

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**  
*School Wellness in New Hampshire*

**FEBRUARY 2008**



**DIVISION OF PROGRAM SUPPORT  
BUREAU OF NUTRITION PROGRAMS & SERVICES**

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## School Wellness is Academic

Studies have shown that well-nourished students have better test scores, class participation, and daily school attendance than their undernourished counterparts. Research also indicates that physically fit children are apt to score higher on standardized tests. Conversely, children who are overweight and sedentary are at greater risk of diminished academic performance, behavior problems, and chronic disease. <sup>(1)(2)</sup>

Maintaining an active lifestyle and healthy weight requires a commitment to regular physical activity and nutritious food choices. Schools can play a powerful role in the establishment of these habits. School programs and curriculums that include nutrition and physical activity components can beneficially influence students' educational success and long term health.

To ensure that schools are providing a healthful environment to students, Congress mandated that local education agencies take up this challenge by requiring that each school participating in the federally funded National School Lunch Program develop and implement a local wellness policy beginning with the 2006-2007 academic year. In New Hampshire, local education agencies have responded by creating wellness policies that promote access to nutritious school meals and empower students to choose healthy eating and activity patterns.

This executive summary on *School Wellness in New Hampshire* summarizes how New Hampshire schools are meeting the wellness challenge. It highlights those schools that are adopting promising wellness practices and outlines the next steps in the area of wellness policy implementation and evaluation.

The New Hampshire Department of Education is committed to working with local education agencies to ensure that all schools have wellness policies established. The Department has a strong mission to provide technical assistance in the development and implementation of local school wellness plans, as well as oversight authority to determine compliance.



Lyonel B. Tracy, Commissioner  
New Hampshire Department of Education



The Child Nutrition & WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 established that every local educational agency participating in the Federal School Meals Programs create a local school wellness policy by July 2006. The law states that schools must set goals for:

- Nutrition education
- Physical activity
- Nutrition standards for all foods available in school (not just in the meals program)
- Other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness
- Measuring implementation of the local wellness policy

To ensure that school wellness committees are a diverse representation of the school community, the legislation requires that the wellness committee include at least one representative from each of the following groups:

- The school board
- School administration
- A representative of the school food authority
- Parents
- Students
- A member of the public

## The Wellness Policy Evaluation Council consisted of six team members:

Laura Jackson Gaudette, MPH, RD, LD  
Nutrition Education Consultant  
New Hampshire Department of  
Education

Martha Judson, RN, MS Consultant  
University of New Hampshire  
Cooperative Extension Nutrition  
Connections Program

Joyce Liebl, RD, LD, SNS  
Food Service Director  
Gilford High School, Gilford School  
District

Jeni Mosca, Principal  
Seabrook Elementary School,  
Seabrook, New Hampshire

Angela Shepard, MD  
School Health Services Consultant,  
New Hampshire Department of  
Education

Elaine VanDyke, Administrator  
Bureau of Nutrition Programs &  
Services,  
New Hampshire Department of  
Education



## New Hampshire Statistics

- 32% of New Hampshire's children, aged 6-12 years have been found to be overweight or obese; and
- 24% of high school aged children have been found to be overweight or obese. <sup>(3)</sup>

## The Wellness Policy Evaluation Council

In January 2007, the Department established a Wellness Policy Evaluation Council. The group was convened in order to fulfill the Department's mission to provide technical assistance in the development and implementation of local school wellness policies. The Council was tasked with:

- Determining if a wellness policy had been established for each school
- Identifying if policies met the minimum requirements of the law
- Distinguishing policies which could be shared as promising practices
- Identifying trends and commonalities to better target where training was needed

To complete this task the group utilized a *School Wellness Policy Assessment Form* to conduct an evaluation of each wellness policy submitted. The form incorporated the minimum requirements of the law, USDA recommended guidelines, and NH Education laws and standards.

The six component areas the form assessed were nutrition education, physical activity, nutrition standards for all foods available on the school campus during the school day, the school environment, policy evaluation, and having a complete policy development committee. Each of the six components included between 7 and 14 best practice indicators. The assessment form may be viewed at [www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition](http://www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition) by clicking on the Local Wellness Policy Toolkit link.

