



# LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY TOOL KIT



**Green Umbrella**  
REGIONAL CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE



Slow Food USA®





# FOREWORD

## By Alice Waters

*The Edible Schoolyard Project and the Alice Waters Institute*

Food and education are universal: Everyone eats. And every child goes to school, or should. How we educate the next generation to live together on this planet is essential for our future. We need to teach the values of stewardship, equity, nourishment, community and diversity. And what better place to teach those values than in the public school system? After nearly 30 years of the Edible Schoolyard project, which I created at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, CA, in 1995, that one school has spread to and inspired nearly 6,500 schools world-wide because of the human values that we all treasure.

What if schools purchased food directly from local, regenerative and organic farmers and ranchers who take care of

the land and their farmworkers? Much like community supported agriculture, school supported agriculture could become an economic stimulus for regenerative agriculture. Local school systems would become reliable buyers who could pay the true cost of food without a middleman. In turn, children in school would be nourished, and those essential values of stewardship would come right through the cafeteria doors. The power of procurement and taste, and the education of the senses in the public school system could transform agriculture, health and education over night! I believe that school supported agriculture could be a national — and even global — policy that could address climate immediately. I call it a “delicious revolution.”

 *In the long view, no nation is healthier than its children, or more prosperous than its farmers.*

— Harry S. Truman

# INTRODUCTION

## By Edward Mukiibi

*Slow Food International President*

In a world attuned to the interconnectedness of our health, environment and community, the journey for good, clean and fair food for our youngest citizens stands at the forefront of positive change. Introducing children to gardens can instill a love of gardening in them for their whole lives. I can testify to this, as from a very young age I had the good fortune to accompany my mother in her work in our agroecological farm in Uganda, and I liked then to observe her in the kitchen, in the preparation of the harvested food. Our senses are the pathways into our minds. A few years ago, during my Good News From Africa tour to the United States, I visited some Slow Food school gardens in Detroit and New Orleans, and I was able to see the importance of this kind of educational activity and the impact that growing food together can have on the physical and mental health of students, not only

in Africa, but also in different contexts of the Global North. As we navigate the complexities of modern education and wellness, Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) emerges as a catalyst for systemic improvement for our society. It is never only about teaching, cooking or gardening per se.

This Local School Wellness Policy Tool Kit is more than a collection of resources; it is an invitation to be a change maker. Its importance cannot be underestimated. It equips individuals and organizations with the knowledge and tools to advocate for wellness policies that address the needs of local communities. By fostering collaboration between schools, cities and community members, the LSWP facilitates a collective effort to champion health. It is a grassroots effort that has the potential to change the landscape of education, creating a nurturing environment where every student can thrive.

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# CHAPTER 1

## *The Local School Wellness Policy Tool Kit*

### A Call to Action

Are you a school district stakeholder looking to advocate for health, food and the environment? Do you find the physical and mental well-being of school-age children concerning? Are you a change maker who is willing to explore policy-making as action for positive and widespread change in systems where improvements are necessary to solve big problems? Helping develop a district-wide Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) will offer you the opportunity to have a voice in issues that affect you the most. Local School Wellness Policies can be viewed by stakeholders as a systems-change approach to invite collaboration between cities, schools and communities. The LSWP tool kit is a road map for individuals

and organizations to get involved in policy at the district level. Whether working in a school district or as an external stakeholder, engaging in the wellness policy process empowers you to create greater impact within your community and beyond.

This Local School Wellness Policy Tool Kit will help you form positive partnerships with school districts around health-related issues and disparities. The tool kit provides tools and resources for current members of a Local School Wellness Committee to review, write or update a wellness policy. While awareness of wellness programs in schools has steadily increased, many Local School Wellness Policies are missing key components and partnerships for how district-wide initiatives are equitably funded and implemented. Alternatively,



numerous schools and school districts across the nation are rolling out incredibly successful wellness and sustainability initiatives, but these programs are not amplified or shared effectively with the public. This tool kit is a call to action for sparking inspiration and instilling a keen sense of empowerment for school and community members to collaborate at the grassroots level to effectively drive change.

### What is a Local School Wellness Policy?

The Local School Wellness Policy is a written document of official policies that guide a local educational agency (LEA) or school district's efforts to establish a school environment to promote students health, well-being and the ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity. While this is a federal regulation, writing and implementing an LSWP at the local level allows school districts to customize a wellness policy to address

the direct and indirect needs of the school community. The LSWP showcases a district's position for its commitment to wellness and sustainability while reducing the ambiguity related to topics such as equity concerning the allocation of resources and food security for all students.

By integrating the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) framework recommended by the CDC, the LSWP can serve as the backstop for local education agencies to amplify their priorities and the district's strategic plan. Wellness policy increases transparency for the public and contributes to the integrity of regulations such as the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. Engaging students in the LSWP process increases their [school connectedness](#) and promotes a culture of care. When students feel a sense of belonging they are more likely to attend school on a consistent basis, consume nutritious meals and receive social emotional support.



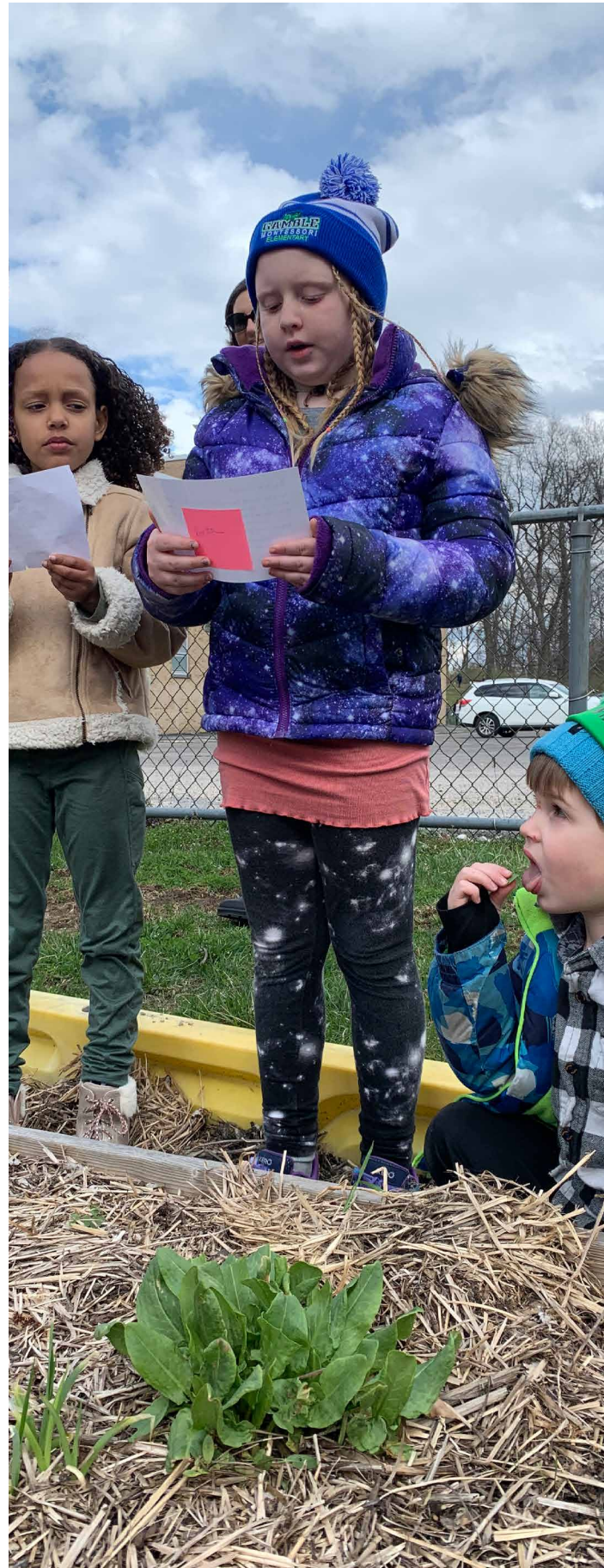
## Requirements for a Local School Wellness Policy

A Local School Wellness Policy is required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). About every five years, via a Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), Congress reauthorizes essential federal nutrition programs that help provide healthy food and nutrition to more than 35 million children and infants each year. In the most recent CNR, the Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act became law. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act states “this final rule requires all local educational agencies that participate in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to meet expanded local school wellness policy requirements consistent with the requirements set forth in section 204 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.”

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) final rule requires educational agencies who participate in federal nutrition programs to produce minimum standards for the LSWP and for ensuring there is:

- Stakeholder participation in the development and updates of policies
- Periodic assessment and disclosure compliance with the LSWP to the public

As a result, these regulations, once implemented, strengthen the ability of an education agency or school district no matter the size to create a school nutrition environment to improve student, staff and community



outcomes. The tools and resources in this tool kit including overcoming barriers, forming a wellness committee and writing policy aim to make this process not only inclusive and equitable, but manageable for all stakeholders.

The good news is that wellness policies work. According to the The Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, “Significant positive associations were found between academic performance and strength of overall wellness policy goals, goals in nutrition education, and other school-based activities.” Economic status of the student population was found to be positively associated with strength of nutrition education goals. Additional research shows that better legislation for school nutrition may improve eating behaviors, including greater fruit intake and less soda intake. Results demonstrate that stronger nutrition laws encourage optimal weight status.

