



Nutrition



Health



Physical Activity



A Guide for School-Level Implementation of Wellness Policies & Practices

May 2014

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Introduction

Since the initiation of the written "Local Wellness Policy" mandate by the Federal Government in 2004 (Child WIC Nutrition Reauthorization Act), school systems in Maryland have developed a wide range of policies supporting student wellness. The rollout of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (2010) requires the update of Local Wellness Policies (written wellness policies developed by school systems). The goals of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act are to strengthen implementation, increase community engagement, better inform parents about school wellness initiatives, and ensure monitoring/public reporting of the implementation of wellness policies and practices on a system and school-level. Based on research in Maryland and across the nation, a set of recommendations has been developed to support the implementation of wellness policies within school systems and schools. Local wellness policies are developed at the system-level, but implemented at the school-level. Therefore, the impact of policies on students is amplified by school-level champions or teams with the passion, commitment, resources and capacity to implement policies.

This guide serves as a resource for school systems to design their own goals, activities, and steps to support school-level implementation of wellness policies and practices by applying the five recommendations on **School-Level Implementation**.

For each of the recommendations you will find information on:

- Critical steps to implement the recommendation
- Sample practices from Maryland
- Success stories from Maryland

What is the Maryland Wellness Policies and Practices Project (MWPPP)?

The purpose of the MWPPP is to enhance 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.

During the 2012-2013 school year, the MWPPP evaluated:

1. **Quality** of written wellness policies (strength & comprehensiveness)
2. **Implementation** of wellness policies on the system and school-level
3. **Impact** of wellness policies and policy implementation on child health and academic outcomes

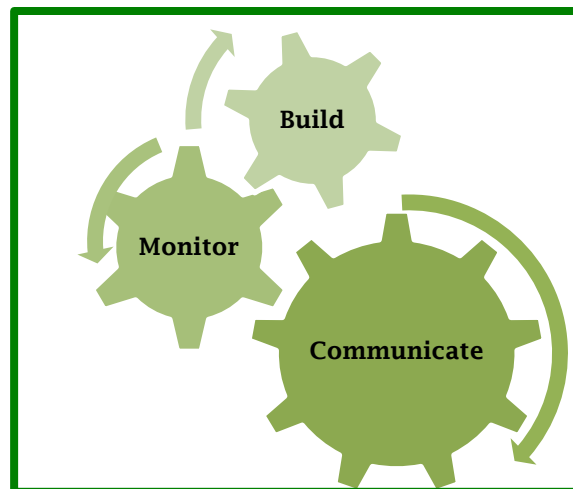
Synopsis of Recommendations

During the spring of 2014, the MWPPP team provided customized reports for each school system with an overview of wellness initiatives within the school system and the State of Maryland. The reports included a list of specific recommendations¹, generated from the data. A key finding was the impact school-level wellness teams have on the implementation of policies. School-level wellness teams can provide a framework for collaboration, develop resources and establish a strong connection specific to the school's wellness climate. The following recommendations are designed to support wellness policies at the school-level. They are organized into three interactive and interdependent concepts:

Build focuses on using local resources, needs and priorities to establish policies, practices and activities;

Communicate encourages school systems to lead the charge on childhood wellness, as a positive community influence;

Monitor establishes processes by which schools can determine the effectiveness of activities, thus informing the building of future activities.



Recommendations: School-Level Implementation

Build

1. **Establish a school-level 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.

Communicate

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

Monitor

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

¹ For a full list of recommendations go to:

http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/school_wellness/index.html

Linking Student Wellness to Academic Success

Growing scientific evidence shows that engaging in physical activity leads to higher academic achievement². A recent study found that middle school students who were aerobically fit were 2-4 times more likely to pass their reading and math standardized tests than students who did not meet the age-specific health standard³. These findings are consistent with other studies across the nation showing that physical fitness is related to academic achievement in diverse samples of elementary, middle and high school students^{4,5,6}. Higher standardized test scores in both math and reading suggest that aspects of physical fitness may be related to academic performance in both children and adolescents^{4,5}. Evidence has shown that academic performance is not hindered when 45-60 minutes of formal teaching time is replaced with physical activity⁶. Overall, the results of studies analyzing the association between engagement in physical activity and academic achievement have been positive.