## General Overview

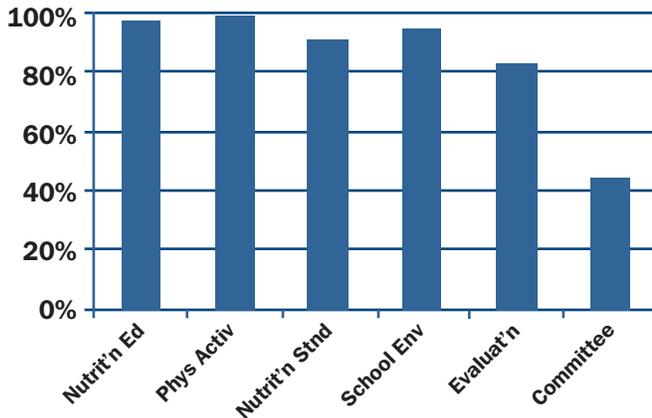
The Wellness Policy Council assessed a total of 113 policies representing 419 public schools. Policies were written at the SAU, district, and individual school level. The policies varied in length, scope, and approach.

Agencies in the beginning stages of the wellness process submitted policies outlining plans for how their schools would develop wellness committees and policies. Other institutions put forward well-defined wellness policies which incorporated detailed strategies and implementation plans. Schools that were the furthest along the wellness continuum submitted updates with their policies which described their work instituting vending standards, meeting physical activity goals, and promoting changes within the school's wellness culture.

Across New Hampshire wellness initiatives have been integrated into school communities in a variety of ways. Schools have hosted educational dinners, teamed up with after-school programs, partnered with PTO's, created newsletters, used cafeterias as learning laboratories, and incorporated nutrition and physical activity into their school's core curriculums.

## Wellness Findings

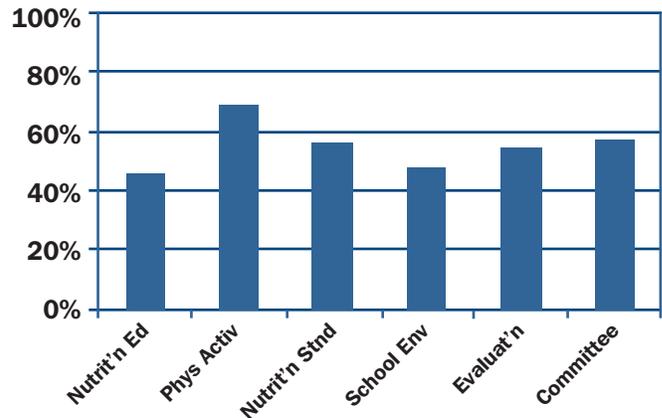
**Table I: Percentage of Schools Meeting Minimum Requirements**



**TABLE I** illustrates the percentage of schools state-wide that met the Federal minimum standard for each of the six wellness components. It shows that over 80% of all wellness policies assessed set a basic goal for nutrition education, physical activity, nutrition standards, school environment, and policy evaluation. However, less than 50% of these policies established wellness committees that included all six required team members.

**TABLE II** summarizes the extent to which schools went beyond the minimum requirements and integrated best practice indicators into their policies. This table shows that on average, schools addressed over 50% of the indicators in each category for physical activity, nutrition standards, policy evaluation, and committee members. In the areas of nutrition education and school environment, schools met less than 50% of the indicators. In comparison to Table I, we can see that although most schools are meeting the minimum requirements of the law, more work must be done to help schools incorporate identified best practices into their policies.

**Table II: Component Best Practice Indicator Scores**



### Further Findings Regarding Best Practice Indicators

**Nutrition Education** was the area that scored the lowest on the indicator scale overall (see Table II). Fifty-five percent of schools reported that they were integrating nutrition into the school health education or core curriculum. Less than one third of all policies required nutrition education activities be conducted with coordination between food service and teachers, or that staff teaching nutrition education receive appropriate training.

**Physical Activity** was addressed prominently in most policies. Approximately 75% of all policies specified that every student be provided with opportunities to regularly participate in physical activity. A directive to integrate physical activity into the health education or core curriculum was included in 54% of the policies. Only 13% of schools required on-going professional development for teachers in the area of physical education.