Developing a wellness policy to address the specific needs of the school district yields increased academic performance and attendance, greater engagement due to experiential real-life learning, decreased nutrition-related diseases, higher percentage of students meeting social-emotional standards, and more focus on equity, inclusion and social justice, among other benefits.

The five wellness policy elements as established by the USDA final rule are:

- Nutrition education
- School meals
- Physical activity
- Implementation and evaluation
- Competitive foods

The local school wellness policy must include measurable goals for nutrition

promotion and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness. In developing these goals, LEAs must review and consider evidence-based strategies and techniques. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention lists the [eight federal minimum requirements of a Local School Wellness Policy](#):

1. Include goals for nutrition promotion and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote students wellness. In developing these goals, local educational agencies must review and consider evidence-based strategies
1. Include nutrition guidelines for all foods sold on each school campus during the school day that are consistent with federal regulations for school meals and Smart Snacks in School Nutritional Standards
2. Include policies for foods and beverages made available to students (e.g., in classroom parties, classroom snacks brought by parents, other foods given as incentives)
3. Include policies for food and beverage marketing that allow marketing and advertising of only those foods and beverages that meet the Smart Snacks in school nutrition standards
4. Permit parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, teachers of physical education, school health professionals, the school board, school administrators, and the general public to participate in the development, implementation and update of the local school wellness policy



5. Identify one or more school officials who have the authority and responsibility to ensure each school complies with the policy
6. Inform and update the public (including parents, students and others in the community) about the local school wellness policy on an annual basis
7. At least once every three years, measure how schools are in compliance with the local school wellness policy, the extent to which the education agency's wellness policy compares to model local school wellness policies, and the progress made in attaining the goals of the local wellness policy. And finally, make the assessment available to the public

related illness and the mental health of both students and staff members. Relative to school meals, wellness policies enable schools to move beyond food security, where basic food needs are met, toward “nutrition security,” when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Strong, comprehensive school wellness policies are especially important to low-income children who often have inadequate access to healthy food and physical activity and rely heavily on their schools to fill these gaps. According to No Kid Hungry, in 2024, one in five kids in the United States live with hunger, equating to nearly 14 million children. Every day, students come to school who have not had a healthy meal or may have not eaten at all. In a [FoodCorps](#) blog, Camille Beredjick writes that [school food is social justice issue](#): “Food justice sees nutritious, nourishing food as a human right – one that communities of color have long been denied, and one that’s critical in our ability to live out our brightest futures. There is no justice unless we each have the power to nourish ourselves, our families and our communities – the kind of autonomy that’s key to dismantling racism and building a more just world.”

## The Importance of Nutrition and Agricultural Education Programs

It is well-documented when students are engaged in nutrition education that is integrated into the school day and connected to a standards-based learning program, there is an increased demand for nutritious foods and less food waste.

Garden to Cafe programs— where students grow fruits and vegetables in the school garden that are the same foods they recognize in the school cafeteria – have shown that students are more likely to consume those foods. The Whole Kids and Slow Food USA [Garden to Cafeteria Tool Kit](#) helps school district food service operations safely bring school garden produce onto the lunch line. As a result, school gardens, local farms and economies flourish, consequently having a positive impact on the environment and climate. The components of a comprehensive school district-wide nutrition program are:

- A school garden or access to a community garden that provides meaningful, experiential hands-on learning, agriculture education and green workforce skills development
- Activities, lessons, curriculum and partner programming that address the nutritional benefits of more fruits and vegetables that ward off

disease, reduce illness and improve overall well-being and academic performance

- Preparing and consuming food from the garden or locally procured food to increase recognition of nutritious foods and identify where food comes from. This should include culturally appropriate foods and community involvement where families can convene and enjoy food together

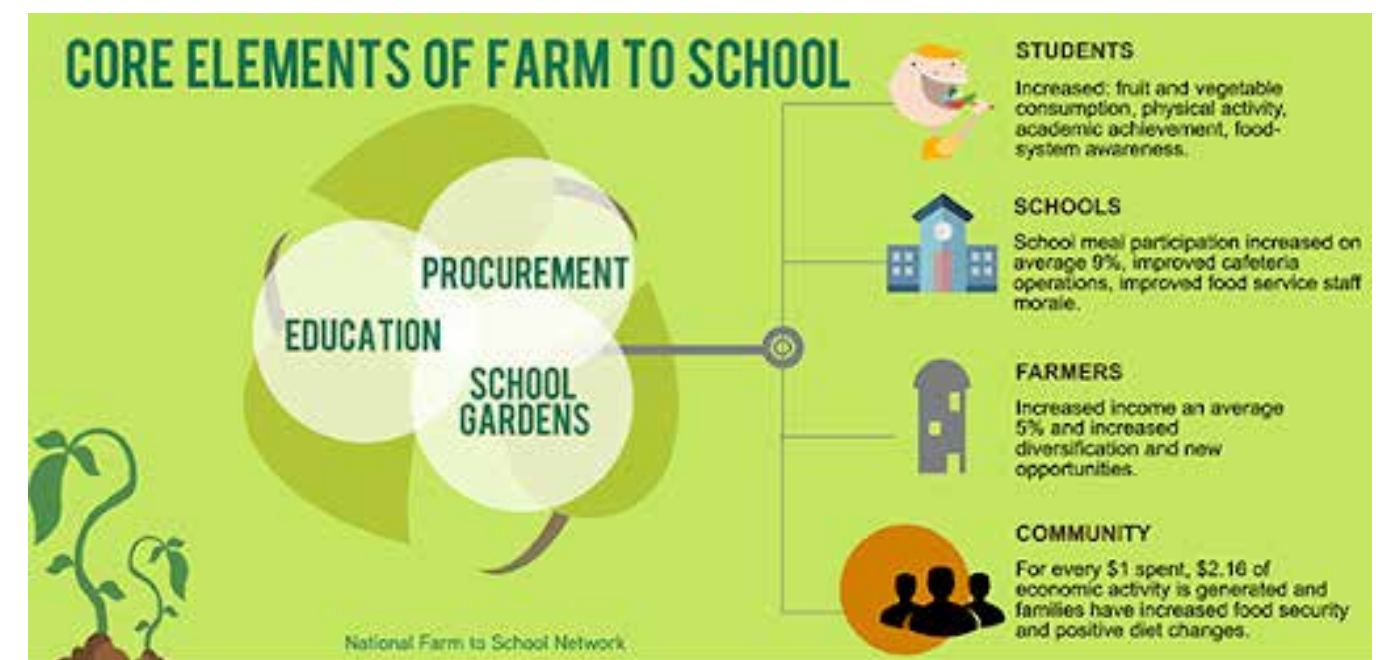
The following organizations have well established nutrition education programs that can be embedded into a LSWP:

The [National Farm to School Network](#) programs are taking place in all 50 states, D.C. Tribal Sovereign Nations and U.S. Territories. By partnering with Farm to School, schools and school districts can craft nutrition education policies to meet the needs of the entire community.

## Why does Local School Wellness Policy Matter?

Local education agencies and school districts play a crucial role in educating children about health, food and the environment that affects them, their families and the regions (rural, urban, suburban) where they live. Local School Wellness Committees have the potential to implement policies to improve the health and well-being of students that go beyond the minimum requirements. Strategies that incorporate climate-friendly practices and sustainability can also help address the inequities prevalent in the access to healthy food, green space and clean air.

An increasing number of peer-reviewed studies demonstrates the correlation between healthy nutrition and physical activity as well as improved academic performance and improved classroom behavior. Wellness policies can specifically attend to problems such as truancy, diet-





It is important to note that the amount of ultra-processed foods available to students during, before and after school programs will increase the need for nutrition education and collaborative efforts to reduce mixed messaging. Often the best strategy to understand children's eating behaviors is to ask them. This can be done effectively by surveying students before and after nutrition education programs are implemented. Consider the following to ensure there is consistent messaging for students to make informed choices.

- Enticing brand name ultra-processed foods – especially when there is marketing that targets children posted in schools – competes with fruits and vegetables. The essential nutrients needed for maximizing academic performance, disease and illness prevention are not consumed and food waste is more prevalent
- When students are rushed to consume their lunch they are more likely to eat the “grab-and-go” food options to quickly satisfy their cravings rather than the more nutritious and scratch-made foods
- When water is not readily available, students lean on beverages that contain sugar
- The free and reduced lunch label is applied to students when they check out at the cafeteria register. Students often do not eat to avoid this association. Read more about subsidized meals stigma [here](#)

Nutrition education creates a culture of care in the classroom and in the cafeteria when nutritious foods that do not compete with ultra-processed food are available. Including experiential real-life learning through school gardens and edible education has the potential of widespread

impact in improving the eating habits of over 30,000 children across the nation.

The Edible Schoolyard Project's [Edible Education Curricula](#) provides hands-on experiences that connect students to food, nature and each other. It systematically addresses the crisis of climate change, public health and social inequality. The curriculum equips students with kitchen skills while helping them investigate their personal connections to food and cooking. This curriculum can be used in conjunction with or enhance existing Family Consumer Science and/or Culinary programs and have the tools and equipment most likely available in their classrooms.