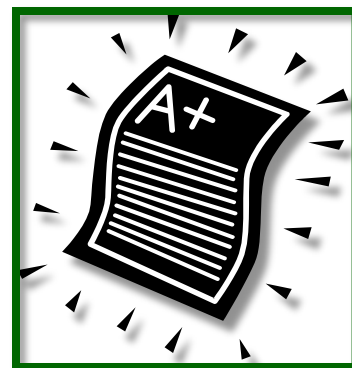
students who were aerobically fit were 2-4 times more likely to pass their reading and math standardized tests

students who eat school breakfast have been shown to score 17.5 percent higher on standardized math tests

Nutrition is also central to child neurocognitive development and positive academic achievement⁷. Schools are a critical component to promoting child health because children spend a large amount of their time in the school environment and can consume up to half of their caloric intake while at school⁸. A review focusing on the role of breakfast consumption in schools found that skipping breakfast has a negative effect on cognition and educational outcomes⁷. Students who eat school breakfast have been shown to score 17.5 percent higher on standardized math tests, compared to students who skip breakfast⁹.

Additionally, schools that implement a universal or alternative breakfast program have seen increases in academic performance. For instance, students attending Maryland schools allowing them to eat breakfast in the classroom were up to 12.5 percent more likely to achieve proficiency on standardized math tests⁹.

The interrelatedness of school nutrition, engagement in physical activity and academic achievement suggests that creating a school environment that prioritizes student nutrition and physical activity would lead to gains in academic achievement.



² Davis, C. L., & Cooper, S. (2011). Fitness, fatness, cognition, behavior, and academic achievement among overweight children: Do cross-sectional associations correspond to exercise trial outcomes? *Preventive Medicine*, 565-569.

³ Bass, R. W., Brown, D. D., Laurson, K. R., & Coleman, M. M. (2013). Physical fitness and academic performance in middle school students. *Acta Paediatrica*, 832-837.

⁴ Chomitz, V. R., Slining, M. M., McGowan, R. J., Mitchell, S. E., Dawson, G. F., & Hacker, K. A. (2009). Is There a Relationship Between Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement? Positive Results From Public School Children in the Northeastern United States. *School Health*, 30-36.

⁵ Castelli, D. M., Hillman, C. H., Buck, S. M., & Erwin, H. E. (2007). Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement in Third- and Fifth-Grade Students. *Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 239-252.

⁶ Roberts, C. K., Freed, B., & McCarthy, W. J. (2010). Low Aerobic Fitness and Obesity Are Associated with Lower Standardized Test Scores in Children. *Pediatrics*, 711-717.

⁷ Basch, C. E. (2011). Breakfast and the Achievement Gap Among Urban Minority Youth. *School Health*, 635-640.

⁸ Action for Healthy Kids. (2013). *The Learning Connection*. Chicago.

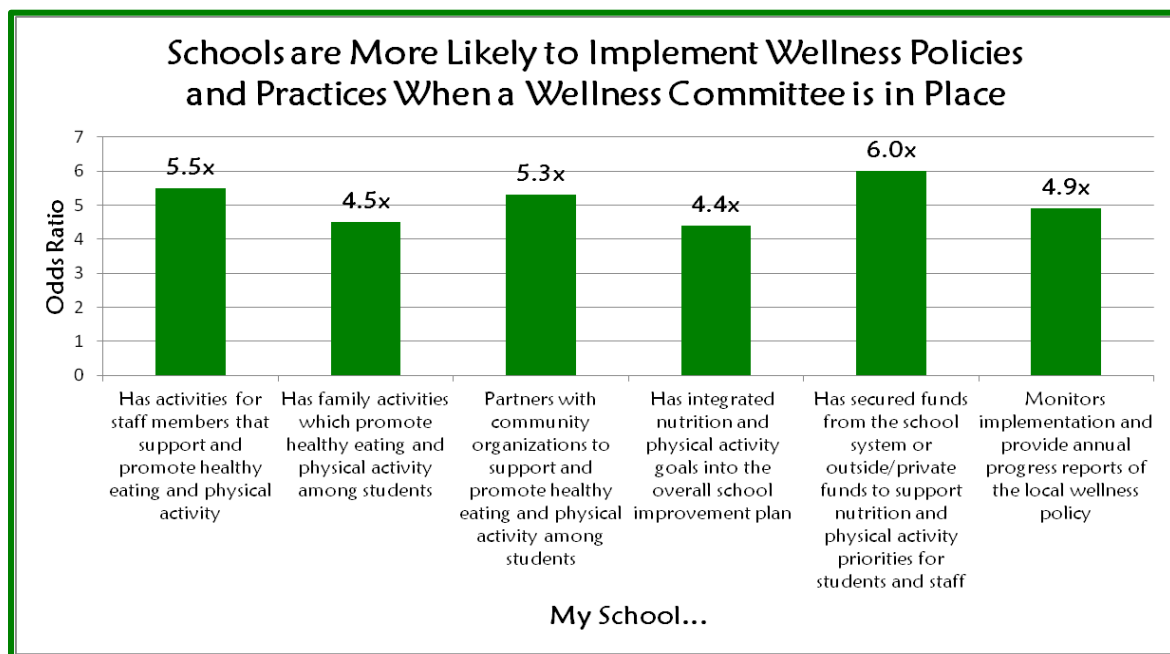
⁹ Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices. (2013). *Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis*. Deloitte development LLC.

