

LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICIES



WELL DONE!

School Nutrition
Professionals
Put Wellness
Policies to Work.





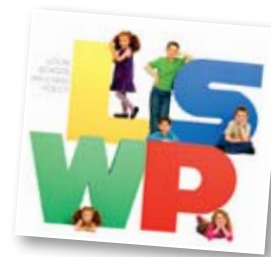
School Nutrition Association

The School Nutrition Association (SNA) has been advancing the availability, quality and acceptance of school nutrition programs as an integral part of education since 1946. Recognized as the authority on school nutrition programs, SNA has 52 state affiliates, hundreds of local chapters and more than 53,000 members. The organization provides education and training; sets standards through certification and credentialing; and represents the nutritional interests of all children through advocacy at the national and state levels. With an award-winning magazine (*School Nutrition*) and website (*SchoolNutrition.org*), SNA members are kept updated on all current trends in school nutrition.

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Meeting the Challenge & Seizing the Opportunity



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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Developing local school wellness policies in districts across the United States was the first challenge, as teams of administrators, teachers, parents, students and school nutrition professionals came together to determine changes and guidance for creating healthy school environments. But with policies now in place, school nutrition professionals and their allies are facing a whole host of new **challenges**—as well as some exciting **opportunities**.

But before we look forward, it's valuable to review the steps that have led us to this point. Is there anyone in America who doesn't recognize by now that overweight, and obesity in children is an alarming health concern today? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 16% of U.S. children ages 6 to 19 (over 9 million) are overweight according to 1999-2002 data; this is triple the proportion in 1980.

SNA offers this new resource to help you explore the possibilities wellness policies offer for achieving change.

Experts attribute much of this increased prevalence of childhood overweight to decreased physical activity and over-consumption of high-calorie foods. To address this frightening trend, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 included language that formalized the role of the school in promoting healthy childhood weight. The members of

the **School Nutrition Association** (SNA) advocated for Section 204 of the Act, requiring that all school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program adopt local wellness policies by July 1, 2006. This Section of the law states that, at a minimum, local wellness policies should include:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities and nutrition guidelines approved by the local school board for all foods available on each school campus;
- A plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy; and
- Involvement by parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators and the public in the development of the school wellness policy.

After the law passed, SNA developed sample policy guidelines; these were widely used by numerous school boards as a model. Through training seminars, webinars, a series of website and magazine articles and education programs at its annual conference, SNA provided school nutrition professionals with a variety of ideas, strategies and resource materials to help in the development of wellness policies. Next, SNA turned its focus to helping school nutrition professionals *implement* their policies. The Association surveyed members to gauge implementation progress. Several reports were issued to help school districts compare their policies and progress with others across the country (see page 28).



Of course, any time meaningful change is attempted—especially in an institution like a school—obstacles and frustrations are commonplace. But many school nutrition professionals nationwide are breaking through the barriers to bring their policy from theory into action.

The editors of *Well Done! School Nutrition Professionals Put Wellness Policies to Work* have compiled a number of examples of school nutrition operators and their allies in the school and community **meeting the challenges** and **seizing the opportunities** presented by local school wellness policies. School nutrition professionals from districts of all sizes and all across the country share experiences relating to gaining support from principals, teachers, parents and students; establishing cafeteria-based nutrition education programs; finding products to meet new

Many school nutrition professionals nationwide are breaking through the barriers to bring their policy from theory into action.

nutrition standards; developing staff wellness programs; and making operational changes.

Local wellness policies offer a comprehensive, community-driven approach to promoting healthy childhood weight and providing consistent messaging about nutrition and health at school. A commitment by parents, students and all those in the school community to act as role models, follow the policy guidelines and offer suggestions for improvements to the policy are critical to the success of this approach.

As the second year of policy implementation begins to draw to a close, SNA offers this new

resource to help you explore the possibilities wellness policies offer for achieving change. On the following pages you will read some truly inspiring examples of how a policy can have a dramatic effect on whole schools, whole communities and individual children, staff and parents. The vision of SNA is to ensure that healthful meals and nutrition education are available to all children. This publication illustrates that wellness policies can make that vision a reality—with a lot of hard work, commitment, perseverance and passion.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

To implement changes, large or small, in the types of foods that schools

allow on campus, it takes the support of principals, school administrators and staff. Too often, school administrators are reluctant to give up the revenue that comes with the sale of foods (through a la carte service, vending, school stores, concessions and fundraisers) that don't meet the new nutritional standards. And it can be an uphill battle to convince teachers and principals that healthy foods and physical exercise actually can help improve students' test scores, attendance and behavior.

Facing the Challenge

When the Portage Township (Ind.) Board of School Trustees approved the district's new wellness policy in April 2006, Child Nutrition Director Jan Black, SNS, was surprised at the negative reaction by parents to the changes. The policy included nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold; established portion limits; mandated time to eat; set requirements for classroom parties and fundraisers; and prohibited foods from outside chains being brought into the school by students or parents.

One outcome of the outraged parent reaction was an initial lack of principal support: "The principals were upset because the parents were so angry," Black recalls. "Other districts in Indiana also gave us some heat because of how strict our policy was. They said, 'We wouldn't touch class parties with a 10-ft. pole! Why do more than the law asks you to do?'"

Black also was taken aback at how determined school administrators were to get around the policy. "The policy doesn't apply to field trips. So, we found out that some elementary schools were calling a one-block trip to a nearby park a 'field trip,' just so that they could serve snacks that weren't allowed in school!"

Wanda Salley, Director of Child Nutrition for Harrison County (Miss.) Public Schools, was surprised—and discouraged—by the lack of support for her district's wellness policy by school staff and principals. "We've been working really hard and reaching out to schools," she reports, "and we've probably made an impact, but I'm feeling kind of down about it."

Like Black, Salley discovered staff trying to circumvent the policy. "All the soft drink machines were transformed and healthier choices were put into vending machines, but last year I found out that a high school teacher was selling Cokes out of her classroom! The bottom line is that no one—clubs, schools or principals—wants to give up the extra money they get to do things with."

Finding Solutions

For Jan Black, the answer to the problem of administration support has come from the top: Superintendent Michael Berta. "When he heard about [the resistance to the wellness policy], he took the project under his wing," she recounts. Since, "The superintendent's support has made things easier: He, too, has received the phone calls—and he sticks by the policy. He addressed the principals and told

SNAPSHOT:

- **Harrison County Public Schools** serve a variety of small and large communities on Mississippi's Gulf Coast. The Child Nutrition Department serves 9,500 lunches, 4,700 breakfasts and 400 snacks daily in 20 school cafeterias.
- **Portage Township Schools** are located in Indiana, 50 miles outside of Chicago. The school nutrition team serves 8,500 children in 12 schools.



them they must uphold the wellness policy as a board policy.”

With Berta’s backing, Black tried to make things easier for principals by setting up resources to help them stick to the policy. “We have a suggested snack list that includes brands and portion sizes, and we update it every time a vendor gives us new snacks,” she notes. “We’re also making it possible for schools to order food for [classroom] parties through school foodservice, and it’s delivered right to the schools. Examples include bagged pretzels, sherbet cups, fruit smoothies, lowfat string cheese—the kids aren’t being deprived! We offer lots of choices that they will eat.” It’s these types of health-friendly and student-tempting offerings that helps make principals more open to supporting the policy.

Although Mississippi’s Salley has struggled with less-than-ideal support from administration and staff, she highlights one group as particularly helpful in promoting the tenets of the policy: school nurses. “They are the most supportive people of all,” credits Salley. “We have a fresh fruit and vegetable grant at one of our elementary schools, and the school nurse at that location is the one who went through the application process and won the grant. And [another one] of the nurses has been my sounding board; she and I talked a lot and did everything we could [to improve healthy offerings to kids].”