[The Alice Waters Institute of Edible Education and Regenerative Agriculture](#) is leading the way for the wellness of people and the planet with a bold vision at the intersection of climate, food, education and health. The impact of school food production, using organic and regenerative growing practices such as school gardens, Agriculture Education career pathways and procuring from small local farmers has the ability to transform the food system, stimulate local economies and support whole-district sustainability efforts. School-supported agriculture programs, such as establishing a K-12 green career pathway that equips students with job-related skills can meet the increasing demand to place skilled individuals into quality green jobs. Furthermore, school garden activities and agricultural education on school campuses across the nation serve as climate action to offset the degeneration of soils and ecosystems. The Alice Waters Institute and The Edible Schoolyards Project provides standards-based learning on topics such as “The Garden as an Ecosystem and Soil Investigation” found on their [resources](#) page.

## Beyond the Basic Wellness Policy Requirements

Conducting surveys to collect data before and after instituting a wellness policy will enable the district to identify specific issues that are prevalent in the district and the surrounding regions and whether the related policy put in place is effective. This is a condensed list of issues that have been reported to be prevalent in children across the U.S.:

- Childhood obesity is an ongoing concern, and most children fail to meet not only the USDA [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), as well as recommendations for daily physical activity

- According to the CDC, [Asthma](#) affects approximately 25 million people, including over 4.6 million children under the age of 18 (2021)
- The CDC also reports that the number of young people under age 20 with diabetes in the United States is likely to [increase more rapidly in future decades](#). Furthermore the CDC noted that in some people Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed through lifestyle changes
- The CDC's [Youth Risk Behaviors](#) report shows data summary and trends for substance abuse experience of violence, sexual behavior, mental health, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, social determinates of health, unstable housing (2021)





By design, federal requirements are broad and do not account for the unique characteristics of each school and district. The USDA final rule allows flexibility for local education agencies to cater policies to best meet the needs of students, staff and community members. A wellness committee should contemplate incorporating additional policies, such as, but not limited to the following:

- Procurement of locally produced foods for school meals
- Staff wellness professional development and training
- Outdoor learning and environmental education
- Creating and maintaining healthy school campus environments
- Student and staff safety
- Positive social-emotional climate
- Employee wellness

## Using the Tool Kit

This tool kit is a playbook for:

- Navigating federal regulations
- Developing a collaborative wellness policy committee involving stakeholders
- Creating opportunities where there are potential barriers
- Reviewing, writing and updating a wellness policy (even if it is not due to be updated)
- Amplifying and leveraging policies with partners and grantors
- Broadcasting the positive impact and increased outcomes of wellness initiatives

## Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework (WSCC)

An exemplary Local School Wellness Policy elevates the collaborative effort of a school district in its commitment to achieve district-wide well-being and sustainability goals. In utilizing the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\)](#) framework, stakeholders are equipped with the essential components to address when reviewing, writing and updating wellness policy. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention [describes](#)



[each of the components](#) of the WSCC to provide language for incorporating into a wellness policy. Each component needs attention in order to improve a child's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development while also reducing barriers that affect student outcomes. This framework can be applied for the following practices:

- Ensuring there are individuals, school departments and community members involved in the wellness policy process that represent each of the components
- Using each of the components as the headers to organize the sections in a wellness policy
- Identify what department or organization representing each component can implement policy by utilizing their expertise and existing resources

Social emotional learning standards (SEL) are used by participating school districts to set goals for inclusivity of all students, increasing interest in academics while decreasing detrimental behavioral issues and promoting positive school culture. These standards are developed by a task force of educators organized by each state's agency or education department. The links for each state's SEL are located at this [site](#). The five SEL competency areas are: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. SEL

provides a shared language in which educators and policy-makers can discuss how the five competency areas can be addressed when writing wellness policies.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

Employing a Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) framework defined in the [Global Schools Forum Playbook](#) throughout the wellness policy process demonstrates a commitment to community engagement and elevates transparency in the policy-making process. By activating each of the following DEIJ pillars, there is opportunity for all students and staff to have access to green infrastructure, resources and programming. Furthermore, this practice aims to achieve food and environmental justice where students have a voice in the issues that affect them and their families, now and in the future.

- Diversity: the presence of different identities, cultures and perspectives within organizations. These differences can include but are not limited to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, tribe, caste, nationality, socio-economic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective

### Diversity

*Individuals & perspectives*

### Equity

*Processes & programs*

### Inclusion

*Collective voice & include all abilities*

### Justice

*Equal rights & equitable opportunities*



- **Equity:** the act of ensuring that organizations have processes and programs that are impartial, fair, and aim to provide equal outcomes for every individual. Equity focuses on ensuring that every individual has what they need, understanding that we do not all start from the same place, and emphasizes that we must strive to adjust to address those imbalances
- **Inclusion:** the practice of ensuring belonging in organizations. This work strives to ensure that all team members feel comfortable and supported by their respective organizations and believe that they can be their authentic selves within the organization
- **Justice:** the process of dismantling systems and structures of historical and current oppression that create inequality and replacing them with proactive systems that promote fairness in policies, institutional practices, cultural messages and social norms for people of all identities and cultures

## Merging Priorities with Policy for Schools, Communities and Municipalities

A Local School Wellness Policy builds momentum for collaboration and drives systemic change for schools, communities and municipalities. When representatives from each of these entities align their priorities and develop a universal policy, there is opportunity for greater and broader impact. This approach to establishing equitable policy encompasses

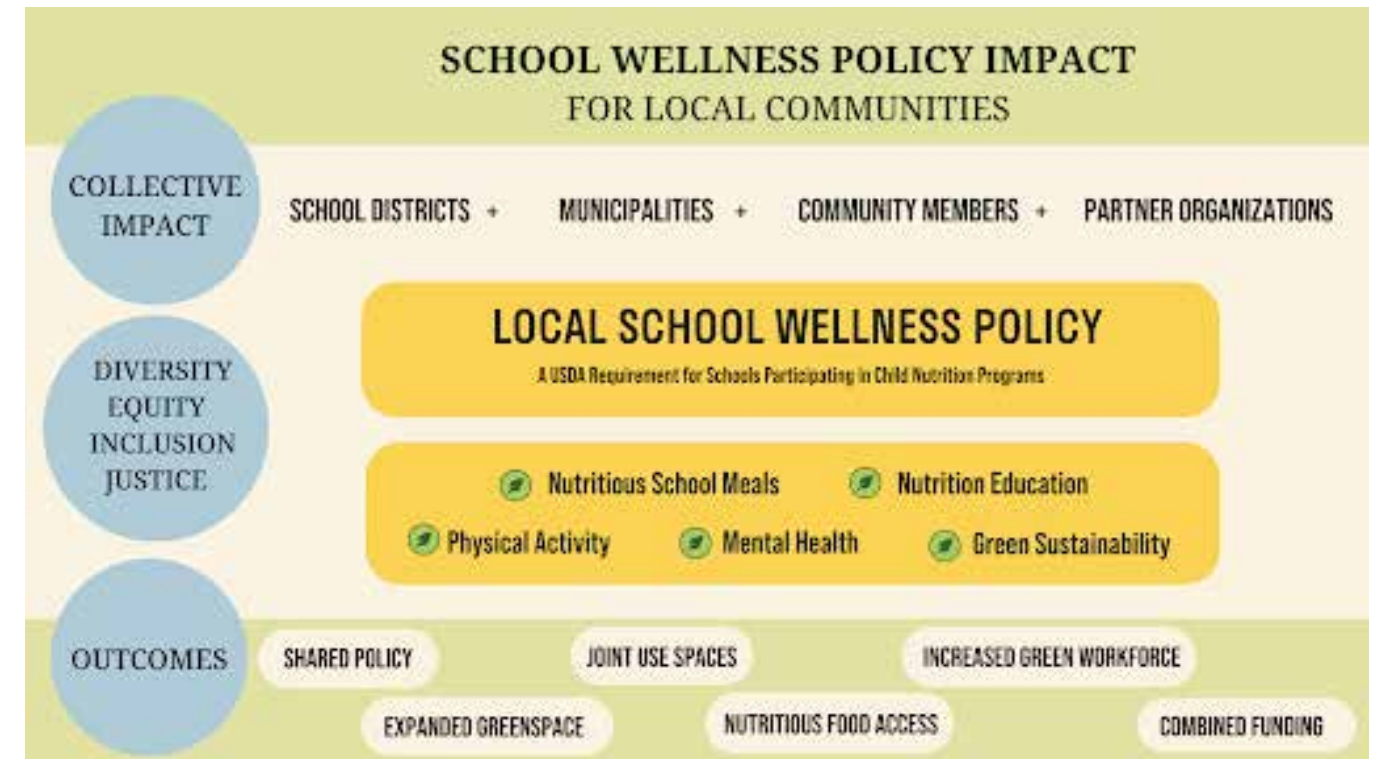
more stakeholders and decision makers where everyone has a voice, and creates a sense of ownership, accountability and empowerment. Through collaboration, entities are able to pool resources and programs to effectively achieve goals within a set time frame.

Merging priorities with policy is being played out in Green Umbrella Regional Climate Collaborative’s [Green Schoolyards Action Network](#). Elected officials, school district key leadership, and community partners are collaborating around the [Green Cincinnati Plan](#), a Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights, and the school district’s commitment to green sustainability. Policies regarding equitable access to outdoor learning spaces are aligned in both the Green Cincinnati Plan and the Cincinnati Public Schools district’s Wellness Policy.