Recommendation #1: Establish a school-level wellness team, with a designated coordinator, that is broadly representative of the school and community.

An active school-level wellness team is a key step to successfully implementing wellness policies within a school. A wellness team helps to maintain wellness as a priority for the school, assesses school-level needs, and guides the growth of school wellness at the ground level.

The MWPPP examined the relationship between school-level wellness teams/committees in Maryland and implementation of wellness policies and practices. School-level teams, led by a wellness champion, serve to overcome barriers to wellness with collaborative, innovative and unique activities designed to support student health.

The figure below demonstrates findings from the MWPPP. Compared to schools without a school-level health council or wellness team in place, schools with a school health council or wellness team were at least 4 times more likely to provide wellness activities for staff and families, partner with community organizations, integrate nutrition/physical activity goals into the school improvement plan, secure funding for health promotion activities, and monitor the implementation of the wellness policy.



A. Critical Steps to Starting a Wellness Team

1. With support of school administration, nominate and identify a school wellness coordinator and discuss the role of the wellness team within the school.*
2. Identify potential team members or groups to be represented.
 - Ensure the wellness team is composed of a diverse group of people from the school and community. Examples include: administrators, nurses, physical education teachers, food service staff, social workers and counselors, classroom teachers, parents, students and community members (local health organizations, public health institutions, recreation programs, anti-hunger organizations). Members can be

recruited by telephone, personal contact, letters, meeting announcements and local media.

3. Hold first wellness team meeting and present wellness policy priorities.
4. Complete an action plan for implementing wellness policies and practices in school and identify priorities.
5. Communicate action plan for implementing wellness policies and practices to the school community.
6. Report wellness progress to the system's school health council or wellness team.*

**It is highly encouraged that: (1) the wellness team is a subcommittee of the School Improvement Team (SIT) and (2) how often the wellness team subcommittee needs to report to the SIT is predetermined (at least annually).*

B. Sample Practices from Maryland

One critical component to the successful establishment of a school-level wellness team is the identification of a school wellness coordinator. The school wellness coordinator is the school's expert on health and wellness and, most importantly, facilitates the implementation of the wellness policy at the school-level. It is important to specify the roles and responsibilities of the school-level wellness coordinator. Several Maryland school systems have identified school wellness coordinators and specific "roles and responsibilities", such as those listed to the right (gathered from systems in Maryland).

Roles and Responsibilities of the Wellness Coordinator:

- Develop and lead the school wellness team
- Facilitate school wellness team meetings
- Liaison between school staff and administrative team with regard to school wellness initiatives
- Develop the annual school wellness action plan
- Coordinate wellness trainings and activities for students and staff
- Report to local health council and SIT
- Network with other school wellness leaders, as well as community partners