Next Steps

After the initial wary reception, Black is pleased to report that she and Superintendent

Berta have begun hearing from other districts expressing interest in learning more about Portage’s wellness policy. “In the long run,” she asserts, “we will be the model for other districts.”

Salley, meanwhile, will continue her efforts to convince principals and teachers that good nutrition will result in higher test scores. “I am a dietitian working in an educator’s world,” she says. “I don’t think educators have an appreciation for what that means. Someone needs to break through to them on an academic level to show that [wellness efforts] will make a difference academically. And unless someone higher up decides that [ignoring the rules] has to stop once and for all, and puts some teeth into [enforcement], it’s not going to work.”

Learn More...

- To learn more about how good nutrition can help kids do better in school, visit www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin470.shtml
- For a copy of the Portage Township Schools wellness policy, click on www.portage.k12.in.us/Documents/PDF/documents/646%20Wellness.pdf
- To reach the Child Nutrition Department in Harrison County Schools, visit www.harrison.k12.ms.us/Departments/ChildNutrition/tabid/62/Default.aspx

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- Nearly 40% of school nutrition program operators indicated that a lack of support from principals is a hurdle to implementing new nutrition standards.
- Only 16% of school nutrition professionals indicated that a lack of support from the superintendent and/or school board is a hurdle to implementing new nutrition standards.
- Respondents indicated that groups outside of school nutrition are involved in the implementation of the district wellness policy: 78% of respondents said teachers are involved; 66% said principals are involved; 61% said other administrators are involved; and 60% said school nurses are involved.
- Just over 40% of respondents said that establishing a priority of teachers fitting nutrition education into class time is a hurdle to implementing nutrition education policies. Almost 30% said getting administrators to prioritize this class time is a hurdle.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

“Do as I say, not as I do” is a directive that’s pretty hard to sell to this generation of youngsters. The promotion of wellness in schools has a better chance of success when those sending the message are role models to emulate. Besides, kids aren’t the only ones who will benefit from the adoption of healthy behaviors related to eating and physical activity. Obesity is a serious medical issue among American adults.

That’s why many local school wellness policies include sections on staff wellness, encouraging the entire school community—including administrators, teachers and school nutrition personnel—to participate in activities that promote exercise, weight loss and other positive health outcomes. Such programs serve staff, establish good examples to kids and their families and help increase awareness of the district’s wellness initiatives.

No Day Like Today

As chair of her district’s wellness committee, Lori Adkins, SNS, Nutrition Supervisor for the West Bloomfield (Mich.) School District, knows that wellness is promoted most effectively by example, not just by “telling.” Thus, the system’s wellness policy includes encouragement of district staff to model wellness. “I think our department needs to take the lead on this,” Adkins asserts. “I feel that our staff needs to not just *talk* about wellness, but to *be* well, ourselves.”

To put theory into action, Adkins launched a unique program for the school nutrition team: Walking the Talk of Wellness. “In this

optional program, I ask staff to set personal goals for wellness, as well as goals for their cafeterias,” she explains. Each participant completes a Wellness Commitment Form, pledging to make a personal commitment, as well as to promote wellness in the school.

Many of the personal goals set by the team in West Bloomfield are reminiscent of a New Year’s resolutions list: lose weight, exercise more, stop smoking, reduce stress. (The wellness goals for the cafeteria are more varied, reports Adkins, ranging from offering bite-sized samples of new fruits and vegetables to promoting a “healthy snack of the month”—baked, lowfat or low calorie—on the à la carte line. “And the kids buy it!” she notes.)

Adkins asks each participant to submit a monthly wellness log detailing progress toward the goals. She encourages honesty in the self evaluations: “Sometimes they say, ‘I didn’t do so well and need to do better!’” To keep participants engaged over the long haul, Adkins holds a monthly raffle among everyone who submits a log, and a randomly drawn winner receives a \$50 gift certificate to a local store. According to Adkins, the fact that anyone can win, regardless of their progress to their goal, is an important incentive. “I think, with wellness, you just have to make an effort and a personal commitment—it all starts with that,” she reflects. “Some months, you do well and some months, you don’t.”

To promote the staff wellness program throughout the school community, Adkins arranged for the design and production of staff aprons featuring the Walking the Talk of

SNAPSHOT:

- Michigan’s **West Bloomfield School District** is located some 25 miles northwest of Detroit. More than 57 languages are represented among the 6,900 students enrolled in the system’s 10 schools. The school nutrition program features 39 staff, serving more than 2,300 lunches every year.

Wellness slogan and a picture of two footprints, which, she says, symbolize both exercise and the idea of moving forward toward wellness.

Results Count!

The Walking the Talk of Wellness program is producing promising results in its inaugural year. Adkins reports that more than half of her staff has signed up, and participants are enthusiastic about submitting their monthly logs and being eligible for the raffle. "The staff is excited about it!" she says. "I hear them talking among themselves, asking, 'How are you doing?' 'Are you walking?', etc." Adkins attributes this enthusiasm, in part, to the fact that participation in the program is voluntary. "Anytime you mandate something, people get turned off."

She intends to keep the program dynamic. She has scheduled speakers on wellness topics to make presentations at future training days. She used offers from a vendor to order free pedometers for each member of her staff. These examples of her own commitment to staff wellness send a message. "It's important for me remind people of the importance of the program and to stoke the fires," she concludes.



Learn More...

- To view West Bloomfield wellness policy, visit <http://web.westbloomfield.k12.mi.us/nutrition/wellness.pdf>
- Check out Eat Smart, Get Moving, offered by SNA and the National Dairy Council, at www.eatsmart-getmoving.org

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The bottom line

for wellness policies that mandate changes to foods made available inside and outside the school cafeteria is straightforward: If you serve it, will they eat? Childhood obesity trends will not be reversed through the efforts of schools working in a vacuum. Parental encouragement is essential in changing the food and activity behaviors of their children. Likewise, wellness policy support from students is valuable in influencing peers in school—and parents at home.

A starting point is ensuring that parents and students understand the reasons behind changes made to offerings, and that they perceive value and taste in healthy alternatives. Successful school nutrition professionals rely on frequent communication, ongoing outreach and good, old-fashioned taste-testing.

Facing the Challenge

For Rita Greene, Child Nutrition Program Director in Cabarrus County (N.C.) Schools, one of the challenges of implementing her district's local school wellness policy lies in taking a plethora of regulations and directives—from federal regulations to state standards—and making them compatible. A separate challenge is making them easy to understand by the layperson.

In North Carolina, Greene explains, school nutrition programs must follow standards established by the North Carolina Superintendent of Schools, as well as regulations from the federal government. In addition, individual guidelines or standards established by the

local wellness team also must be taken into consideration. "They needed to be merged together into one policy, in lay terms that principals, teachers, parents and students can understand," asserts Greene, and her district's wellness team did precisely that in creating The Cabarrus County Food and Beverage Guidelines.

Among other areas of the school environment, these Guidelines also addressed reimbursable meals served by the school nutrition program. Notably, they mandated a change from the traditional food-based menu-planning approach to nutrient-based menu planning. This transition required some education of parents and students.

Finding Solutions

According to Greene, the district took a multifaceted approach in explaining the policy and its changes to stakeholders throughout the district. The new policy was rolled out to the Board of Education (BOE) at a meeting televised throughout the county. "By making the presentation to the BOE," Greene says, "we could ensure that parents could see it on television, as well." The televised presentation also generated interest on the part of the press, and Greene met with two local newspapers, both of which printed articles on the new policy.