The District Wellness Policy Impact for Local Communities illustrates the Local School Wellness Policy as an effective collective impact model with positive shared outcomes for schools and cities. The LSWP can be a powerful tool for aligning priorities between school district and municipalities while combining efforts for broad improvements in food and environmental systems.

## Turning Potential Barriers into Opportunities

This section attempts to address a wide range of potential barriers while forming a wellness committee and developing policy. It can be used as a tool for identifying opportunities during the policy-writing process. For further assistance in addressing issues specific to individual districts, contact your regional or state [USDA Food and Nutritional Services office](#) or the office of food and nutrition



in each state’s education department. The following Frequently Asked Questions section is organized by type of stakeholder and their potential concerns.

### Individual Stakeholders

*“The word policy gives me pause.”*

Consider that the act of participating in the local school wellness policy-making process brings issues to the grassroots level where solutions are easier to address. Helping simplify policy language reduces the stigma that policy itself is difficult to navigate and is the reason so many community members avoid it. When possible solutions become policy, there is accountability for entities and leaders to achieve the goals laid out in a written plan. It is empowering and gratifying to serve in such an important role to make positive change possible.

*“The Local School Wellness Policy process takes a lot of time and is too restrictive.”*

Once policies are put in place, knowing what the expectations are reduces confusion on the part of the school community and the time it takes to figure out issues on an “as needed” basis. Policy creates the opportunity to reduce or eliminate inequities within the school district. In the long run, having policies established saves time and reduces conflict.

*“I attempted to be a part of the wellness committee but I cannot commit to attending the meetings, there are no vacancies, or it is too late in the school year to join as a member.”*





Additional opportunities exist to get involved, and with persistence, landing a spot on the wellness committee may happen in the future. Other methods include:

- Participating in a sub-committee, task force or group that is an extension of the wellness committee
- Offering a service, resource or programming to support the committee
- Forming an individual school wellness team that could contribute to the wellness committee

*“I was assigned the role of leading/participating in the wellness policy process but I do not have the time or the energy to be effective.”*

Invite or recruit stakeholders to participate on the Local School Wellness Committee who may already be equipped with the knowledge and resources that they are doing for the organization or business they work for. If the local health department has programs that attempt to solve the problems the school district faces, it may be able to decrease your responsibilities exponentially. Also, consider being a co-chair; a food service director or curriculum manager can effectively provide expertise for many of the components of a wellness policy.

### Schools

*“We do not have the support we need and there is inconsistent messaging in the schools.”*

Provide all schools with positive visual messaging and programming resources related to consuming more fruits and vegetables. You can find resources from [USDA Team Nutrition](#) and [SNAP-Ed](#) that promote nutrition security, physical activity and health. The LSWP can include parameters for advertising brand name products if it does not align with the nutrition education policies.

### The Classroom

*“We can’t add one more thing to our curriculum and we do not have the training to implement new initiatives.”*

Incorporate environmental learning, nutrition education and physical activity during or in place of regularly scheduled routines (often this can be built into normal routines such as lunch counts, homeroom or activity periods). In order for there to be buy-in from school staff, professional development should be offered. Educator professional development and staff training can take many forms such as designated days, partner organization training programs and virtual training modules. Reallocating designated professional development time or assigning continuing education credit for completing hands-on training can be designed in a way that staff members get excited about teaching and learning. Staff professional development also allows educators to personally benefit from being equipped with tools and techniques to manage their own wellness.

### The Cafeteria

*“Meeting the nutritional requirements and getting kids*

*to actually eat what you serve is a challenge.”*

Learning about what the challenges are for school food service operations makes it easier to approach difficult conversations about what is being served for school meals. School Nutrition Association [2024 School Nutrition Trends Report](#) outlines the reality of what Foodservice Directors face, especially in adhering to new nutritional standards. Keep in mind the following initiatives are easier said than done and foodservice operations need support and partnerships to make this happen:

- Shifting the focus from processed foods, high sugar and salt products to promoting and offering locally produced nutritious foods through Farm to School that reflect taste and cultural preferences
- Gradually reducing the amount of processed foods being offered in conjunction with providing nutrition education will set students up for academic success and reduce illnesses
- Consider asking food service staff to partner with school garden teams. When students connect what they are growing to what they see offered on the school lunch line, the likelihood of students selecting healthier options increases

*“School foods programs have been historically underfunded, which results in strained staff capacity and more processed ingredients in meals.”*

Begin by advocating for [Healthy School Meals for All](#) — also known as universal



free school meals — allows all enrolled children in a school that operates the national school lunch program or school breakfast program to receive free breakfast and free lunch, regardless of their family’s income. The benefits not only improve the quality of school meals but reduce the free and reduced lunch stigma students face (some who choose not to eat because of this) and reduced paperwork needed for families and foodservice operations. As of the September 2023 school year, eight states have passed legislation allowing for healthy school meals for all: California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont. If the school district falls outside of these states, there are educational agencies that provide school meals at no charge to all students independent of state legislation. Canal Winchester Schools, a district in Ohio is one example who has taken this step to “support student’s well being, ensuring they have nutrition they need to stay focused and succeed in the classroom.”

*“As a food service director, how do I get my staff on board for promoting and selecting nutritious foods?”*

Provide food service staff with training using pre-existing programs that support increasing school meal participation and consumption of nutrient rich foods during the school day. The [Chef Ann Foundation](#) provides professional development and district support through a variety of programs.



## Parent Involvement

*“Parents are too busy. They do not have the time to support healthy eating and physical activity, let alone participate in a wellness committee.”*

As students and staff are being educated about growing and preparing nutritious food, there are opportunities for families to participate when it is convenient for them. Invite parents to join their children during lunch or have a community partner provide a cooking class for families by supplying recipes or healthy ingredients to take home. During school events and regularly scheduled meetings such as teacher/parent conference night, plan a healthy potluck dinner for families. If parents are looking to participate in the wellness policy process, plan meetings to accommodate their schedules or consider providing childcare.

## The Community

*“It takes time and effort to form community partnerships and actively involve community members in the wellness planning process.”*

Invite partner organizations to present their programs to students, staff and parents during a school district wellness meeting to determine how these organizations can actually save time by delivering the programs. These organizations are likely to offer programming at no cost to the district.

*“It is difficult to address specific issues regarding all aspects of the wellness policy when there are differing views from a wide range and large number of stakeholders.”*

Lead a [collective impact training](#) for the first meeting of the wellness committee. Consider asking members to do some required reading or online learning about the dynamics of a wellness committee. An agreement of meeting norms may be signed by each member before they participate each school year. As an individual stakeholder, consider the mindset that change takes time, value the work people do, and that the wellness committee might not be able to address all issues.

## Promotion

*“Promoting and sharing wellness policy plans and implementation is difficult.”*

Add a district communication department representative to the school district wellness policy committee. A district communication specialist has knowledge of publications and protocols and has built relationships with media outlets. Making wellness a priority demonstrates a commitment to positive school culture. Be sure to allow ample space to amplify the message on individual school and district websites, as they are highly visible to the public.



# LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY UNIVERSAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Attempting to navigate through official documents and food jargon while keeping up with educational trends is overwhelming let alone understanding how a wellness plan is developed! Defining often used titles and terms may help even those who are familiar with the wellness policy process to ensure all those involved are using terms everyone understands. Consistent language is recommended to help with devising a plan for whole-district efforts, equity in the resources available to all students and staff members across the district and in communicating and promoting a Local School Wellness Policy.

## Child Nutrition Reauthorization:

[Child Nutrition Reauthorization \(CNR\)](#) refers to Congress's process of making changes to the permanent statutes that authorize child nutrition programs, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants,

and Children (WIC), and related activities: the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, and (less often) Section 32 of the Act of August 24, 1935, which transfers funds to the child nutrition programs annually.

## Competitive Foods:

Foods and beverages sold separate from school meals to meet new nutrition standards are considered [competitive foods](#). They are sold in competition to the complete reimbursable school meal, these items include entrees, sides, snacks or drinks sold during the school day in vending machines, snack bars and a la carte lines. Federal competitive food standards are minimum standards. State agencies and LEAs have discretion to adopt more stringent standards for the types of food and beverages allowed to be sold. Competitive foods are also referred to as [Smart Snacks](#) in Schools.

## Copycat Snacks:

Food companies have reformulated common snack food products for sale in schools, which look similar to nutritionally different foods sold in stores. It is possible that these snacks create consumer confusion among students.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ):

Within the context of people, food and the environment, all four components are essential in terms of social, food, and environmental justice. The Global Schools Forum defines DEIJ in the following way:

**Diversity:** the presence of different identities, cultures and perspectives within organizations. These differences can include but are not limited to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, tribe, caste, nationality, socio-economic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective.

**Equity:** the act of ensuring that organizations have processes and programs that are impartial, fair, and aim to provide equal outcomes for every individual. Equity focuses on ensuring that every individual has what they need, understanding that we do not all start from the same place, and emphasizes that we must strive to adjust to address those imbalances.

**Inclusion:** the practice of ensuring belonging in organizations. This work strives to ensure that all team members feel comfortable and supported by their respective organizations and believe that they can be their authentic selves within the organization.