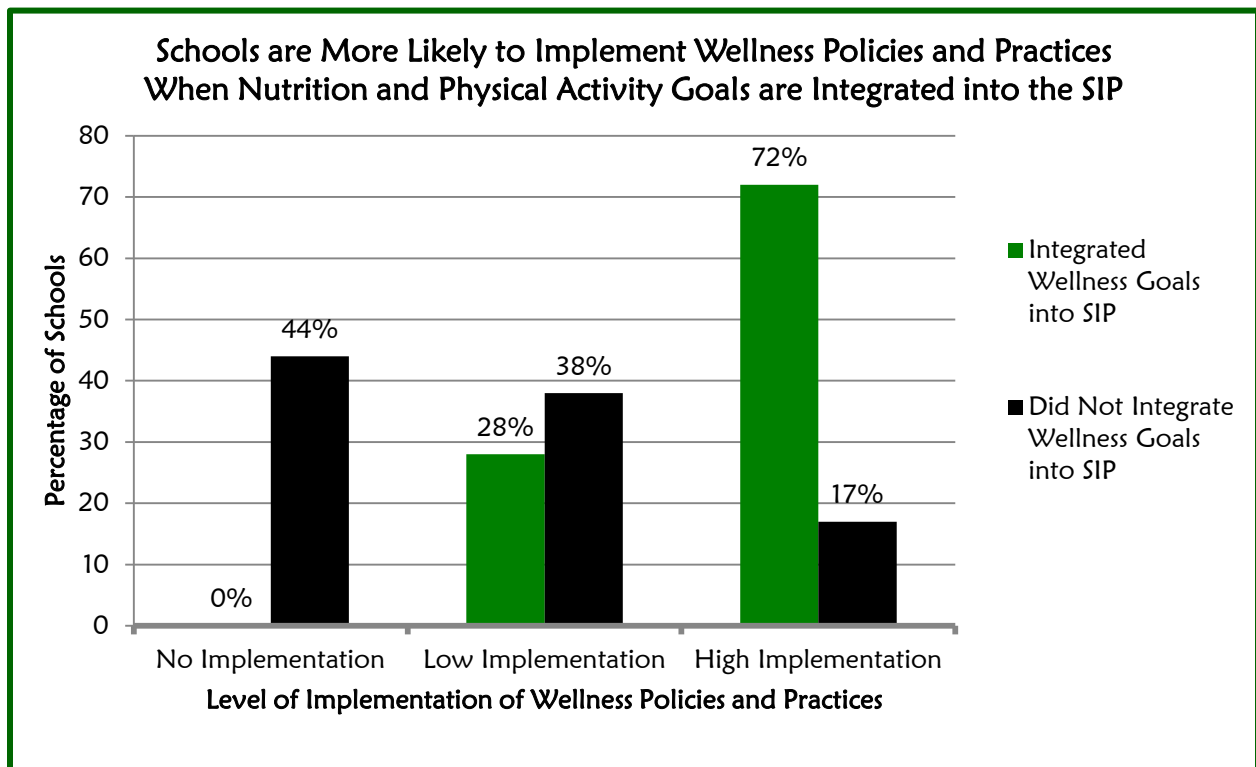
C. Success Stories from Maryland

- "I'm the principal, and I'm committed to this [*wellness team*]. I have my wellness team, and I have three chairs. One is our PE teacher, one is a special education teacher, and the other one is our school nurse. So, I have a core group that makes sure these things are happening and they come up with the ideas and they plan it. They do different roles and they get together in their meetings monthly and they discuss who's going to do what as far as for the wellness activities... It's all about that core team that kind of gets things moving." –ES Principal
- "We've gone more structured this year, as far as requiring every school to have a wellness coordinator. We've done that loosely in the past, but we've really instituted a lot more accountability this year." –System Representative

Recommendation #2: Develop school wellness goals and implementation plans that connect with school improvement team goals.

The tasks of the school improvement team (SIT) are: to lead the development of a school improvement plan (SIP) that addresses student achievement needs, to monitor the implementation of the SIP, and to revise the SIP when appropriate. MSDE has provided guidance for principals for developing SIPs on their website, found at: <http://mdk12.org/process/leading/index.html>.

The MWPPP found that only **18%** of Maryland schools integrated nutrition and physical activity goals into the SIP. From the 21 items in the MWPPP school survey that inquired about school-level implementation of wellness policies and practices, a 3 category implementation scale was created: 0 items endorsed="No Implementation" (36% of schools), 1-6 items endorsed="Low" implementation (37% of schools), ≥ 7 items endorsed="High" implementation (27% of schools). As shown in the figure below, schools with wellness goals integrated into their SIP were significantly more likely to be in the "high" implementation group and less likely to be in the "No Implementation" group.



A. Critical Steps to Incorporating Wellness Goals into the SIP

1. Create a vision for improving student health and wellness.
2. Solicit support from the school community and the PTA/PTO for a healthier school environment.
3. Ensure wellness team members participate in the SIT.
4. Identify health and wellness goals that are linked to improving academic achievement.

B. Sample Practices from Maryland

One local school system in Maryland requires schools include three health and wellness goals in their SIP.