Next, Greene and the committee gave their presentation to the district's assistant principals, who, in turn, took the message to teachers and parents. The new policy, and the ways it would affect parents and kids, was

SNAPSHOT:

- North Carolina's **Cabarrus County Schools** enrolls 27,000 students in 33 schools. Its Child Nutrition Program serves more than 3 million lunches every year, operating in 29 cafeterias. Sites feature a "bar of the day" (taco, baked potato, salad) several times a week.



written about in the parent newsletter. “We talked about how menu items would be chosen,” Greene recounts, “and we educated parents on the nutrient-based menu process and explained what nutrition standards mean.”

One of the most controversial measures for parents was the idea that all children would be treated alike. “Some parents liked to visit their kids at school and bring them a fastfood lunch,” says Greene. “Our policy stopped that practice, because it created an environment where not all children were treated equally, and it became a prestige thing.” With the policy in place, “A few parents had to be stopped at the door and turned away with a bag of fastfood,” she reports.

Once parents were more or less on board with the policy changes, Greene needed to turn her attention to the students and ensure their acceptance of the new cafeteria menus. According to Greene, menu changes ranged from the minor (e.g. the status change of macaroni and cheese from entrée to side dish) to the more radical (e.g. the introduction of new dishes: smoky black beans with rice; chicken *tikka*; white beans and ham with a sweet potato biscuit; tomatoes with spinach; and even Brussels sprouts in a bechamel sauce).

Greene applied two primary strategies to entice students to try new dishes. First, she paired new offerings with items likely to be attractive to kids. For example, a tuna melt was offered with an applesauce cake: “I spoke to one girl, who told me she had taken the tuna melt to get the cake,” reports Greene. “But she may take a bite of the tuna, too! I thought

this showed that our strategy was working.” Second, Greene worked with her cafeteria managers to distribute samples of a new dish—the day *before* it was part of the menu. In each cafeteria, servers offered taste samples in small paper soufflé cups with individual spoons, telling the students, “*Won’t you try this? We’re going to have it tomorrow—see if you like it!*”

Greene herself admits that she needed some convincing when she first reviewed the new menu items. “I said, ‘Gosh, I don’t know, this may hurt us—the students may not eat these things...,’” she recalls. But the program’s participation figures dispelled her fears: They increased 6%!

Next Steps

Despite the increased participation in reimbursable meals, Greene has experienced some revenue decline due to limits on a la carte choices. Plus, her costs have increased somewhat because of the more-expensive fresh fruits and vegetables that her program now offers (as well as the effect of nationwide increases in milk and other food product prices). But she remains undeterred.

“I’ve had to ask the Board of Education for 10-cent price increases for two years in a row, and I’m going to have to ask them again this year. Still, I’m able to pay all my bills and don’t need outside support. This latest increase will bring us to where we don’t get in trouble financially,” she explains. Fortunately, “Because of the education to our public—all facets of it—the Board has not complained about the

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- Sixty percent of school nutrition professionals said that student acceptance of new menu items meeting nutritional standards is a hurdle to implementation of new standards.
- Thirty percent of survey respondents said that parent support was a hurdle to implementation of the new standards.
- More than 90% of respondents said that parent and community education and communication efforts are parts of their wellness policies, but only 40% said that those efforts had been fully implemented.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

price increases.” In the meantime, Greene intends to continue working with her staff chef, who is also a registered dietitian, to create innovative menus that address nutritional needs, provide lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and widen students’ experiences with different kinds of foods.

Learn More...

- To view Cabarrus County Schools’ wellness policy, visit www.ccsweb.cabarrus.k12.nc.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=49935&fileitem=15240&catfilter=ALL
- For an example of a Cabarrus County menu, visit www.ccsweb.cabarrus.k12.nc.us/education/dept/deptinfo.php?sectiondetailid=54118&sc_id=1194196617

4

Turning Cafeterias into Classrooms

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

In many districts, nutrition education struggles for attention among all the academic imperatives in the school day. How can you get principals and teachers excited about teaching nutrition? The answer is deceptively simple: Tie it to academic achievement. The cafeteria is a near-perfect place to educate children about healthy eating and proper nutrition. Almost every student visits the cafeteria daily—and they arrive hungry and thinking about food!

Respected organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Institute of Medicine are recommending strategies to combat childhood obesity that emphasize nutrition education. And for more than a decade, SNA has promoted cafeteria-based nutrition education as a fundamental part of a complete school wellness policy.

No Day Like Today

Serena Suthers, RD, SNS, School Food and Nutrition Services Director for Prince William County (Va.) Public Schools, knows that promoting healthy cafeteria meals at the elementary school level can be an uphill battle. Cafeteria-based promotions competed with all sorts of school activities, fundraisers and a focus on testing and academic achievement. “We used to have a calendar of special events

SNAPSHOT:

- **Prince William County Public Schools** enrolls more than 72,000 students; fewer than 30% qualify for free or reduced-priced meals in this Virginia “exurb” of Washington, D.C. More than 700 school nutrition employees serve approximately 44,000 lunches and 8,500 breakfasts to students, as well as some 1,750 staff meals, every day in the district’s 86 schools.

Numerous studies indicate that cafeteria-based nutrition education is effective. Programs like the 5-a-Day Power Plus initiative, a grade-specific, 16-lesson nutrition curriculum developed under a grant by the National Cancer Institute and the University of Minnesota, have been shown to reduce student fat intake and increase their consumption of



in the cafeteria that was tied to holidays,” she recalls. But, “We never had a lot of success with getting the rest of the school excited about it.”

Then one March, Suthers served green eggs and ham in her elementary school cafeteria to celebrate Dr. Seuss’s birthday; she was amazed at the interest and enthusiasm generated by the simple promotion! Encouraged, she created a promotion around the children’s book *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, by Judi Barrett. She decorated cafeterias with huge meatballs hanging from the ceiling, and the cafeteria workers wore raincoats. The students were delighted—and when they asked to read the book, so were the teachers!

This success inspired Suthers to create an entire year’s worth of promotions tied to healthy eating messages found in children’s books about nutritious foods. The first full school year of the program centered on fruits and vegetables. The list of books and foods (*below*) is full of variety and good nutrition.

Each month, elementary school cafeterias serve menu items featuring the fruit or vegetable in the story. But the nutrition education promotion doesn’t stop there. Each cafeteria is decorated with whimsical pictures and art featuring the showcased item, and Suthers makes sure that cafeteria staffers are equipped with plenty of jokes, riddles and nutrition facts to share about the items. Jokes and facts are posted where students waiting in line can read them, or cafeteria staffers read the information over a public address system during the meal.

The promotions also involve contests designed by the individual school cafeterias. For example, awards might be given to the class demonstrating the best behavior in the cafeteria, the class that ate the most fruits and vegetables or the one that read the most books. The winning class earns a tasting party.

Suthers has big plans for expanding on the success of this program. She intends to post kid-friendly recipes on the department’s web pages. The recipes will feature the month’s

Learn More...

- To view Prince William County’s wellness policy, visit www.pwcs.edu/menus/NutritionIntegrityPolicy.pdf
- To see an elementary school menu from Prince William County featuring the book of the month promotion, check out www.pwcs.edu/menus/index.html

highlighted fruit or vegetable, and kids can prepare the dishes at home with their families.

Results Count!

According to Suthers, the book-themed promotions have been a huge hit with students and school staff. “The cafeteria can be an isolated part of the school,” she observes. “Principals and teachers have their own important focus: the education of kids. They aren’t typically involved with activities like National School Lunch Week. But when we build excitement in the cafeteria that has to do with reading, they really get into it! They are much more excited about this kind of promotion than they were about promotions like giveaways and holiday themes.”