**Justice:** the process of dismantling systems and structures of historical and current oppression that create inequality and replacing them with proactive systems that promote fairness in policies, institutional practices, cultural messages and social norms for people of all identities and cultures.

## Edible Education:

[Edible education](#) is an approach to learning that uses food and cooking as a way to teach a range of topics, from science and math to history and culture. It can be implemented in different ways, such as cooking classes, school gardens, and food-based projects. The goal of edible education is to help individuals develop a lifelong love of learning and become more informed and empowered eaters.

## Food and Beverage Marketing:

The promotion and messaging by food companies for foods and beverages can be seen in schools on posters, the fronts of vending machines, textbook covers, and scoreboards. Local school wellness policies are required to address food and beverage marketing by allowing marketing and advertising of only those foods and beverages that meet the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards.

## Food and Nutrition Services (FNS):

[This agency](#) administers the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program to help ensure all children, particularly low-income children, receive breakfast and lunch while at school or childcare.

## Food Literacy:

According to the [Food Literacy Center](#), it is understanding the impact of your food



choices on our health, environment and economy – and understanding that these impacts are not experienced equitably.

### **Free and Reduced Meals:**

Meals served at no charge to children whose household income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines. Children are entitled to pay a reduced price if their household income is above 130% but at or below 185% of these guidelines. Children are automatically eligible for free school meals if their household receives food stamps, benefits under the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations or, in most cases, benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

### **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010:**

Congress passed the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010 with bipartisan support to help ensure every American child has access to the nutrition they need to grow into healthy adults. One goal of the law was to help reduce America's childhood obesity epidemic and reduce health risks for America's children by helping schools across the country produce balanced meals so children had access to healthy foods during the school day. USDA based the new school meal standards on independent, expert recommendations from the Institute of Medicine to ensure kids are being fed healthy food while they are at school.

### **Healthy Foods:**

As defined by the World Health Organization, healthy foods help to protect against malnutrition in all forms, as well as non-communicable diseases including diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer.

### **Local Education Agency (LEA):**

A school district, public board of education or other public or private nonprofit authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public or private nonprofit elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district or other political subdivision of a state.

### **Local School Wellness Committee/ Local School Wellness Policy Committee:**

A diverse group of school and community members who develop initiatives aimed at improving and maintaining the health and wellness of students. Establishing and implementing a wellness policy is either one task or the main driver of the committee's work. The Wellness Committee may serve as the main steering group while a Wellness Policy committee may be solely focused on writing policy. A wellness committee, also called a council, alliance, or health advisory is a name often used by small districts or individual schools.

### **Local School Wellness Policy:**

A written document of official policies that guides a local educational agency (LEA) or school district's efforts to establish a school environment that promotes students' health, well-being and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity. It is recommended that Local School Wellness Policy is used as a lever to provide equity throughout the district and identify the school district's accountability for implementation according to USDA requirements.

### **National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP):**

Both are federally assisted child nutrition meal programs operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. They provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free breakfast and lunches to children each school day.

### **Nutrition Education:**

According to the Encyclopedia of Food Security and Sustainability the definition of [nutrition education](#) is defined as strategies and environmental-based learning to encourage the adoption of healthier, sustainable food choices and eating patterns. Nutrition education contributes to enhancing nutrition security and the understanding of food literacy.

### **Nutrition Security:**

According to the article [Prioritizing Nutrition Security in the U.S.](#), nutrition security means consistent access, availability and affordability of foods and beverages that promote well being, prevent diseases and if needed treat diseases particularly among racial/ethnic minority populations lower income populations and rural and remote populations including tribal communities and insular areas.

### **Nutrition Standards for School Meals:**

The [standards](#) are a detailed collection of documents regarding milk, whole grains, sodium and a wide range of other meal considerations and requirements.

### **Nutritious Foods:**

Food that in the context where it is consumed and by the individual that consumes it, provides beneficial nutrients (e.g. vitamins, major and trace minerals, essential amino acids, essential fatty acids, dietary fiber) and minimizes potentially harmful elements (e.g. antinutrients, quantities of saturated fats and sugars). For example, a granola bar may be considered healthy because it contains healthy ingredients but it may not be considered [nutritious](#) because it also contains high levels of sugar.

### **Offer vs. Serve:**

This is a [provision](#) in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) that allows students to decline some of the food offered. The goals of OVS are to reduce food waste in the school meals programs while permitting students to decline foods they do not intend to eat. An unintended consequence is that with or without nutrition education, children may not receive the necessary nutrients needed for academic readiness or disease and illness resistance.

### **Processed Foods and Ultra-processed Foods:**

Processed foods are those with added vitamins or minerals and may include added sugar. Ultra-processed foods are foods that have not only been processed, but have also had other substances like salt, sugar, fat, preservatives and food dyes added to them for flavor and to make them shelf-stable. Ultra-processed foods pose more health risks.



### Reimbursable Meal:

This is [federal cash assistance](#) including advances paid or payable to participating schools for a single priced meal unit that offers all of the USDA daily required meal pattern components for each age/grade group served in the minimum required amounts. Quantities vary by age/grade group, but components remain constant and necessary for all student meals claimed for reimbursement.

### School District Sustainability Plan:

A plan created by individual districts that addresses buildings, transportation and safety measures. These efforts can be combined with the Local School Wellness Policy to produce a collective effort to reduce harmful health-related issues.

### School Food Authority (SFA):

The SFA is another name for the food service or dining services department and is the governing body which is responsible for the administration of one or more schools; has the legal authority to operate the program therein or be otherwise approved by FNS to operate the nutrition programs.

### School Meal Components:

The USDA requires those participating in federal assisted school National School Lunch Program must include 1) meat/ Meat Alternative, 2) Grain/Bread, Fruit, 3) Fruit, 5) Vegetables, 5) Milk. [Salad Bars to Schools](#) can include a full salad with all five components at the salad bar. Tofu and soy meats do not count in any of the categories.

### School Wellness Policy:

Refers to a single school policy or plan,

whereas a Local School Wellness Policy implies a whole district approach in the title. This group, representing a single school, may also be called a health council or alliance.

### SNAP-Ed:

A federally funded evidence-based grant program that helps people use SNAP dollars to teach them how to cook healthy meals and lead physically active lifestyles. [SNAP-Ed](#) partners with state and local agencies to implement nutrition education and obesity prevention programs that promote healthy food choices and physical activity.

### Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):

The process of developing and using social and emotional skills and may be referred to as socio-emotional learning or social-emotional literacy. States across the nation have adopted these types of standards that can be found on state education agencies' websites.

### Standards-Based Learning:

A system of instruction, assessment, grading and reporting based on students demonstrating understanding of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn. Examples include state education agency common core requirements and Next Generation Science Standards.

### State Agency (SA):

SAs ensure the school district complies with the wellness policy requirements through the Triennial Assessment. The SA or state department of education provides technical assistance to the school district for complying to the requirements. This is where the office of the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Department who administers the FNS program presides.

### Team Nutrition:

[Team Nutrition](#) is an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Services to support the child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance for food service operations; nutrition education for children and their caregivers; and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

### Triennial Assessment:

The document a district produces every three years that demonstrates the district's compliance with the wellness policy, progress made in attaining the goals of the wellness policy and how the wellness policy compares to model wellness policies.

### United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

[This agency](#) provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural

development, nutrition, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management.

### USDA CDC Healthy Schools:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) works with states, school systems, communities and national partners to prevent chronic disease and promote the health and well-being of children and adolescents in schools. The CDC is an extensive hub of resources and houses national health indexes.

### Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC):

[The CDC's framework](#) addresses health in schools, is student-centered and emphasizes the role of the community in supporting the school, the connections between health, academic achievement and the importance of evidence-based school policies.



# CHAPTER 2

## *The Local School Wellness Committee*

### **What is a Local School Wellness Policy Committee?**

Optimally, a Local School Wellness Committee is an action-oriented, diverse and inclusive group who focuses on the health and well-being of a school community. A school wellness committee consists of six to twelve members and includes school staff, students, community partners and organizations, as well as other pertinent stakeholders. The Local School Wellness Committee's primary role is to implement the district wellness policy and lead other health-related initiatives. This group should meet at least four times during the school year. Sub-committees, teams or task forces may be needed to write the policy or fulfill other responsibilities such as funding wellness related projects and programs.