Health and Wellness Goals

1. Provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle
2. Promote activities that support a healthy and safe school environment
3. Implement social skills development and bullying prevention curricula

Sample school activities to address these goals include:

- Ensure physical activity and recess are not withheld as a punishment
- Promote the use of non-food rewards as positive incentives for students
- Hold a family health and fitness night/running PE night/Passport to Fitness Night
- Provide a list of healthier snacks and beverages for classroom celebrations
- Provide anti-bullying messages in the school through posters and bracelets
- Display health-related bulletin boards/publish newspaper articles
- Provide daily stretches during morning announcements
- Sponsor Mileage Clubs/Walking and Running Clubs/Peer Mediation Clubs/Bowling Clubs

C. Success Stories from Maryland

- "Each school will now be responsible and looking at [wellness] as part of the school improvement plan...We felt that wellness teams were dormant at schools...As a result of that, we pushed to get it into the school improvement plan, that way it's looked at every year, and every year, the schools are coming up with ideas they can do to improve wellness for staff and students in the community." - System Representative
- "One thing that we require...is that each school is part of their school improvement plan. Actually, there are three questions they have to answer relative to wellness...basically to demonstrate what they are doing as a school community to promote wellness in their particular school... it's required as part of their plan. They have to attend to it and actually do something." - System Representative



Recommendation # 3: Identify resources to support implementation of wellness policy provisions at the school.

Many excellent resources exist to support school system policy development, however there are few resources focusing on school-level policy implementation. The Resources section of this guide provides a list of print and electronic resources from across the country that support wellness policy development, implementation, and evaluation. In this section, we focus on four broad ideas for building substantial and long-term financial resources. Funding should come directly from partners who benefit from healthy children. These partners could be parents, relatives, health care providers, hospitals, community organizations (YMCA, fire houses, fraternal organizations), local government, higher education, and workforce development organizations.

Funding was identified as the biggest barrier to promoting healthy eating and physical activity practices among school systems and the 3rd biggest barrier among schools. --MWPPP

A. Critical Steps for Identifying Resources to Support Implementation of Wellness Policy Provisions at the School

1. Connect with national and state organizations.

Action for Healthy Kids, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and USDA all provide recognition, grants and awards for wellness activities. Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Maryland State School Health Council, and local health departments also have provided resources to support school wellness initiatives in Maryland.

2. Use “crowd funding” for a wellness activity or position.

According to Forbes Magazine, “Crowd funding is growing a market for impact investing in social enterprises, marrying the worlds of entrepreneurship and philanthropy”. Crowd funding is a collection of funds from the “crowd” to fund an initiative and usually occurs on the Internet platform. What could be a better investment than the children in our schools?

3. Stage a friendly takeover of the myriad of fundraising events in the school.

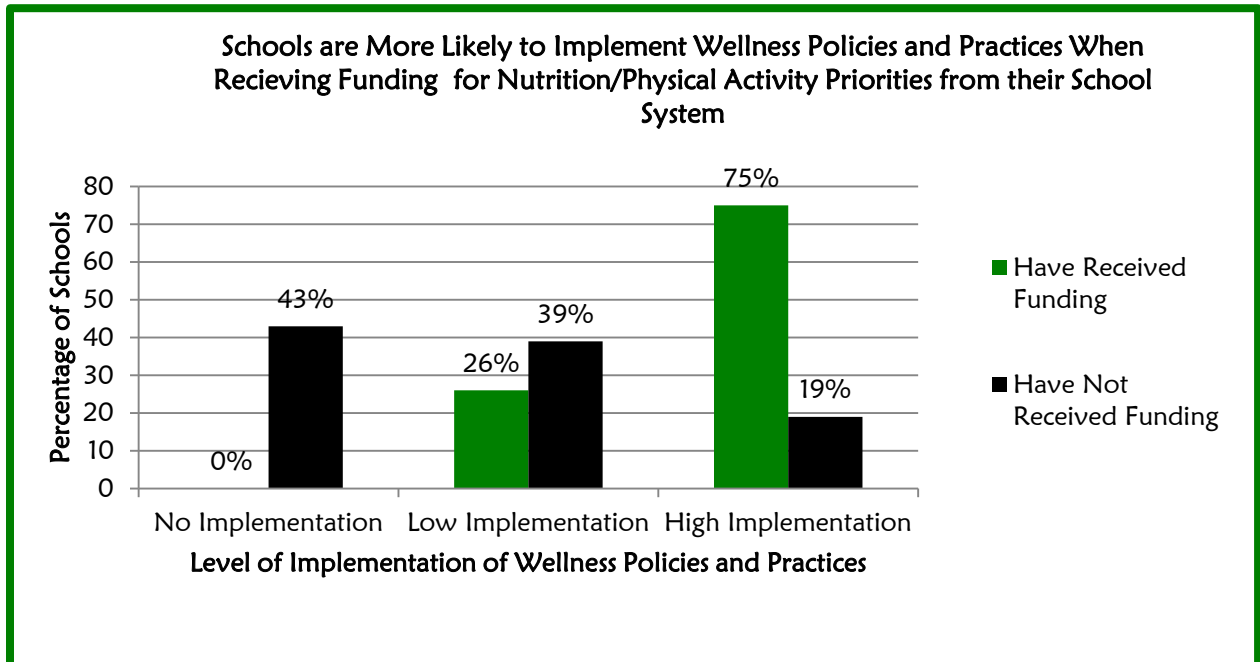
A coordinated approach to school fundraising can remove the pressure from individual organizations and increase overall fundraising. Use the public broadcasting or local fire department model of monthly payments, subscriptions or annual fund drives to make it easier for individuals to give to a cause.