September	Watermelons	<i>Icy Watermelon</i> by Mary Sue Galindo
October	Zucchini	<i>I Heard it from Alice Zucchini</i> by Juanita Havill
November	Grapes	<i>First Day in Grapes</i> by L. King Pérez
December	Oranges	<i>The Three Golden Oranges</i> by Alma Flor Ada
January	Apples	<i>An Apple for Harriet Tubman</i> by Glennette Tilley Turner
February	Raspberries	<i>Stella and the Berry Thief</i> by Jane B. Mason
March	Green Peas	<i>The Pea Blossom</i> by Amy Lowry Poole
April	Cauliflower	<i>The Trouble with Cauliflower</i> by Jane Sutton
May	Strawberries	<i>The First Strawberries</i> by Joseph Bruchac

As school districts implement their wellness policies—

many of which feature new, prescriptive nutrition standards, as well as changes to the portion sizes of numerous menu items (including prepackaged foods)—school nutrition program operators are finding that manufacturers are struggling to catch up to the varying requirements of states and local food authorities. Many school nutrition professionals simply can't find products that meet all the specifications of the different guidelines, standards and regulations in effect.

Even when a school meal program can find sources for items that meet wellness policy and other standards, success often comes at quite a price—literally. The costs of healthy alternatives can strain the average school nutrition budget.

Facing the Challenge

For several years now, Meg Domas, Executive Director of School Nutrition Services for North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, has sought solutions to challenges associated with the implementation of the wellness changes mandated by the State of Texas and by her own local school wellness policy. (Texas came early to the wellness table; a statewide nutrition policy for schools was issued in 2004.)

The limited availability of certain products that meet state and local standards has been a chief undertaking. Still, she has been buoyed by the underlying goal. Whether the task is to find a single-serve package of chips (as

an alternative to the four servings found in a typical “grab bag” product) or to increase the availability and visibility of fresh fruits and vegetables (despite higher costs), it's worth it, she says. The reaction of the students to these changes has been very positive.

Finding Solutions

In some cases, the lack of product availability on the market has prompted Domas and her team to get more creative with menu planning and make a transition from prepackaged items to offerings prepped and packaged inhouse. “We've incorporated alternatives like a yogurt/cheese plate and wrap sandwiches,” she explains. In addition, “We're moving toward offering more whole grains, but these are harder to find commercially. So, we make our own wheat rolls at lunch, and we are working to find whole-wheat hamburger and hotdog buns that meet the nutrition standards.”

Some long-time favorites have disappeared from the North East menu all together. “We had to eliminate the individual chocolate-chip cookies we used to offer,” she notes. “The ones we were serving had too much sugar, and we couldn't find any low-sugar, lowfat cookies that were acceptable. So, we've just gone to alternatives like animal crackers and graham crackers.”

Despite menu changes that reputedly require more labor time, Domas insists that labor costs haven't been much of an issue for her operation. “I've always heard that using more fresh fruits and vegetables adds labor costs, but we...work it into our day. After all,

SNAPSHOT:

• **North East Independent School District** is an urban/suburban district in the San Antonio area. Its 62 schools serve 63,000 students. The school nutrition department boasts its own nutrition education/wellness coordinator, whose responsibilities include the publication of a monthly nutrition newsletter.



we don't send people home on days when the lunch is easier to prepare!"

Next Steps

Domas wants national recognition for her team's efforts in showing that wellness policies with strict nutrition standards *can* work. She is working toward certification in the HealthierUS School Challenge (available at the elementary-

school level), which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program requires that schools demonstrate specific steps in improving nutrition, promoting physical fitness and addressing the problem of childhood obesity. And healthier menu offerings that feature more fresh fruits and vegetables are an integral part of meeting this challenge—despite the costs.

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- More than three-quarters of districts responding to SNA surveys reported they experience increased costs as a result of implementing new nutrition standards.
- Almost all of the responding districts said that they have experienced an increase in the cost of food since implementing local school wellness policies; 28% said they also saw an increase in labor costs; and 12% said they have noted increases in equipment costs.
- Districts accommodated the increased costs by changing the types of foods/products they serve (57%), raising prices (45%), waiting for the situation to settle over time (23%), changing operational procedures (21%), reducing labor hours/headcount (15%) and adding services (8%).

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

Learn More...

- For more information on the HealthierUS School Challenge, check out www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html
- To learn more about the School Nutrition Services program at North East Independent School District, visit www.neisd.net/foodserv/HTML/menus.html
- Check out links for finding affordable products at www.schoolnutrition.org/Index.aspx?id=2424

Around the country,

many local school wellness policies emphasize the importance of making greater availability of fresh foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, in school menus—and on students' trays. One way that school nutrition programs can bring fresh, locally grown food to their cafeterias is through farm-to-school programs.

In most farm-to-school program models, a school district purchases produce, dairy or other items directly from a local farm or group of farms, without the services of a distributor or other middleman. While there is no national agency or private business brokering such relationships, school districts can turn to a number of organizations to help them connect with farms (see *Learn More...*). Farm-to-school programs can be found across the country, in states as agriculturally diverse as California and Wisconsin, New York and Florida. From salad bar staples to roasted winter vegetables, every area of the country has some kind of locally grown produce that will enhance the nutrition and taste of the food on kids' cafeteria tables.

No Day Like Today

In New York City, new regulations require that, by 2012, 50% of produce served in its schools come from local farms! And across the nation, another school district that has used its wellness policy as a springboard for a farm-to-school program is Oregon's Portland Public Schools. According to Portland's Director of Nutrition Services, Kristy Obbink, SNS, while her district's wellness policy covers several

general issues, the administrative directive that followed the policy is quite detailed: "Part of the directive addresses school gardens, school-based learning and farm-to-school programs."

In response to this directive, Portland began a Harvest of the Month program. "Every month, we choose a produce item that is produced locally," explains Obbink. "It might be winter squash in February, asparagus in April, cherries in May and strawberries in June. We feature the farmer that's providing the produce in [promotional] posters; we serve the produce in the cafeteria; and we offer simple educational and activity sheets in the classroom."

The result has been new tastes for the students—and new recipes for cafeteria staff. "Asparagus was not something we normally served, but the kids loved it—we were shocked!" Obbink recalls. "We did extensive training on how to prepare the asparagus, and ended up roasting the spears. All we have are ovens in our kitchens—no stovetops or steamers. So we drizzled them with olive oil, added salt and pepper and roasted them for 10 minutes. The kids ate them up with their fingers!"

Obbink says she doesn't require produce to be organic, but she does try to require sustainably farmed produce. "We want to use Shepherd's Grain flour, which is grown in eastern Oregon and Washington by a co-op of wheat farmers that use sustainable harvesting methods," she explains. "We didn't want to go back to scratch cooking, so we're asking our [manufacturers] to use this flour. If a manufacturer is local, we offer enough volume that it makes it worthwhile for them to use the flour."

SNAPSHOT:

- The urban **Portland (Ore.) Public Schools** system enrolls 47,000 students at 85 regular school buildings, as well as alternative and charter schools sites. An estimated 45% of students qualify for free and reduced-priced school meals. The 280-employee school nutrition program serves 20,000 lunches daily and also provides meals for 4 non-district contracts.



Results Count!

Portland students, parents and teachers have reacted to the Harvest of the Month program with enthusiasm, and Obbink plans to highlight the program as a way to draw more attention to child nutrition. “We send home a 12-month printed menu to all elementary school students,” she says. “This year, our menu features kid-drawn art about Harvest of the Month.” Obbink is optimistic about the impact that farm-to-school programs, school gardens and other strategies to bring fresh food to cafeteria trays will have on students: “We are helping to reconnect kids with the food they eat.”

Learn More...

- To see a sample of Portland School District’s menu, featuring the Harvest of the Month, visit www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/nutrition/lunchcal.php
- For information, resources and case studies from the National Farm-to-School Network, check out www.farmtoschool.org
- Check out the resources available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture at <http://desearch.nal.usda.gov/cgi-bin/dexpldcgi?qry2092973177;1>
- Learn more about programs in place by visiting The Community Food Security Coalition’s Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids project at www.foodsecurity.org/healthy.html

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Large, small or in-between. Urban, suburban and rural. It seems that almost

all school nutrition operations—no matter their size or location—are at risk for revenue declines, if their local school wellness policies have any teeth to them, in terms of food and beverage items that are permitted or prohibited. How operators counteract these potential and actual declines is a tribute to their commitment to make school wellness work.