### **What are the Responsibilities of the Wellness Committee?**

Wellness committee members are tasked with managing all aspects of the wellness policy that have the potential to change and improve health and wellness outcomes of the school community, which is both overwhelming and exhilarating. To manage this tall order it is recommended that there are additional task forces or teams dedicated to the responsibilities that cannot be solely carried out by the Local School Wellness Committee. By doing so, responsibilities can be allocated to members who will be most effective during wellness meetings. The following list of responsibilities will be helpful in having potential members understand the scope of the work and also how to delegate tasks:

- Equitably provide support to all schools in the district in developing a healthier environment
- Create the mission and goals for the Local School Wellness Policy to align with priorities of the district's strategic plan, goals and guardrails, sustainability action plan and city green sustainability initiatives legislation and regulations
- Be involved with writing or updating a new district LSWP as either the wellness committee or create a task force to be directly involved in solely composing the wellness policy
- Recruit parents, community members including city officials, and partner organizations involvement in developing a healthier environment district-wide and in surrounding neighborhoods
- Tap into citywide and partner joint funding and leverage resources for student and staff wellness and/or create a task force to identify and write grants for implementing wellness infrastructure and programs
- Plan the implementation of projects and programming for students and staff
- Prepare and participate in administrative reviews and submit the triennial report
- Conduct district surveys such as the Wellsat to identify specific district needs for both student and staff wellness
- Evaluate projects, programming and policy efforts by benchmarking short and long term strategies and goals







- Notify the public about the wellness policy and any updates to the written document
- Stay current with federal, state and local legislation that affects what is required related to nutrition and other health standards

are collected, they may be used in the triennial assessment report to meet the requirements in federal regulations. Check the appropriate [state agency](#) for specific information regarding an administrative review. This is an example of requirements from a state's department of education administrative review:

- Provide current Local School Wellness Policy
- Ensure minimum required elements are written into the LSWP
- Provide documentation showing public awareness of the LSWP
- Provide documentation explaining when and how the LSWP is reviewed and updated
- Who is involved in reviewing and updating the LSWP

## Onsite Administrative Review by the State Agency

USDA compliance of the Local School Wellness Policy is the responsibility of the Local Education Agency or school district. Accordingly, the final rule clarifies that the responsibility is at the LEA level rather than the School Food Authority (SFA) level and codifies the state agency's monitoring responsibilities. State agencies conduct administrative reviews once every five years. When the following items

- What is their relationship with the SFA
- How are potential stakeholders made aware of their ability to participate in the development, review, updates, and implementation of the LSWP
- Provide a copy of the most recent assessment on the implementation of the LSWP
- How does the public know about the results of the most recent assessment on the implementation of the LSWP

## The Triennial Assessment

The Triennial Assessment must be submitted to the USDA every three years. The purpose of this report is to demonstrate progress implementing the policies stated in the Local School Wellness Policy. At least once every three years, the following is measured and made available to the public:

- The extent to which schools comply with the LSWP
- The extent to which the LSWP compares to a [model local school wellness policy](#)
- The progress made in attaining the goals of the LSWP

This is an example of a completed [form](#) that can serve as both an assessment tool and triennial assessment report template to meet the requirements of federal regulations and prepare for the administrative review. These reports assist the wellness committee by helping them assess compliance by schools and determine progress toward benchmarks, objectives and goals. Developing a wellness policy with measurable objectives and

realistic benchmarks will determine the success of the implemented projects and programs.

## Public Notification of Policy Information

LEAs or schools must notify households on an annual basis of the availability of the LSWP and provide information that enables interested households to obtain additional details. It is strongly recommended that LEAs make concerted efforts to ensure that the local school wellness policy and any public announcement related to the policy includes any updates to the policy and is available in the languages that represent the school community. The wellness committee must retain the following documentation:





- Written local school wellness policy
- Documentation demonstrating compliance with community involvement requirements
- Documentation of the Triennial Assessment of the local school wellness policy
- Documentation to demonstrate compliance with the annual public notification requirements

## Funding the Implementation of Projects and Programs

The wellness committee can recruit and appoint a task force to identify, write and manage grants based on the needs of the school district. It is advised that the school district grant writer, in addition to partner organizations who may already have city, state or federal funding available participate in a wellness committee or specialized task force. A customized Local School Wellness Plan will be an asset when applying for grants and can be included in documents showcasing the district's commitment to wellness and sustainability. The task force can consider existing funds that might be reallocated to better align with the school district's commitment to wellness.

School district departments can share the cost of hiring a school garden coordinator between the facilities, curriculum and food service departments since their responsibilities fall within the scope of a wellness policy requirements. Adding members from the business community — especially from a hospital — will increase the task force's chance of identifying multiple funding mechanisms to allow for wellness initiatives to be cost-effective and sustainable.



Funding through Parent Teacher Organizations and working with the school district's education foundation (or establishing one) can present fundraising opportunities while attending to health and wellness of the school community at the same time. Sponsoring an annual district-wide health expo is an example of a funding stream that could annually provide funds for implementing projects and programs while promoting community engagement in wellness related activities.

## Who Can be a Member of the Local Wellness School Committee?

Each committee member has a contribution to make in determining what policies should be included in the Local School Wellness Policy. While

some may have specific roles, such as a garden coordinator or physical education teacher, others may focus on issues such as nutrition security or climate action. As an internal or external stakeholder, explore becoming a member of the LSWP committee by connecting with the wellness committee leader to:

- Inquire about members of the current wellness committee
- Ask to observe a committee meeting
- Discuss opportunities for participating in the wellness policy and implementation process

The roles and the composition of the wellness committee often depends on the size of the school district and its wellness priorities. For instance, if nutritious food access is a priority for the local education agency or school district, the city or county health department would be an essential committee member. Some titles or roles do not exist within certain school districts, while many staff members may

be taking on multiple roles. The Whole School Whole Community Whole Child and the Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice frameworks referenced in Chapter 1 and in the appendix of this tool kit can help drive decisions about who should be represented on the wellness committee.

## Who Should Lead the Local School Wellness Committee?

Individual school districts are most qualified to identify who is the best candidate for local school wellness policy leadership as size, resources and needs vary greatly. Often it is the food service director who is assigned to fill the leadership role of recruiting members, planning wellness meetings and ensuring the compliance of the Local School Wellness Policy. In addition to serving in this role, the food service/nutrition director oversees food service operations in all schools or sites and administers





the school meal program in accordance with local, state and federal policies. Understandably, this may result in less focus on the wellness policy committee due to maintaining their regular job responsibilities.

Even though the food service or the nutrition supervisor most often serve as the leader of the wellness committee it is worth noting that although they are essential to providing child nutrition program expertise, they most likely do not possess a background in



education. To reduce the challenges and responsibilities that may be beyond their capabilities of running a food service operation, it is recommended that the sustainability or wellness manager fulfill the duties in leading the committee. If these positions do not exist, other administrative personnel such as a curriculum manager could co-lead with the food service director.

Those asked to lead the wellness committee should consult with the school board or superintendent to evaluate if leadership training is necessary for effectively managing a group of individuals who represent a variety of different backgrounds, priorities and goals. This type of training most likely will be available through the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) within each state's agency or state education department.

## Building a Collaborative and Diverse Wellness Committee

Potential and existing committee members should represent the diversity of the school district student population. Recruiting and retaining new members is time consuming and challenging but essential to achieving positive outcomes for students, staff, and the school community. Practices can be established to allow all stakeholders an equal opportunity to participate in the wellness policy process:

- Meeting times are convenient for all members
- Child care is provided
- Nutritious snacks are available
- Members are paid a stipend for participating



Learn about the steps to forming a committee built on diversity, equity and inclusion [here](#). No matter what method is employed for selecting members to join the wellness committee, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) can be used to inspire meaningful conversation for existing and potential members to describe what each of these terms mean to

them. More information about the DEIJ framework appears in Chapter 1 of this tool kit.

The wellness committee chairperson or leader should determine the need for a [collective impact](#) model for organizing the wellness committee to effectively facilitate collaborative meetings. These [resources](#) from the Collective Impact Forum can give wellness committee leaders and members guidance on how collective impact can activate change. Collaboration — when school and community voices are central — presents a wealth of opportunities to align priorities and share positive outcomes for cities and regions, such as expanded green space, increased food access and for tapping into additional funding mechanisms. Having representatives from the school district, municipalities and partner organizations participate in the wellness policy process increases the success of achieving the desired outcomes of an LSWP. The following should be considered when employing a collect impact model:

- Design and implement the initiative with a priority placed on equity
- Include community members in the collaborative
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve
- Cultivate leaders with unique systems leadership skills
- Focus on program and system strategies
- Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect across participants
- Customize for local context





## Inviting Members to Join the Local School Wellness Policy Committee

Whoever is assigned or appointed to become the leader of the wellness committee, the first task will most likely be determining who is returning as a member, how many members are needed to fill vacancies, and what type of members need to be invited or recruited. The current membership may decide to conduct an application process to establish there is a balance of required, essential and perhaps recommended stakeholders. Here are some ideas for the committee leader(s) and existing members to initiate the process of recruiting new members:

- Reach out personally to potential required and essential members
- Send out a personalized invitation [letter](#)

- Announce committee openings on the main page of the school and district website which also includes responsibilities, time commitment, and possibly an application or survey
- Connect with local parents, students, community groups, councils, and associations to identify a representative from each organization
- Identify existing school or school district partners based on potential programming needs of the district

## Required, Essential and Recommended Stakeholders

According to the USDA the wellness policy requires a collaborative effort between:

- Parents
- Students
- School Administrators
- Food Service Personnel
- Physical Education Teacher
- School Health Professional
- School Board Member
- The Public (organization, community member or city official)

Ideally, the wellness committee should include members who can address the priorities of the school community. A community-staff-student survey may be in order to identify what are the top health and wellness issues plaguing the district. Based on the results, the wellness committee can be formed by recruiting members who have lived-experiences for each of the identified problem areas. By identifying where the essential and recommended stakeholders can support the implementation of the plan will increase the effectiveness of the wellness committee and create accountability for all members.

### Essential

The following stakeholders are considered to be essential for determining what policies are needed for their particular school community:

**Students (from existing district advisory or student council):** *Students are the most important stakeholder.* Involvement in the policy-making process allows students to be change makers regarding issues that effect them the most. Learning how to engage in civil proceedings, using persuasive writing techniques and advocating for real-life issues that are meaningful to them will solidify the

success of policy implementation. These activities can easily be embedded into core subject areas and then presented at committee meetings along with input from other members.







