school"	"Each elementary school will promote daily recess preferably outdoors, during which schools should encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity through provision of adequate space and equipment."	"All elementary school students will have at least 20 minutes a day of supervised recess, preferably outdoors, during which schools should encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity verbally and through the provision of space and equipment."
<u>Evaluation:</u> "Addresses providing a progress report to a specific audience"	"The Superintendent shall inform and update the public about the content and implementation of this policy."	"The Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent will provide an annual report on the progress of the implementation of this policy and procedure to be presented to the Board on an annual basis"



Monitor

1. Conduct regular wellness policy meetings to review and revise your wellness policy.
2. Review the written wellness policy evaluation (provided as a supplement to this report) with your School Health Council*.

**Reviewing your written wellness policy evaluation will enable your School Health Council to identify areas to enhance during the next policy revision. Sample language for written wellness policies may be found in the document: "Making Wellness Work: A Guide to Implementing and Monitoring Wellness Policies in Maryland".*



Section 2: Statewide School System Implementation of Wellness Policies & Practices

In the summer of 2013, the Maryland School Wellness Policies and Practices Project team administered a brief, web-based survey to examine school system and school-level implementation of wellness policies and practices for the 2012-2013 school year..

The **school system** survey targeted the "*chairperson of the School Health Council or the person in charge of school wellness initiatives*". The System-Level "**School Health Council**" refers to any team that coordinates activities related to wellness policies on the system level.

The data below provide an overview of statewide practices. School systems may use this information to reflect on practices and establish activities to achieve the recommendations in each section.

School System Implementation & Recommendations

- All Maryland School Systems (100%) have a System-Level School Health Council in place.
- Membership:
 - Central Office Leadership from Physical Education, Health Education, Food Service, and/or Nursing is represented on all system School Health Councils (100%).
 - Most system School Health Councils include representation from the local health department (88%), school administrators (75%), community members (67%), and parents (67%), but few include student representation (21%).



RECOMMENDATION

Build:

Maintain a System-Level School Health Council (or wellness policy team) that is broadly representative of the system and community.

- Few school systems have included "wellness policy implementation" as a standing agenda item at School Board Meetings (17%).



RECOMMENDATION

Communicate:

1. Report Wellness Policy goals and action steps to the local school board regularly.
2. Inform the public regarding progress in wellness policy implementation and wellness practices

- 67% of school systems have updated their written wellness policy within the past 3 years.
- When updating written wellness policies, school systems provide opportunities for input from:
 - Teachers/school health professionals (71%)
 - Parents (67%)
 - Students (38%)
- Most school systems assess the implementation of wellness policies annually (58%)



RECOMMENDATION

Monitor:

1. Conduct regular wellness policy meetings to review and revise your wellness policy.
2. Measure semi annually or annually the progress made in attaining the goals of the school system wellness policy.

School System Support of School-Level Implementation & Recommendations

- Half of school systems require the identification of wellness policy coordinators in each school (50%)
- Over one third of school systems require the integration of nutrition and physical activity goals into the overall school improvement plan (38%).
- The majority of school systems report promoting healthy eating and physical activity for staff members (71%) and encouraging staff members to model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors (58%)
- Less than half of school systems report providing schools with funding (33%) or other resources (46%) to support nutrition and physical activity policies/ practices.



Build

1. Establish a school based wellness team, with a designated coordinator, that is broadly representative of the school and community.
2. Develop school wellness goals and implementation plans that connect with school improvement team goals.
3. Identify resources to support implementation of wellness policy provisions at the school.

- Nearly half of school systems provide technical assistance to schools for the evaluation of wellness policy implementation (42%).
 - These same systems also report collecting annual reports from schools on school level implementation of wellness policies (42%).
- School systems inform the public about wellness evaluations primarily through the system's website (46%) and School Board Meetings (42%).