Facing the Challenge

For Cynthia Sevier, SNS, Director of School Nutrition Services for Guilford County (N.C.) Public Schools, the advent of new nutrition standards was a significant turning point for the school nutrition program. The district's foodservice program "had been managed by a food management company for three years," she recounts, "and they abruptly left midyear, two years ago; this is when I came onboard. Before they left, [the management company was] selling *anything* they could sell for a profit! My superintendent and I wanted to have healthier options available to students."

Sevier's personal passion, coupled with new state standards for nutrition, meant particularly drastic changes in a la carte offerings. "We took away daily French fries and many other popular items. We started offering fresh fruit every day; found a healthier cookie and an ice cream that fit state guidelines...anything that would help us increase fiber and cut fat, sugar, sodium and overall calories," she explains. Initially, Guilford's student body was not impressed with the

alternatives—and a la carte sales plummeted. "Between the 2005-06 school year and the 2006-07 school year, we lost \$300,000 in revenue," Sevier reports.

Thousands of miles away, the much-smaller Baraboo (Wis.) School District experienced similar declines; notably, it lost about 20% in a la carte revenue. Food Service Director Mary Loveless explains what happened: "We removed items on the a la carte line that kids were used to seeing year after year. Some of them commented that we were putting them on a diet! They felt that we were forcing them to eat what we wanted them to eat."

In Baraboo, student dismay with the new a la carte offerings was compounded by the high school's open-campus policy. "There are fastfood hamburgers and Subway available within walking distance," Loveless notes. "And the kids told us, through declining sales, that they weren't happy with the changes we made." The consequence was not trivial: "Unfortunately, we make a lot of money on a la carte," admits Loveless. "It carries the entire foodservice program."

In suburban Prospect, Conn., Region 16 Public Schools experienced significant declines in beverage sales once local and state wellness standards were implemented, reports School Lunch Program Director Victoria Biello, SNS. Now, she can offer only water, 100% juice products and milk. Fortunately, her overall revenues have not declined too badly, she notes, crediting the fact that her operation historically sold only snack items (and not individual meal components) on an a la carte basis.

SNAPSHOT:

- **Guilford County Public Schools** is an urban/suburban district close to Greensboro, N.C. Its 119 schools serve some 72,000 students, 47% of whom receive free and reduced-price meals.
- Wisconsin's **Baraboo School District** is a small-town system of 3,000 students, serving 1,400 hot lunches each day. An estimated 1,200 students in middle and high schools buy their lunch from the a la carte lines every day.
- **Region 16 Public Schools** in Prospect, Conn., is a suburban district serving 2,800 students in five schools. The school nutrition program serves an estimated 1,425 lunches each day.



Finding Solutions

The good news is that many districts are finding that the sharp *decreases* in a la carte revenues and other food sales can be offset by *increases* in meal participation. When tempting but unhealthy a la carte choices vanish, students seem more intrigued by reimbursable meal alternatives.

This theory holds true in Guilford County, Sevier says. “We’re serving more meals per day—meal sales are going up while a la carte sales are going down,” she reports. (Nonetheless, the district’s losses were so significant, administrators went to the state to request funding to address the costs of implementing the state standards. The state’s response, a study examining how to distribute funds to cover the costs of implementation, has not resulted in any additional monies for Guilford or any other district—yet.)

Loveless’s Wisconsin district decided to pass costs on to students in the form of a la carte price increases: “This year, we raised our a la carte line prices to make up for the losses, and we’ve had no more overall declines,” she reports. There’s also talk about revoking the open-campus policy, which will address safety and discipline concerns, as well as increase meal participation.

In Connecticut, Biello has benefited from participating in a state initiative called the Healthy Guidance Snack Program. Districts that use these stringent nutrition standards can receive an additional 10 cents per reimbursable meal. “The standards apply to all foods sold to students during the school day

from any source, so they encompass the whole school campus,” Biello notes, adding that her operation receives about \$30,000 per year from this program. The extra funding helps her to afford the healthier snacks offered to students.

Next Steps

Loveless expects that acceptance of the new nutrition standards will gain momentum as those Baraboo students who were used to the less-nutritious options grow older and eventually graduate. “The newer kids don’t know the difference,” she remarks.

Meanwhile, Biello anticipates that the cost of snacks that meet healthier guidelines like Connecticut’s will decrease over time. “Manufacturers are stepping up to the plate and producing the healthier versions of their products that more and more states are demanding,” she observes. “As this happens, the additional revenue I get from participating in the Healthy Guidance Snack Program will go to cover general school foodservice operations.”

Another solution to revenue declines may lie in educating the public about the business realities facing school nutrition programs. “We have to talk about money,” Sevier says firmly. “We want to do what’s right for the kids, but it’s tough. I’m trying to publicize the funding issue, but many people don’t understand that lunch money and reimbursements pay for *all* salaries, equipment, benefits, insurance, food delivery, etc.”

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- School nutrition professionals who responded to SNA surveys reported that meal participation either stayed the same or increased following the implementation of new nutrition standards. Increases were greatest at the high-school level.
- Most school nutrition operations reported decreases in a la carte and vending revenues following implementation of new nutrition standards. At the high-school level, 51% reported decreases in a la carte revenues and 40% reported decreases in vending revenues.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

Learn More...

- To see the State of Connecticut’s comprehensive, brand-specific list of healthy foods and beverages, including vendors and portion sizes, visit: www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#Healthy
- Links to menus served at Guilford County Public Schools can be found at www.guilford.k12.nc.us/depts/school_nutrition/index.htm
- To view the menus at Baraboo School District, go to www.baraboo.k12.wi.us/parentstudent/lunch_menus.cfm
- To learn more about the foodservice program at Region 16 Public Schools, check out www.region16ct.org/page.cfm?p=13

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

With childhood obesity and health and wellness issues getting so much attention these days, the number of available resources to help address such concerns seems to be on the rise. Many organizations—industry groups, individual companies, universities, state and federal governments, national organizations and local agencies—offer grants that are designed to help school nutrition operations defray the costs of improving their programs and establishing healthy school environments. Researching and applying for grants requires vigilance, creativity and work. But those school nutrition professionals who take the time and make the effort are rewarded with the funding to apply truly creative and innovative ideas.

No Day Like Today

At the Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, Ind., Food Service Director Sara Gasiorowski, SNS, is always trying innovative ways to make available—and promote—more fresh fruits and vegetables for students. The goal is not a new one in Wayne Township, which is part of metropolitan Indianapolis. Gasiorowski's team, which serves more than 60% of its children free and reduced-price meals, has been proactive about serving fresh fruits and vegetables for a decade. But the combination of new state guidelines, a new local school wellness policy and Gasiorowski's personal commitment to addressing the nutrition needs of her students prompted her to seek out new sources of funding. She decided to explore industry grant opportunities.

The makers of Hidden Valley Ranch Dressing established the Love Your Veggies grant program in 2007. On behalf of one of her district's elementary schools, Gasiorowski applied for and received one of several \$15,000 grants. The specific purpose of the grant is to increase student exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables, explains Gasiorowski; the elementary school designated to receive the grant monies has a diverse student enrollment that is more than 85% eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. "I wanted to provide those kids with more access to fresh fruits and vegetables—I wrote about that in my grant proposal," she recounts.