**District food service and nutrition director:** In order to impact the school food environment, the food service director and cafeteria staff are key players in helping the school wellness committee understand federal and state requirements and making important changes to the food and beverage offerings within the school district. They play a critical role in implementing healthy eating programs and managing the food serving process to ensure a clean, safe and healthy eating environment.

**District administrators (principals and other internal departments such as facilities, sustainability and wellness managers, student safety, community outreach):** Administrative support is instrumental for ongoing efforts to improve school health and to support engagement. Principals (representing elementary, middle, and high school) and/or other district administrators should be included and informed about planning activities. Administrators can also help identify how district wellness can be integrated into other school initiatives to support the development of the whole child.

**Educators (science, health, physical education, family consumer science, career and technology, intervention specialists, agriculture and culinary pathways, STEM, STEAM):** Teachers should be included and informed in order to facilitate health and wellness activities. They can support the implementation process by utilizing the WSCC model. Staff members are instrumental for implementing professional development or training that is needed across the district.

**School garden coordinator:** Whether there is a district coordinator or several coordinators who oversee the school garden program, they are essential in



contributing what is needed for food and nutrition education. As a member of the wellness committee, a school garden coordinator can effectively collaborate with the curriculum and food service departments to make valuable connections between growing and consuming nutritious meals for students.

**Curriculum managers (including professional development and career and technology education):** These specialists have the expertise to integrate standards-based environmental and nutrition education into district curriculum maps. They can support the implementation process to improve the development of the whole child and are instrumental in determining what professional development or training is needed for district-wide implementation.

**Partner organizations:** Community organizations and nonprofits are crucial in bringing their work into schools to not only meet their outreach goals but to lessen the burden of committee members who are held accountable to plan and administer policies. They provide educational programs to support the implementation of a wellness plan often free of charge or have their own funding to support school district programs.

**Student health services (nurse, counselor, social worker, psychologist):** The school nurse is known as the school health “specialist” that provides seamless provision of comprehensive health services to students. Even though the school nurse may serve part-time at some schools, they can serve as a team member in providing preventive services, early identification of problems, interventions, and referrals to foster health and educational success.



The school counselor provides counseling, psychological and social services to support the development of the whole child. School counselors play a critical role to provide input and resources to build a healthy social-emotional climate to support student health and academic achievement.

**Parent/caregiver group (parent teacher organization or parent teacher association):** Parent and family involvement is critical to ensure school wellness efforts will reach beyond the school walls. Parents and family members serve as natural advocates for students and can support spreading the word to other parents and help gain support for school wellness efforts. Their involvement also fosters partnerships among schools, family and community groups.

**City and community partners (city officials, health department, food policy council, waste management, active transportation, environment):** Health care professionals and other partners can provide data about health-related issues that are affecting students within the community. They can also provide resources and/or services to support improving student health and whole-district green sustainability efforts.

**Community members (neighborhood councils, coalitions, alliances):** These members often have access to community resources and lived experiences that are valuable to crafting policy language and supporting local projects and programs. Local groups are often eager to work with schools.



## Recommended

**School board members:** School board members can offer district-level policy support and advocacy. They are often engaged with the district over a long period of time, so their involvement may increase the sustainability of the school wellness committee efforts.

**School staff members (resources coordinator/community liaison, intervention aides):** staff members who may not be certified to teach have the important role of building positive relationships with parents and community members. They have the ability to connect educators with community programs and events that support wellness.

**Before, after school, summer out-of-school time organizations (parks and recreation, community learning centers, community-based afterschool services):** Out-of-school-time (OST) staff provide physical activity opportunities, enrichment programs, and snack options to continue student wellness before or after school hours. It's important to involve OST staff to ensure students are receiving the same healthy options and messaging conveyed during school hours.

**Higher education institutions (environmental internships, university extension-farm to school, SNAP-Ed, school gardens, master gardeners):** If school districts are connected to a college or university, the possibilities of implementing programs to support all aspects of school district wellness and sustainability efforts are expanded. School districts who sponsor internships and co-ops related to nutrition and the environment are adding to their capacity to ensure equitable access to wellness

programs, green infrastructure and curriculum related resources.

**Elected Officials:** Most often this is a city council member who sits on a committee that has aligned priorities that include youth, education, food access and green workforce development. These individuals and their affiliations can be identified by accessing the city website. Check for a city office of sustainability which may have goals that mirror a wellness policy.

**Local business community (including hospitals):** Businesses have a stake in helping young people be healthy and successful in school so they will continue this success in their future job or career. Businesses can provide resources such as funding or sponsorships that can be leveraged to financially support wellness initiatives.

**District communications:** The status of wellness policy implementation should be communicated consistently through the district website, school newsletters, school websites and on social media. The district communication team can create media releases and talk with the media when they are covering events.

**School district grant manager/writer:** Invite the school district grant writer, perhaps on an ad hoc basis, to identify available city, state, and federal funding for wellness projects and programs.

**District human resources representative:** If there is not a district wellness coordinator, most likely a human resource professional is needed to establish staff wellness related opportunities such as health checks and exercise programs. The benefits of this are two-fold; staff wellness programs attract new teachers and serve as a method for educators to model healthy behaviors.



# CHAPTER 3

## *A Wellness Policy Network*

Because of the flexibility the USDA allows for developing a wellness policy that specifically meets the needs of the education agency or school district, a wellness committee would benefit by coordinating a network of internal and external partnerships. No matter the size of the school or school district, the following structure is recommended in order to facilitate effective meetings with a diverse representation of stakeholders. Each year may present a different set of circumstances. At the beginning of each school year the wellness committee leaders should review committee membership based on changes in school district priorities, goals or strategies. Membership parameters, such as term limits, can be instituted to allow opportunities for additional stakeholders to participate.

A wellness committee should be composed of approximately 12 individuals, where the majority of members are considered “required” or essential and the rest from the “recommended” category. (See chapter 2 of this tool kit for more details.) Four wellness committee meetings per school year is recommended, but more meetings may be needed if a new or updated wellness policy is required. (The wellness policy must be updated every three years.) Recommended members can be ad hoc and invited to meetings as needed.

An example of a wellness committee plan for a particular school year and meeting agenda template is found [here](#). At the first wellness committee meeting, establish group norms, decision-making protocols and agreements regarding participation. Also consider the following:



- Determine participation requirements. Internal stakeholders may be asked to select a substitute to attend in their place if they cannot attend a meeting
- Set short- and long-term goals, including strategies for implementation and benchmarks
- Establish a school-year timeline for achieving goals. An additional task force or team may be created if needed

The following committee structures are recommended based on the scope of the work, as well as committee leader and committee members’ capacity to maximize

the effectiveness of producing and implementing a customized wellness plan.

### **The District Wellness Committee**

This committee structure engages required or essential committee members who will perform all functions to meet the USDA requirements for Local School Wellness Policy. A description of a wellness network follows which demonstrates a school district’s commitment to the health and wellness of staff and students while facilitating a plan for equitable implementation. This network is illustrated in a chart on page 46.





## The Writing Wellness Policy Subcommittee

This group should be comprised of six to eight representatives from the district wellness committee and additional essential or recommended members based whose expertise is needed. The subcommittee composes the LSWP based on what the full committee decides will be school district policy. The need for a sub-committee often is determined by the size of the school district. Each of these members represent the components of the wellness policy, nutrition, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.

## The Wellness Joint Funding Subcommittee

Similar to the policy writing subcommittee, six to eight members are recommended to participate in this group. During the course of writing or updating the LSWP new infrastructure, projects and programs may be identified that require funding. This group can be dedicated to ensuring there is equitable distribution of resources for all students and staff. The group's responsibilities include producing budgets, identifying funding, grant writing and reporting. This is an example of collective impact where entities are able to pool their resources to fund wellness initiatives rather than a school district trying to accomplish this on its own.

## Individual School Wellness and Outdoor Learning Teams

This is a team functioning at the individual school level that is responsible for working with the staff and students to nurture and maintain the designated outdoor learning spaces.

## Student Advisory Groups

Inviting students that are already in existing groups from school councils, clubs or organizations will reduce the extra time needed to recruit them. Educators can recommend younger students and suggest ways they can participate outside of the scheduled meeting times.

## Beyond the Wellness Committee

Opportunities for involvement and advocacy exist beyond being a member of an internal school district committee.

- **Student:** Start a group or club with a sustainability and/or wellness focus
- **Parent:** Join the parent/teacher association at the school to advocate for funds to support health and wellness programs and to plan events centered on community
- **Individual:** Offer to speak or present at a committee meeting about a topic or opportunity committee members may not be aware of
- **Individual:** Contact schools directly to inquire about wellness-related wellness volunteer opportunities

- **Individual:** Contact state and local governments about how to participate in advocacy efforts related to Universal Free School Meals and other health and wellness legislation
- **Environmental Education Partner:** Contact the curriculum department to inquire about how to provide wellness related programming
- **Higher Education Institution:** Contact school departments where an intern could be placed that would increase the district's capacity for maintaining programs and physical spaces
- **National and Local Partner Organization:** Contact the curriculum department to offer curricular resources, virtual or in-person professional development and training to district staff members
- **Regional Planning Groups:** Encourage the inclusion of the Local School Wellness policy in regional climate action plans

## Summary

By exploring the broad implications of the Local School Wellness Policy and the dynamics of a diverse wellness committee, school district stakeholders are better equipped to maximize net benefits including potential economic, environmental, public health and safety effects, distributive impacts and equity that will directly benefit all students and staff members, which also reaches the community at large. The writing wellness policy tools in the next chapter are designed to inspire inclusive conversations, present opportunities and ignite action.