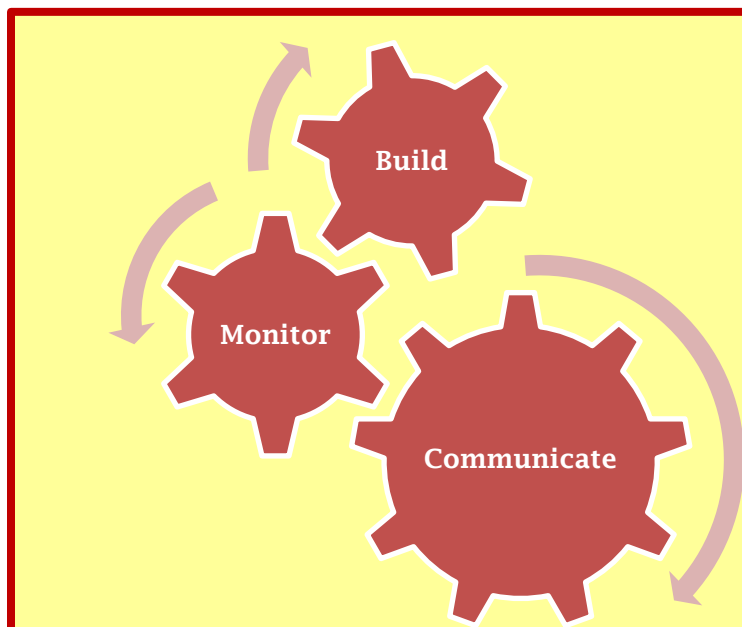


Build:

1. Develop wellness policy implementation and monitoring plans and communicate them to students, families, and the community
2. Train administrators and staff to support designing, implementing, promoting and evaluating wellness policies

Monitor:

Provide school-level guidance and technical assistance on the evaluation and reporting of wellness policy implementation.



Section 3: School-Level Implementation of Wellness Policies & Practices

An online survey was sent to administrators in all Maryland Public Schools, targeting the person who “*had the responsibility of supporting implementation of wellness policies, preferably an administrator.*” The survey included questions on School System Practices, School Practices, and the School-Level School Health Council.

The state-wide response rate was 56%, 757 out of 1356 eligible schools. The table below summarizes survey data from all Maryland administrators.

% of School Administrators reporting that their <u>School System...</u>	Maryland
had a school health council to address general health and wellness issues	47%
provides technical assistance to schools for evaluating local wellness policy implementation in schools.	28%
provides public updates on the content and implementation of local wellness policies.	36%
has a mechanism in place to encourage teachers and school health professionals to participate in developing and updating local wellness policies.	43%



Communicate:

Communicate school system’s wellness initiatives with school-level wellness councils and school administrators.

% of School Administrators reporting that their <u>School...</u>	Maryland
monitors implementation of the local wellness policy.	29%
provides annual progress reports to the school system on school-level implementation of local wellness policies.	20%
communicates the status of school-level implementation of local wellness policies to school staff and/or parents and families.	27%
provides opportunities for parent and/or student input on wellness policy implementation.	15%
has secured funds from the school system or outside/private funds to support nutrition and physical activity priorities for students and staff.	22%
has activities involving families to support and promote healthy eating and physical activity among students.	21%
has integrated nutrition and physical activity goals into the overall school improvement plan.	18%



Build

1. Develop school wellness goals and implementation plans that connect with school improvement team goals.
2. Identify resources to support implementation of wellness policy provisions at the school.

Communicate:

Communicate and promote the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for students, families, and the community.

Monitor:

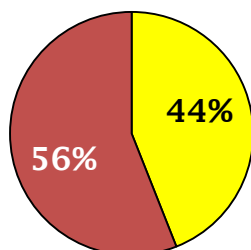
Gather and report school-level data on wellness policy implementation.