As part of the grant award, Gasiorowski received a Cambro salad bar. "We use it on Fridays as a side salad bar," she says. The main focus of the grant money is to provide a fresh fruit or vegetable break every day for students in the school. "At about 10:00 a.m. every day," Gasiorowski says, "we take fresh fruits and vegetables directly to the classes. It might be pineapple spears, carrots with dip, celery with peanut butter...the kids love it—and the teachers love it, too. They feel like it's a great pick-me-up for the students."

According to Gasiorowski, one challenge of this program is preparing the food servings for these healthy snacks. "The hard part is getting things that are packaged to take to the classrooms, because they are so expensive," she observes. "We package a couple of the items ourselves, but since we need 800 servings, it takes a lot of time and labor. For that reason, packaged items work better."

SNAPSHOT:

- Indiana's **Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township** enrolls approximately 14,700 students at 20 sites. The school foodservice team serves some 20,000 meals and snacks daily. A registered dietitian prepares monthly nutrition newsletters.

Results Count!

This was the first time Gasiorowski had applied for a grant, and she couldn't be happier with the experience, especially given the enthusiastic reception it has enjoyed from both students and staff. She's planning to take her fruit and vegetable promotions even further in the future: "In the spring, we will work on a school garden," she reveals. "Also the school offers a parenting skills class once a month, and I'll work with the administration and a P.E. teacher to put together one program on healthy snacking with fresh fruits and vegetables—and how to do this on a limited or food-stamp budget."

Gasiorowski also plans to continue with the classroom program even when the grant money runs out. "I will work with a local education foundation to see if they can help us with the costs," she explains. "Also, Indiana is a pilot state for [a USDA program to] increase fresh fruit and vegetables, so we will try to work with that."



Learn More...

- To learn more about the school nutrition program in Wayne Township, visit the department's web pages at www.wayne.k12.in.us/foodserv/index.htm
- For more information on the Love Your Veggies grant program, check out www.loveyourveggiesgrants.com
- To explore opportunities through U.S. Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition grants, check out <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/grants.html>
- Many other entities, including industry, government, universities and nonprofit organizations, offer grants for school nutrition operations. To keep on top of what's available, check SNA's SchoolNutrition.org and *School Nutrition* magazine on a regular basis.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Altering the nutritional profile of school meal offerings can result in a domino effect of changes for school nutrition programs. Modifications in products mean adaptations to menus and changes in menus mean alterations to purchasing and preparation procedures. Out with the prepared items and in (again) with scratch cooking? For some districts, the answer is, “yes.”

But if you offer menu items just like grandma used to make, will kids actually eat them? And is it the right decision for your operation, when you consider labor, equipment, transportation and other factors?

Facing the Challenge

For Paula De Lucca, Director of Food Service Professionals, an agency of the Archdiocese of Chicago, changes to her operation's school

recipes and menus arose from changing customer demands. “We get regular feedback from our customer base and try to stay ahead of the game. We recognized that there was an increased interest in menu items that were less processed,” she notes.

To meet new nutrition standards, Eileen Bentzen, Food Service Director for Littlestown Area (Pa.) School District, needed to reduce the fat in a number of items served. At the same time, high school students in the district campaigned for more homemade-type offerings, such as casseroles and lasagnas, to provide variety to the pizza-and-chicken-heavy menu.

Finding Solutions

For the schools it serves within and outside of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Food Service Professionals developed the NutriTrack™ menu, which increases the amount and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables served and integrates whole grains more fully. “We developed our own recipes that allow us to cook more from scratch and minimize the number of purchased prepared convenience items,” De Lucca explains. Her team, which includes a staff dietitian and a chef, look at recipe variations and make recommendations for new dishes. Today, students are offered from-scratch spaghetti sauce served over whole-grain pasta; Santa Fe turkey chili; taco meat prepared and seasoned from scratch; and homemade biscuits and even granola bars. All items are trans fat-free, she emphasizes.

“For the most part, reaction has been

SNAPSHOT:

- Through its Food Service Professionals agency, the **Archdiocese of Chicago** serves more than 98,000 students in more than 300 urban and suburban schools. The school nutrition operation features more than 900 trained professionals.
- Pennsylvania's **Littlestown Area School District** serves mostly rural communities and small towns; it enrolls an estimated 2,300 students in four schools.



positive,” reports De Lucca, “especially from the ‘gatekeepers’—principals, parents and school administrators. And the children have been fairly receptive to the new items.” *Fairly receptive* means that De Lucca and her team continually evaluate and tweak menu items to improve their acceptability with customers. For example, the operation offers fruit and vegetable breads made from ingredients like carrots, zucchini, peaches—even jalapeño is used in a cornbread! But the students weren’t crazy about the distinct taste left by the whole-wheat flour used, so De Lucca is modifying the recipes to make them more friendly to kid palates, without sacrificing nutrition.

For Food Service Professionals, which uses a central production facility to serve most schools, the transition to offering more from-scratch items has been fairly smooth. “We have an inhouse cooking staff,” notes De Lucca, “so the labor hasn’t increased a lot—it’s been manageable. Also, with cooking from scratch, the ingredient costs are less, so this offsets any increased costs in labor.” Having said that, she acknowledges that some sites that do onsite preparation may face labor costs increases, as well as training expenses to teach employees the skills to prepare the new menu items.

In Littlestown, school menus now feature many homemade items, particularly baked goods. “We do all of our baking inhouse,” Bentzen says. “We don’t buy cookie dough, muffins or anything like that. And I’m cautious about what I put on the menu in order to meet standards.” She also takes pride in

going beyond the recommendations—not requirements—of her district’s wellness policy, by including a fresh fruit and vegetable every day. “I’m stricter on our kids than the wellness policy is!” she boasts.

To address student yearning for comfort foods with her own commitment that recipes meet nutritional guidelines, Bentzen began scratch preparation of such items as tuna noodle casserole, stuffed shells and lasagna. Mission accomplished: “When we serve our homemade, from-scratch lasagna,” reports Bentzen, “nearly half the kids will have this for lunch!”

Next Steps

When De Lucca introduced her from-scratch menu items, she recalls, “the original intent was to be kid-tested and kid-approved. I still believe in that, but I also think we need to integrate some new items into our menus, to expose children to new ways of selecting foods that are beneficial.” To that end, she will continue to introduce “experimental” items designed to broaden students’ taste repertory.

Bentzen also knows that “from scratch” is no guarantee that kids will eat what’s offered!

Learn More...

- To learn more about the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Food Services Professionals operation visit <http://web.archive.org/web/20070225084835/www.fspro.com/fsp-about.html>

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- A whopping 86% of respondents to SNA surveys reported that nutrition standards in their wellness policies affect the baked goods they could use; 80% said the standards affect their a la carte entrees.
- A little more than 60% of respondents said that the price of products meeting new nutritional standards is a significant hurdle to meeting the requirements of their wellness policies.
- A quarter reported that finding a new vendor in their area who could meet the standards is a significant hurdle.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

Understanding that being proactive and anticipating resistance is crucial, her team lets kids sample new foods, “so that we nip their objections in the bud before we get a boycott,” she explains. Also, through careful menu balancing, Bentzen continues to offer some sweet treats to her students; for example, she is altering cookie recipes to add whole wheat and increase fiber content. “My theory is that we can’t teach kids moderation if we take away all sweets!”

- You can find lunch menus and information about portion sizes and nutrition at the following Littlestown Area School District web pages: www.lasd.k12.pa.us/district/lunchmenus.html

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

When a school district is serious about implementing its wellness policy, changes to the school environment can be seen on many levels. Indeed, the objective of the local school wellness policy mandate was not just to crack down on certain foods and beverages. The intent was to encourage schools and districts to create environments that provide students and staff with opportunities to improve their health, as well as their understanding of how to make—and keep making—healthy choices for life. For most schools, the creation of such environments requires some truly significant changes.