4. Make yourself a healthy community center resource.

Provide goods, services and activities that support the community’s health in collaboration with community partners. While this may not raise funds per se, it can create resource availability that will build your school’s capacity to enhance the wellness of your children and adults. Resources can be fiscal, physical, relationship, information and personnel. Collaborate with a local organization or business to help form a 501c3 that can solicit and manage funds to support school wellness activities.

B. Sample Practices from Maryland

Only 15.4% of schools reported receiving funding for nutrition/physical activity priorities from their school system during the 2012-2013 school year, according to the MWPPP. These schools were significantly more likely to implement wellness policies and practices, compared to schools that did not receive funding, as shown in the figure below.



C. Success Stories from Maryland

- “We are the first public school in Maryland to be a Projects in America School...we received two years of professional development for our PE teacher and any other staff members we can include. We received a curriculum for projects that enhances our current curriculum that the state requires. It gives us all kinds of activities for classroom teachers that develop the core body strength of the children. It involves pre-testing and post-testing for two years and submitting the data...and it included \$17,000 worth of equipment for our playground.” –ES Principal
- “We do a walk-a thon and it’s called the “Beaver Fun Run”. It promotes wellness and it’s also a fundraiser for our school, but we do a whole wellness education program with it and all of our children participate regardless if they fundraise or not. It just promotes wellness and physical activity with our students. We, monthly, had a wellness grant in conjunction with [hospital] and [local] county health department, and we did one wellness activity every month during the school year. Sometimes, it was a healthy eating activity where we would have the kids...teach them how to make yogurt parfaits.” –ES Principal

Recommendation #4: Communicate and promote the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for students, families, and the community.

Schools play a critical role in improving the dietary and physical activity behaviors of children and adolescents. Schools can create healthy environments by implementing policies and practices that support healthy eating and physical activity and provide opportunities for students to practice these health behaviors. The CDC and USDA have produced a number of guidelines on the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. The guidelines serve as the foundation for implementing school-level healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices for students and also support the instructional programs in the schools.

Ultimately, communication and promotion are designed to call individuals to action. The promotion of wellness is designed to change attitudes or beliefs and call students, parents and staff to action toward maintaining or enhancing the school environment. Both the communication and promotion to students, whether in print or by person, verbal and non-verbal, contribute to students' choices about their food, beverages and physical activity pursuits. To be effective, healthy eating and physical activity messages should be consistent and align with the school system wellness policy.

Schools can communicate and promote the importance of healthy eating and physical activity through multiple strategies:

- Existing school curricula & lessons for healthy eating & physical activity
- Electronic communication: websites, text messages, social media
- Newsletters & Brochures
- Videos
- Billboards
- Media-local newspapers, television and radio
- Student and family wellness advocate training
- School Events: Wellness Days, Competitions/Challenges, Fundraisers
- School Menus

Schools that responded to the MWPPP survey utilized the methods listed in the table below to share information with the public on school-level wellness activities during the 2012-2013 school year.