Section 4: School Level School Health Councils/ Wellness Teams

The figures below show the percentage of school-level School Health Councils in Maryland

% of Schools that had a School-Level School Health Council or Wellness Team in Place

Maryland



- % with a School Health Council
- % without School Health Council

Compared to schools without a school health council in place, **schools with a school health council or wellness team were**⁶:

- **4.9 times more likely** to monitor the implementation of the local wellness policy
- **5.7 times more likely** to provide annual progress reports to the school system on school-level implementation of local wellness policies.
- **5.9 times more likely** to communicate the status of school-level implementation of local wellness policies to school staff and/or parents and families.
- **4.6 times more likely** to provide opportunities for parent and/or student input on wellness policy implementation.
- **3.8 times more likely** to have secured funds from the school system or outside/private funds to support nutrition and physical activity priorities for students and staff.
- **4.5 times more likely** to have activities involving families to support and promote healthy eating and physical activity among students.
- **4.4 times more likely** to integrate nutrition and physical activity goals into the overall school improvement plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Build

1. Establish a school based wellness team, with a designated coordinator, that is broadly representative of the school and community.
2. Identify resources to fund a position/stipend to support implementation of wellness policy provisions

⁶ adjusting for clustering of schools within school systems and school-level free and reduced price meal %

Section 5: Recommendations (Summary)

The Maryland School Wellness Policies and Practices Project team is committed to helping school systems and schools enhance and implement wellness policies. The common goal is to promote healthy eating and physical activity in Maryland's schools. The following recommendations to support School Wellness Policies are focused on school system and school level activities and organized into three concepts: **Build, Communicate, Monitor**. School systems may use these recommendations to guide wellness policy activities.

Recommendations: System Level Implementation	Recommendations: School-Level Implementation
<p>Build</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain a system-level school health council that is broadly representative of the system and community. 2. Identify resources to fund a position/stipend to support implementation of wellness policy provisions 3. Develop wellness policy implementation and monitoring plans and communicate them to students, families, and the community 4. Train administrators and staff to support designing, implementing, promoting and evaluating wellness policies <p>Communicate</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Report Wellness Policy goals and action steps to the Local School Board regularly. 6. Communicate school system's wellness initiatives with school-level wellness councils and school administrators. 7. Inform the public regarding progress in wellness policy implementation and wellness practices <p>Monitor</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Conduct regular wellness policy meetings to review and revise wellness policies. 9. Measure semi annually or annually the progress made in attaining the goals of the school system wellness policy. 10. Provide school-level guidance and technical assistance on the evaluation and reporting of wellness policy implementation. 	<p>Build</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a school based wellness team, with a designated coordinator, that is broadly representative of the school and community. 2. Develop school wellness goals and implementation plans that connect with school improvement team goals. 3. Identify resources to support implementation of wellness policy provisions at the school. <p>Communicate</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Communicate and promote the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for students, families, and the community. <p>Monitor</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Gather and report school-level data on wellness policy implementation.

Primary funding support:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cooperative Agreement #5U58DP003497-02
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prevention Research Centers Program Cooperative Agreement #U48 DP001929 and Special Interest Project #12-062 with the University of Maryland Prevention Research Center.
- This report has been prepared solely by the authors independent of the supporting agencies and may not represent the official positions of these agencies.

Supported in part by:

- NIA Short-Term Training Program on Aging Grant T35AG036679 to the University of Maryland School of Medicine
- University of Maryland School of Medicine Summer Program in Obesity, Diabetes and Nutrition Research Training (SPORT), NIH Grant #5T35DK095737."
- Mid-Atlantic Nutrition Obesity Research Center (NORC) Summer Research Program, under NIH Grant #P30 DK072488."

Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge our partners in the Maryland Wellness Policies and Practices Project, our data collection team, and all of the school system representatives and school administrators that participated.

Contact Information:

Erin Hager, PhD (University of Maryland School of Medicine) ehager@peds.umaryland.edu
 Stew Eidel (Maryland State Department of Education) seidel@msde.state.md.us
 Erin Penniston (Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene) erin.penniston@maryland.gov