Such changes might entail a new class schedule that features longer recess or lunch periods, or the rescheduling of recess *before* lunch to improve behavior and eating habits. A changed school environment might mean that a group of teachers and students regularly take a brisk walk at the beginning of recess. It could mean that a nutrition break is scheduled after homeroom, allowing students to eat a late breakfast. It could mean that traditional candy or bake sale fundraisers are replaced by the sale of non-food items or that carrot sticks are more common at school parties than cupcakes. For some districts, changes on this order might be controversial and difficult to establish. But even small steps are steps *forward* on the path to wellness.

No Day Like Today

When Ohio's Boardman Local School District had completed its wellness policy and prepared for implementation, officials realized

that it would be doomed to failure if the changes were too sweeping and sudden, recalls Karen Sanders, Food Services Supervisor. "We knew that we would take baby steps," she says, "but that everything counts. So, as we meet certain goals, we move on to other ones, so that we don't get overwhelmed."

Sanders lists an abundance of "baby steps" that together add up to big changes in the food students eat at school and the ways they get exercise. "First, we designated the cafeterias as 'No Pop Zones,' and asked parents to stop sending soft drinks in their kids' lunches," a once-common practice in Boardman cafeterias, she reports. Sanders and her team also established a policy of "better choices" of refreshments for classroom parties (including lowfat ice cream with a variety of toppings, fresh berries and vegetables, pretzels and so on) and offered parents and teachers the opportunity to order these healthier treats directly from the foodservice department.

Some schools launched walking clubs during recess time. A former student donated t-shirts that kids put on over their clothes, and a staff member leads a walk around the school building at the beginning of each outdoor recess. Participants track their progress on a chart.

Boardman's wellness committee has encouraged more movement and exercise in small, creative ways, too. "Every morning, children in grades K through 8 do a minute and a half of exercise inside their classrooms while morning announcements are going

SNAPSHOT:

- **Boardman Local School District**, located in Youngstown, Ohio, near the Pennsylvania border, enrolls 4,700 students at seven schools. The free/reduced-price eligibility rate is 23%. The 46-member school nutrition team serves 3,000 meals each day.



on,” reports Sanders. “It’s up to the teacher to decide what kind of exercise—it depends on the size of the class.” In some classrooms, kids stand behind their desks and do squats or stretches; others march in place or, if they have the space, do jumping jacks. Many teachers play music or have the students do chants or cheers while they exercise. One elementary school boasts a small television studio and broadcasts a group of students doing the exercises; classroom TVs allow all the students to watch and follow along.

Results Count!

To spread the word and encourage participation, wellness committee members met with building principals, who then introduced the plan at their individual staff meetings. Sanders is pleased to report that the efforts have been well received by staff and parents: “People are into it!” Although the additional exercise

time is very short, it gets the kids moving and reinforces the idea that exercise is an important part of everyone’s daily routine. The wellness committee is using its “baby steps” approach to address other logistical challenges in incorporating more movement into the school day. Since cafeterias double as gymnasiums, when the weather doesn’t allow for outside recess, there’s little space to get kids moving. Videos have kept the kids attention on such days in the past. “Now we are working on indoor recess stations,” Sanders says. “For example, we will have a jump-rope station in a designated place.” These activity stations will allow teachers to rotate kids from station to station to get some exercise and return to class ready to learn, instead of being full of excess energy.

Learn More...

- For ideas of small steps that anyone can take to increase physical activity and fitness, visit www.smallstep.gov/sm_steps/sm_steps_index.html
- To find suggestions for getting kids to walk, check out www.iwalktoschool.org
- You can view ideas from the President’s Challenge on Physical Fitness at www.presidentschallenge.org/home_kids.aspx
- To learn more about Boardman Local School District, visit www.boardman.k12.oh.us

School wellness teams—including school nutrition professionals—all

across the country are taking some bold and creative steps to implement their districts' wellness policies. But when responsibility for full implementation at individual school sites lies in others' hands, how do stakeholders know if wellness-focused innovations are actually being put into place? Have the contents of every vending machine been changed? Are all teachers following classroom party guidelines? Is a principal or some other authority turning parents bearing fastfood lunches away at the cafeteria door?

Wellness policy oversight and monitoring is a complicated—and potentially costly—undertaking. But what happens if a reporter observes blatant infractions in the policy? Will you have a p.r. nightmare on your hands? Some districts find that it's worth some outside help and funding to put oversight and monitoring into place.

Facing the Challenge

The San Marcos Unified School District (USD) in California implemented its first school wellness policy in 2006, and in 2007, its wellness committee revisited that policy and made some additions. According to Dena England, Director of Child Nutrition Services, “[Our wellness committee] wanted a set of procedures that would show us *how* to apply the policy, and [these would be procedures] that we could change as necessary, without changing the policy itself.”

San Marcos USD's lengthy policy includes

general guidelines, as well as specifics for nutrition education, physical education and activity and nutrition profiles for all foods available to district schools. It includes a requirement to measure the impact of changes. “But it's difficult to come up with measurements at the beginning, when there are no procedures in place,” England notes, adding that the committee identified some existing benchmarks to track progress, such as those provided by the President's Council on Physical Fitness. Still, she explains, the group wanted to establish measures that not only would allow them to evaluate the overall success of the policy, but monitor how well the various aspects of the policy were being implemented in the schools.

Finding Solutions

Not long after the San Marcos USD wellness committee enacted its policy and procedures, the California Department of Education established wellness policy demonstration mini-grants. Each of six grants provides between \$30,000 and \$35,000, plus technical support and expertise from the state, to establish a monitoring system for wellness policy implementation. San Marcos USD was among those awarded a grant.

After the awards were announced, state agency representatives met with all of the grantees to discuss the data that would be needed. “They had some great ideas,” England recalls, “and we also requested that they broaden their data collection, because we all viewed the policies in the same way: We

SNAPSHOT:

- The **San Marcos Unified School District** serves 17,100 students in 16 schools. Although it's a San Diego suburb, the district includes some rural and small town areas, as well. The Child Nutrition Services Department serves 10,000 meals each day and has its own mission statement, which states its goals to provide “nutritious food choices that are tasty, appealing and popular to all students and district staff” and to “market healthy foods.”



saw them as well-rounded and coming from many different vantage points within each district.” The grantees wanted to ensure that all areas of the policy—from physical education to vending to school parties—were monitored.

Under the terms of the grant, San Marcos USD will continue its implementation process according to an established timeline with agreed-upon milestones, including placing an article in a local newspaper about the wellness policy and the grant; holding regular district health council meetings; implementing nutrition education in the classroom; conducting a wellness fair (planned for April 2008); publishing brochures; and meeting other benchmarks. Another key implementation step is coordinating a nutrition poster contest for the students (March-April 2008). “We will keep all the entries,” England says, “and over the years, we can see how the students’ work changes as they learn more about nutrition.”

After the grant development meeting, experts from the state agency visited the district to collect such baseline data as the types of foods being offered a la carte, as well as food

items sold through school stores, student-accessible vending machines and even a vending machine in the faculty lounge. England expects more data collection to follow. The grantees also will gather together in Spring 2008 to report what’s working and what’s not working. England stresses that this monitoring process doesn’t mean that the outcomes of the procedures are being numerically evaluated. “It’s really a change of atmosphere that they are checking for,” she explains.

Next Steps

For England, the value in monitoring wellness policy implementation progress is clear. Tracking how such progress is made is less cut and dried. In order for the monitoring program to continue when the grant period has concluded, someone in the district will need to take it on. “I am in charge of the district health council, but I am also child nutrition services director—and that, in itself, is a full-time job,” she notes. Still, she’s enthusiastic about the steps her district is taking. “I feel that we are creating some practices that other districts

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- A little more than half of the school nutrition professionals responding to SNA surveys cited ongoing oversight and monitoring of new standards as a hurdle to wellness policy implementation.
- Only 15% of respondents have received a grant related to their district’s wellness policy.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

can model; they don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

But she stresses that new thinking about wellness policies and monitoring needs to take place: “This is something that’s never been attempted. It’s a concept that goes across all avenues within the district: cafeteria, classroom, student clubs, stores, parents bringing things from home and fundraisers. It’s a huge undertaking that’s going to have to be monitored. The grant is a start, but it’s not the end.”