**Nutrition Standards** was a component that showed wide variability outside of the standards established for the federal meals programs. Between 50 to 75% of schools identified guidelines for a la carte sales, vending machines, snack bars, school stores, concessions, fund raising, parties, and celebrations.

**School Environment** was also an area that showed a wide range of responses. While 46% of all schools directed that students receive adequate time to eat, only 14% required that lunch be scheduled near the middle of the day. Less than 25% of all policies required that recess be scheduled before lunch for elementary students. Thirty-eight percent of policies prohibited the use of food as a reward or punishment and 36% prohibited withholding physical activity as punishment.

## New Hampshire Promising Wellness Practices



While many New Hampshire schools are in the beginning stages of wellness policy development, others have embraced the spirit of the law to form dynamic wellness committees that reach across the school community. Showing a strong commitment to wellness, the three local education agencies featured below have emerged as wellness policy leaders. These agencies have developed comprehensive wellness policies aimed at promoting healthy eating and activity patterns among students and school staff. We commend them for their promising wellness practices.

The promising practices highlighted below share several commonalities. All policies met the minimum requirements of the law and at least 75% of all best practice indicators on the School Wellness Policy Assessment Form. In general, the policies establish strong cross curricular linkages between key players in the wellness realm including teachers, health professionals, food service staff, and school administration. They also worked to convey consistent wellness messages to students, as well as to partner with parents and local communities.

These policies have been posted on the Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services website. Please visit the website and click on the Local Wellness Policy Toolkit link for an in-depth read at: [www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition](http://www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition)

### **SAU 38: MONADNOCK REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT WELLNESS POLICY:**

This comprehensive wellness policy covers nine schools in eight towns. It was framed by an inclusive and active wellness committee. It is written in clear language, sets attainable goals, and is well-rounded assigning each of the six assessment areas equal importance and detail. Areas in which this policy scores exceptionally well include nutrition education, nutrition standards, and the school environment. The policy reinforces the need to support strong linkages between the school, home, and community environments. It addresses the training, resources, and funding needs necessary to attain policy goals. Lastly, it supports staff wellness and good staff modeling.

### **SAU 48: SAU 48'S WELLNESS POLICY ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION:**

This policy covers the eight towns in SAU 48. It scores well in all of the six wellness areas and shows strong support for the National School Breakfast Program. Additionally, it includes detailed nutrition standards, a strong nutrition education component, guidance on food marketing, integrating physical activity into the classroom setting, and communication with parents. The policy calls for the establishment of a staff wellness committee to compliment the SAU's School Health Council.

### **SAU 61: FARMINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT HEALTH AND WELLNESS POLICY:**

This wellness policy applies to the three schools in the Farmington district. Although it is comprehensive, it is also tailored to meet the needs of the district's schools. The policy clearly incorporates elements of New Hampshire education law and Federal requirements. It specifies that school staff will be provided opportunities for ongoing professional development in the areas of nutrition, physical education and wellness. This policy recognizes the many groups that must work together to promote a healthy wellness culture and contains realistic and tangible approaches to include each of them.



## Wellness Policy Summary...

Well-nourished, physically fit children perform better academically and face a brighter long-term future. All over the United States, schools are recognizing these realities and are striving to be a positive influence in the establishment of lifelong healthy habits.

In New Hampshire, valuable progress has been made in the formation of wellness committees and the creation of school wellness policies. Adopting a policy is step one of the process. Much work remains to be done. Some schools need to strengthen policies to meet the minimum requirements of the law. Others need assistance in implementation and policy evaluation.

That schools find themselves at varying points along the wellness continuum is appropriate at this time. It is expected that progress will be made incrementally at the local level according to the needs of the community. As we look ahead to the coming year, the Department will concentrate on assisting local education agencies to move past the policy development stage and into implementation. Through focused trainings and technical assistance, we will encourage wellness committees to move policy initiatives forward.