Most Common Ways Schools Shared Information on School-Level Wellness Activities	
PTA/Community Meetings	51%
Website	44%
Newsletters	38%
Word of Mouth	35%
Bulletin Board	22%

A. Critical Steps to Communicate and Promote

1. Meet with a School Administrator to develop an action plan for communicating the importance of physical activity and nutrition.
2. Designate a wellness team member to lead the communication and promotion efforts.
3. Include communication and promotion strategies in the action plan.
4. Obtain feedback from students, families and the community about the communication and promotion efforts, and incorporate into the action plan as necessary.

B. Sample Practices from Maryland

School system representatives and school administrators identified “parents and families” as the biggest barrier to promoting healthy eating and physical activity practices. Additionally, only 16% of schools reported communicating the status of school-level implementation of wellness policies to parents and families and only 14% reported providing opportunities for parent and/or student input on implementing wellness initiatives. By inviting parents and families to the table, new ideas are generated and communication to families and communities is enhanced.

C. Success Stories: from Maryland

- “While we talked about becoming a wellness school and that is the target here in [our] County, I want parents to know that we are not just looking for an award but, we are looking for the stewardship of the process that children are talking to their moms and dads when they get home about healthy eating and that parents are getting out with their children and exercising and walking with their children.”
–ES Principal
- “... being a whole child’s school here, we look at the whole child... it is built into our value statement.... It is important for the parents to know what the mission and vision is for your school....when I am looking at the students who are coming here, it is important for our parents to know that the food that the children eat, the amount of recreation that the children get all impact their growth and development which leads to a better lifestyle.” –ES Principal



Recommendation #5: Gather and report school-level data on wellness policy implementation.

Evaluation and feedback are very important components to maintaining a wellness policy. Evaluation is **what you do with the information you have gathered** and determines the effectiveness of your strategies as well as the strength of the policy. Evaluation is critical to assessing wellness policy activities in individual schools and helps inform school systems and the public on the progress made toward wellness goals. It also helps determine if the strategies employed should be modified to meet or maintain goals. Results of monitoring and evaluation of wellness policies and practices should be shared with key stakeholders. The implementation of the wellness policy should also be assessed periodically and made available to the public. The April 2011 Bridging the Gap report on wellness policies recommends that individual schools take the lead on ensuring timely review and feedback about their implementation efforts to the school community.

A. Critical Steps to Gather and Report School-Level Wellness Policy Implementation Data

1. Identify an individual in the school system to be the wellness data coordinator.
2. Work with schools to gather their school wellness action plans and ensure that specific data points are included for all implementation goals.
3. From these data points, identify existing data aligned with goals and activities or, if not available, develop a standardized tool for collecting school-level data based on data required.
4. Collect and analyze data at the school system level.
5. Individual schools report results to school system wellness data coordinator.
6. Provide regular updates to key stakeholders on each school's progress in meeting the local school wellness goals.

B. How to Collect Data

Look for easy and quick methods to collect data. This can be accomplished by conducting an annual survey of progress in a health education class or a visual audit of the school cafeteria environment. Data could also be collected by the local health department, Parks and Recreation, a County organization or a national organization. Most, if not all, school systems have institutions of higher learning within their borders. Such institutions often have academic experts who could be valuable partners for data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Epidemiologists, often employed by health departments or academic institutions are trained professionals in data collection methods and can serve as a valuable resource.

MWPPP data shows...

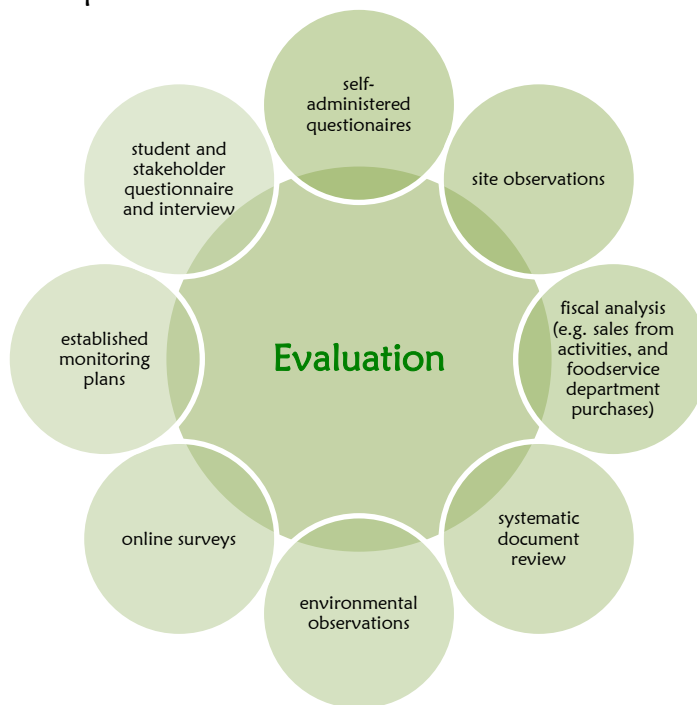
School Systems:

- 42% provide technical assistance to evaluate local wellness policy implementation
- 42% collect annual progress reports from schools on school-level implementation of the local wellness policy

Schools:

- 29% monitor the implementation of the local wellness policy
- 20% provide annual progress reports to the school system on school-level implementation of the local wellness policy
- 26% communicate the status of school-level implementation of local wellness policy to school staff

Data collection methods that are recommended when evaluating implementation of wellness policies and practices include:



C. Match Outcomes to Data Collection

Identify specific outcomes first and then look for data to support measuring the outcome. Some data may apply to multiple outcomes.

<u>Sample Outcomes</u>	<u>Sample Data to Collect</u>
1. School staff has skills necessary to support policy goals.	1. Professional development or training conducted.
2. Foods and beverages sold and served comply with policy.	2. Compliance with nutrition standards for competitive foods.
3. School meals environment is pleasant and inviting.	3. Satisfaction survey of the cafeteria environment quality.
4. Regular physical activity is promoted.	4. Satisfaction survey on physical activity opportunities.
5. Only foods that comply with Wellness Policies are sold and profits maintained.	5. Monitor fundraising types of foods sold by and profits from school groups.
6. Foods as a reward were discontinued, and foods offered during celebrations are healthier.	6. Document classroom reward and celebration practices.

D. Success Stories: from Maryland

- “If another county planned an activity like this, first and foremost, I would probably say to really look at your data, look at need, do a needs assessment. For us, we looked at our community and we noticed that our foreign population is growing and though there are a lot of health issues that are concerning and are related to them and we want to trouble shoot and problem solve, obesity cases. I would say also, talk to your nurse if you have a nurse in your school building...Get data and be able to talk to the parents about it.” –ES Principal

Wellness Policy Resources

Wellness Team Policy and Implementation Resources

[MSDE Wellness Policy Implementation Guide](#)

[USDA School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources](#)

[Federal Guidelines for School Wellness Policy Implementation](#)

[Recommendations for Coordinated School Health](#)

[School Health Index Self Assessment](#)

[USDA Nutrition Reauthorization Local School Wellness Memo: SP 42 – 2011](#)

[Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Section 204: Local School Wellness Policies 5-Year Technical Assistance and Guidance Plan](#)

[National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion: Healthy Youth! School Health Policy](#)

[The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity Wellness Policy Development](#)

[Healthy School Report Card Online Analysis Tool](#)

[Action for Healthy Kids Wellness Policy Tool](#)

[USDA – Team Nutrition Policy on Nutrition Wellness](#)

Wellness Team Policy and Implementation Examples

[Principals' Wellness Policy Implementation Manual - Minnesota](#)

[California Project Lean](#)

[LearnWell Chicago Public Schools](#)

Research Based Data on Benefits of Physical Activity

[Benefits of Exercise for Children](#)

[Facts on Childhood Obesity](#)

[Physical Activity and Academics](#)

[The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance](#)

School-based Physical Activity Programs

[Healthier Generation](#)

[Skillastics](#)

[NFL Play 60](#)

[Kaboom](#)

[Dance 4 Peace](#)

[Playworks](#)

[Peaceful Playgrounds](#)

[Let's Move!](#)

National Health and Fitness Organizations

[SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators](#)

[ACSM - American College of Sports Medicine](#)

National Health Guidelines for Children

[School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#)

Teacher Resources

[Take 15 - Physical Activity: MSDE](#)

[Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool](#)

[Technology in Physical Education](#)

[CDC National Physical Activity Plan](#)

[CDC Podcast on Adolescents and Physical Activity](#)

[CDC Physical Activity Guidelines Toolkit](#)

[CDC Childhood Obesity](#)

[The Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool \(PECAT\)](#)

[The National Physical Activity Plan](#)

[CDC Overweight and Obesity Social Media Tools](#)

[About Promoting Youth Development in Schools](#)

[Healthier Middle Schools: Everyone Can Help](#)

[School-Based Obesity Prevention Strategies for State Policymakers](#)

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