Learn More...

- To view the San Marcos Unified School District’s wellness policy and procedures, as well as lots of information on snack alternatives, a snack calculator and useful nutrition and fitness links, visit www.smusd.org/cnServ/cnServDL.html
- For a list of California districts awarded wellness mini-grants, as well as more information about the grant program, visit www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r9/swpd07result.asp and www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr07/yr07rel99.asp

Section 204 of the Child Nutrition and WIC

Reauthorization Act of 2004

requires a district's local school wellness policy include a plan for measuring its implementation. Frequent assessment—and appropriate revision—of a district's policy is essential in ensuring its effectiveness. Evaluation can be quantitative or qualitative, scientific or observational. To evaluate a wellness policy, districts can use established tools or create their own. Of course, even with available evaluation tools, actually conducting regular evaluations—and deriving meaningful data from them—is a complicated task.

According to Cheryl Sturgeon, Director of School and Community Nutrition Services for Jefferson County (Ky.) Public Schools, “We have to report, by law, to our school board and to the public specific items about our program and provide assurance that we are meeting USDA guidelines. We also demonstrate that we’re serving only approved foods for a la carte or vending and report on physical activity programs in the district.” Sturgeon says that the required information is available in several formats: posted on her website, printed for distribution, presented at a school board meeting and discussed with the community in a public forum.

In Bloomington, Ind., assessment of wellness activities at Monroe County Community School Corporation is coordinated through Healthy Schools Coordinator Jennifer Staub. She says the state regulations recommend ongoing evaluation, but there are no specifics about exactly what to evaluate or what tool to

use. This means it's up to the district and its Coordinated Health in Schools Committee to decide how to conduct evaluation of its wellness policy.

No Day Like Today

In Jefferson County, the wellness team has chosen to use an evaluation tool that is recommended (but not required) by the state. A *Performance Descriptor Standard and Indicator* was developed by the Kentucky Department of Education. “The tool lists performance standards for the program,” explains Sturgeon, “and has levels within each set of standards. It addresses nutrition standards; preparation and service procurement practices; communication and marketing; nutrition education; and human resources.” At the end of the evaluation process, the district receives a rating (from one to four) in each performance area.

Staub says Monroe County opted to take advantage of a program developed by Indiana University. “The Healthy School Report Card, which has been adopted by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], was developed by a professor at Indiana University,” she explains. Because the university is local, the professor let the school district use the program at no charge and, in fact, assigned graduate students to help implement it, Staub adds.

The Indiana University evaluation tool follows the CDC's eight components of a healthy school (see *Learn More...*). Working with members of the district's Coordinated Health

SNAPSHOT:

- Kentucky's **Jefferson County**, which includes Louisville, is a district that combines rural, suburban and urban areas. The district enrolls 99,000 students in 146 schools. The school nutrition program serves 87,000 meals each day. The operation was the first in Kentucky to earn Gold certification in USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge.

- **Monroe County Community Schools** serves the small city of Bloomington, Ind., which boasts 11,000 students in 21 schools. The 102-member school nutrition team serves 7,000 meals every school day.

in Schools Committee, evaluators observe implementation of the policy and develop quantitative scores in the eight areas. These scores are made into a report card, with action item lists identifying areas that need improvement, organized by priority and cost.

"We did really well, since we have a good system in place, with lots of great partners," asserts Staub. "And the evaluation also showed us how much we haven't done—and it gives us a sense of direction of what to do about it."

Staub says that one of the "most interesting" things identified in the report was the fact that district parents really wanted healthier school lunches for their children, but weren't sure how to ask for this. "The parents' perception was that every lunch is a bad lunch! [But] If you look at the nutritional content of pizza, for example, we are using lowfat cheese," she notes, adding, "Parents didn't know that what we were offering was better than fastfood pizza. They didn't realize how many healthier offerings we had, so we learned that part of our job is to communicate to parents *what* we are serving."

Results Count!

Sturgeon, who plans to continue to use the Kentucky state evaluation tool, says she will use her annual results to identify areas for improvement in her program. "One of the most helpful areas for me is human resources," she says. "The tool deals with policies and procedures training and certification. We've always had training in place, but now we have some



guidance on how to focus our training more toward nutrition standards and preparation techniques."

In Monroe County, Staub says her wellness committee is now concentrating on obtaining funding for some of the improvements and initiatives that the evaluation revealed. "The whole committee, along with its subcommittees, is now working on the priorities that the report card showed us," she reports, "and we will come together midyear to review our progress."

Learn More...

- To view the Nutrition Services & Physical Activity report that Jefferson County's School and Community Nutrition Services created for public review, visit www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Pubs/Nutrition/NutritionNews.pdf
- The school nutrition program in Jefferson County posts nutrition guidelines and other details about healthy school meals on its web pages: www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Departments/NutritionServices/index.html

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

According to 2007 research:

- More than 40% of respondents to SNA surveys said their districts are evaluating the implementation or impact of their local wellness policy.
- An additional 49% indicated that they are planning to conduct an evaluation.
- The most common evaluation tool being used is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's criteria for HealthierUS Schools, cited by 42% of respondents.
- Other tools cited as being used for evaluation are state agency evaluation tools; the measuring/monitoring of Body Mass Index ratios; and the CDC's School Health Index.

Source: From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later, *School Nutrition Association/School Nutrition Foundation*

- A description of Monroe County's Healthy School Program can be found at www.mccsc.edu/~healthy/
- You can read about the CDC's Coordinated School Health Program and learn about the eight components of healthy schools at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP/

LSWP Resources

The School Nutrition Association is your number-one local school wellness policy (LSWP) resource! You can find a wide variety of references and tools on the Association's website, www.schoolnutrition.org, all designed to help you develop, implement, assess, benchmark and revise your own community's policy. At SchoolNutrition.org, you will find

- Model policy guidelines
- Sample policies from more than 50 school districts across the United States
- Presentations from SNA's webinar, "Your Local School Wellness Policy: Addressing the Challenges, Making it Work," highlighting strategies for implementation success
- Research analysis of the characteristics of LSWPs (*Foundation for the Future: Analysis of Local Wellness Policies from the 100 Largest School Districts* and *Foundation for the Future II: Analysis of Local Wellness Policies from 140 School Districts in 49 States*)
- Research findings on the obstacles and opportunities presented by LSWPs and analysis of implementation progress (*From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later*)
- The answers to frequently asked questions about LSWPs
- Links to third-party organizations featuring information and resources for policy development and implementation, healthy school environments, nutrition education, fundraising in schools and nutrition guidelines
- An archive of web and magazine articles about LSWP development and implementation

In addition, find out how you can order more copies of this publication, **WELL Done! School Nutrition Professionals Put Policies to Work** to share with school administrators, board of education members, parent-teacher groups, wellness policy committee members, local media, state and federal lawmakers and more. **Contact the SNA Service Center at (800) 877-8822, servicecenter@schoolnutrition.org, for costs and shipping details.**

Written by Susan Davis Gryder. Designed by CW Design Solutions, Inc.
Editorial Direction by Patricia L. Fitzgerald, with Susan Coppess,
Arianne Corbett, Erik Peterson, Bethany Hanna Pokress and Alexis Steines.
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**SCHOOL
NUTRITION
ASSOCIATION**

School Nutrition Association

700 S. Washington Street, Suite 300

Alexandria, VA 22314

(703) 739-3900 • (703) 739-3915 (Fax)

www.schoolnutrition.org