## ...And Next Steps

To fulfill its mission to provide technical assistance in the development and implementation of local school wellness policies, the Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services has prepared this *Executive Summary* along with an individualized *Wellness Policy Profile* for each Local Education Agency (LEA) that submitted a wellness policy. In addition, we encourage you to take the following steps:

- a) Compare your Wellness Policy Profile to the Wellness Policy Assessment Form posted online at: <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/Localwellnesspolicy.htm>
- b) Study the Promising Practices featured in this executive summary at: <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/Localwellnesspolicy.htm>
- c) Contact the Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services with specific questions
- d) Use the resource page listed on the back cover of this booklet for further guidance
- e) Be on the lookout for upcoming Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Service trainings
- f) Investigate the BNPS-National Food Service Management Institute online wellness training course designed to enhance food service directors' leadership and team building skills within the wellness team at: <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/nfsmi/>

## References

- (1) Food Research and Action Center, "School wellness policy and practice: meeting the needs of low-income students," Washington, DC. February 2006. Available at [www.frac.org/pdf/wellness\\_guide2006.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/wellness_guide2006.pdf).
- (2) Nutrition-Cognition National Advisory Committee, "Statement on the link between nutrition and cognitive development in children," Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University. 1998. Available at [www.centeronhunger.org/cognitive.html](http://www.centeronhunger.org/cognitive.html).
- (3) Foundation for Healthy Communities. New Hampshire Childhood Obesity Report. September 2007.

## Resource Guide

*USDA Team Nutrition Healthy Schools Local Wellness Policy Requirements site:* Access this site for information on how to create, implement, and evaluate a wellness policy. See examples of wellness policies and view funding suggestions. [http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellness\\_policyrequirements.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellness_policyrequirements.html)

*School Nutrition Association Local School Wellness Policy site:* Visit this site for sample policies, model guidelines, implementation advice, and wellness policy analysis. <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Index.aspx?id=1075>

*NH-DOE Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services Local Wellness Policy Toolkit site:* Visit this site to view a copy of the School Wellness Policy Assessment Form, examples of New Hampshire wellness policy promising practices schools, and related resources. <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/Localwellnesspolicy.htm>

*Action For Healthy Kids: Wellness Tool site:* Follow an eight step process toward the creation of a successful wellness policy. <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wellnesstool/index.php>

*California Project LEAN School Wellness Policy Tools site:* Navigate this site for links to resources on nutrition and physical activity, healthy fund raising ideas, and the guidebook "Policy in Action: A Guide to Implementing Your Local School Wellness Policy." <http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/resourceLibrary/genResourceLibraryCategoryList.asp?CATNID=1057&CATNGUID=%7BD74538AF-C1DA-438C-8986-4A75010ABF09%7D>

*Food Research and Action Center Local School Wellness Policies site:* Gain information on meeting the needs of low income students via the wellness process. [http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/school\\_wellness.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/school_wellness.html)

*CDC Healthy Youth! School Health Index site:* This site includes a self-assessment and planning guide developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that enable schools to develop action plans for improving student health. Physical activity and healthy eating are two of the topic areas addressed. <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>

### BUREAU OF NUTRITION PROGRAMS & SERVICES CONTACT INFORMATION:

**Dr. Judith D. Fillion, RD, LD**  
Director, Division of Program Support  
Email: [jfillion@ed.state.nh.us](mailto:jfillion@ed.state.nh.us)  
Telephone: (603) 271-3855

**Elaine VanDyke, Administrator**  
Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services  
Email: [evandyke@ed.state.nh.us](mailto:evandyke@ed.state.nh.us)  
Telephone: (603) 271-3860

**Kathryn Hodges**  
Financial Program Specialist  
Email: [khodges@ed.state.nh.us](mailto:khodges@ed.state.nh.us)  
Telephone: (603) 271-3861

For general bureau information contact:  
Bureau of Nutrition Programs & Services  
Website: [www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition](http://www.ed.state.nh.us/nutrition)  
Main Telephone Line: (603) 271-3646

For School Wellness information contact:  
Laura Jackson Gaudette, MPH, RD, LD  
Nutrition Education Consultant  
Email: [lgaudette@ed.state.nh.us](mailto:lgaudette@ed.state.nh.us)  
Telephone: (603) 271-3864

**Tami Drake**  
Bureau Accountant  
Email: [tdrake@ed.state.nh.us](mailto:tdrake@ed.state.nh.us)  
Telephone: (603) 271-3647