School District Wellness Network	District Wellness Committee	Writing Wellness Policy Subcommittee	The Wellness Joint Funding Subcommittee	School Teams	Student Groups
Students	X	X	X	X	X
Parent/Teacher Organizations (parents & caregivers)	X		X		
District Food & Nutrition Services	X	X	X		
District Wellness or Sustainability Supervisor	X	X	X		
Student Services	X	X			
District Curriculum & Career Readiness	X	X	X		
District Facilities & Maintenance Supervisor	X	X			
Science Educators	X			X	
Physical Education Educators	X			X	
Intervention Specialists	X				
School Counselors	X			X	
School Nurses	X				
Health Department Staff Members	X	X	X		
Garden Educators	X			X	
PreK-12 Principals	X	X			
District School Board Member	X		X		
Elected City Official	X				
Community Councils Partners	X		X		
Partner Organizations	X		X	X	
District Communications Staff Member	X				
Business Partners	X		X		
District Grant Writer	X		X		

# CHAPTER 4

## Writing Wellness Policy Tools

### How to use the Tools

The USDA allows for flexibility in customizing a district wellness policy and the tools that follow are meant to be used

by the wellness committee to facilitate collaboration. Recommendations for implementing projects and programming with additional resources are included with each tool.





# Tool #1

## Writing Local School Wellness Policy Worksheet

This worksheet is intended to provide guidance during the process of reviewing, writing or updating a plan that goes beyond the minimum requirements. Prior to writing or updating the policy, information should be gathered about what is already happening in the district. Some projects and programming may already be in place but they are not included in the current policy. This worksheet can be used in various ways including having wellness committee members use it as an onboarding tool prior to the first meeting or it can be used for a workshop experience during a meeting as a group or in smaller break-out groups. A [sample wellness policy template](#) for writing a new and/or improved policy and the [Guidance for Updating a Policy](#) may be useful depending on what the committee is working on. No one boilerplate wellness policy fits all school districts, however

these two examples provide inspiration for what a final copy might look like which can also be shared with the public.

[Providence Public School District](#)  
[Austin Independent School District](#)

### Writing the Wellness Policy Introduction

What are the benefits for students, school staff, and the community who are going to be considered when reviewing, updating or creating a wellness policy that reflects the priorities of the district? How will the policy align with district priorities, goals, strategic planning, and the continuous improvement plan? What set of state or national standards will be applied to the policy? Here are a few additional areas of interest that may be included:

- Academic performance
- Attendance
- Community involvement
- Mental health and social skills

- Equity and access to nutritious local food organic when available
- Disease prevention
- Supports the local economy
- Nutrition security
- Environmental and sustainability issues
- Other benefits specific to the school district
- Climate resiliency

## Introduction

### Components of a District Wellness Policy

The USDA minimum requirements of a Local School Wellness Policy are outlined by the final rule found [here](#). Based on the school district's continuous improvement or strategic plan, what additional topics (this is not an exhaustive list) should be considered to help the district meet its goals? A plan for implementation and who will implement it should accompany each requirement.

- Professional development
- District-wide outdoor learning and school gardens
- Healthy physical environment
- Social emotional learning (SEL)
- Mental health
- Screen time
- Other student risk behaviors
- Community engagement
- [More time for school meals and recess](#)
- Food and material waste
- Staff wellness
- Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)
- Safety



## Components

Will the wellness policy include a statement about DEI? If so, what will it describe in terms of those on the committee, the staff and students it

will serve? Consider race, ethnicity, gender identity and special needs for those who deliver and receive education, including food service personnel.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Statement

## District Staff Wellness Plan

[Creating a culture of wellness](#) for school employees that is aligned with student wellness allows staff members to model healthy behavior while improving their own mental and physical well-being. Gather data and information to determine the nutrition and physical activity needs of school staff members and assess the availability of existing school employee wellness activities and resources. The [CDC Worksite Wellness Scorecard](#) is a great way to access your school's wellness program. Remind staff about employee assistance programs with access to resources, referrals, and counseling. Here are some other ideas:

- Recognize staff contributions and achievements and celebrate milestones with others

- Hold exercise challenges (e.g., steps challenge, exercise minutes challenge)
- Find and share stress management and mental health resources and information
- Build in physical activity breaks during the school day (can be done along with students)
- Have mindfulness meditation breaks for staff and students during the school day
- Provide or attend professional development on social-emotional skills, trauma-informed approaches (understanding the impact of trauma on the individual), and resilience

## District Staff Wellness Plan

## Assessment Collecting and Sharing Data

If the wellness policy is being updated or written from scratch, how will the committee develop an understanding

of the district's strengths as well as what improvements are needed? Consider using the [WellSAT 3.0 tool](#) as a tool for writing policy, after it is implemented and in preparing an administrative review and the triennial report.



- The Triennial Assessment is required to be submitted to the USDA every three years. Where is the district in the cycle to submit the report?
- What type of documentation, both qualitative and quantitative can be collected?
- Throughout the year, how will new policies be recognized and made available to the public? How will the public be notified each year, using culturally and linguistically appropriate language?

## Assessment

## Food and Nutrition Services

Beyond the minimum requirements set by the USDA, additional food-related policies can encourage students to eat fruits and vegetables while reducing or eliminating ultra-processed food. Consider the following list a jumping-off point for additional food-related policies or ideas your committee could bring to life.

- Culturally appropriate meals
- Food fundraisers
- Food and beverage marketing
- Ultra-processed food
- Organic food

- Vegetarian and vegan options
- Local food procurement
- Reducing food waste
- Defined integrated pest management surrounding school gardens
- Stigma of free/reduced meals

The USDA Farm-to-School program can be a useful resource for identifying how to incorporate local food into the school meal program. The Farm-to-School program supports local farmers and producers while leveraging the regional economy. Consider locality of certain foods such as fish. Check into [One Fish Foundation](#) and their educational resources [here](#).

## Food and Nutrition Services

### Nutrition and Edible Education

The [Edible Schoolyard Project](#) is a wealth of information for teaching and learning how to prepare nutritious food. This resource will activate ideas for standard-based learning activities related to cultural appropriate dishes and meals. Edible education can be done in conjunction with Family Consumer Science and Culinary Science educators whose curriculum involves food safety and knife skills.

- How will school gardens or the plan to implement a school-garden program in the district provide food and nutrition educational opportunities for students?
- What professional development opportunities and curricula options are available to support school gardens, and how are the activities integrated into individual schools? [Click here](#) to read more about the SFUSA Good and Clean Garden Curriculum

- What connections can be made to students growing produce in gardens to consuming the same type of food during school meals? Check at the [Whole Kids Foundation Garden-to-Cafeteria tool kit](#) for making these types of connections
- What is needed to improve school kitchen infrastructure and cafeterias to decrease the amount of ultra processed foods and increase scratch food cooking?
- How are nutritious foods being promoted while marketing for items such as ice cream and pizza being downplayed or eliminated?
- How might food waste and single-use items be minimized by allowing students additional time to eat school meals, compost food scraps, and consider the logistics of reusable or recyclable materials?



## Nutrition and Edible Education

### Marketing of Nutritious Foods

Big food companies are allowed, if permitted by the food service department, to market food and beverages on the school campus during the school day if those foods and beverages meet competitive foods standards. The marketing of products on the exterior of vending machines, through posters, menu boards, coolers, trash cans and other food service equipment, as well as cups used for beverage dispensing, are all subject to LSWP standards. Under these standards, the logos and products marketed in these areas and items are required to meet the competitive foods standards for foods sold in schools.

- What is the difference between healthy food, nutritious foods, processed and ultra-processed

foods and what are the potential benefits versus harmful effects of each?

- How can fruit and vegetables be promoted throughout the school day to educate and compete with other unhealthy items such as ice cream, chips and sweetened beverages?
- Is water readily available in all parts of the school building and especially in the cafeteria?
- What are the benefits of eliminating marketing items that entice students to buy a Big Food company's products?
- How can nutritious foods be marketed in place of processed foods that have little nutritional value?

## Marketing of Nutritious Foods

### Physical Activity

Explore [The Walking Classroom](#) and the resource [Spark Physical Education Program](#) for getting students up from their seats and moving throughout the school day. At this Action for Healthy Kids [link](#) there are videos, activities and tip sheets for improving student's physical and emotional health.

- What changes in school schedules can be recommended for accommodating more movement and exercise by staff and students during the school day?
- What nutritious food options are available to school athletes to maximize their physical performance?

### Physical Activity



## Outdoor Learning and K-12 Environmental Education

[Children and Nature Network](#) supports and mobilizes leaders, educators, activists, practitioners and parents working to increase safe and equitable access to the natural world for all.

- What needs to be done to provide green schoolyards (outdoor classrooms, naturescapes, school gardens, agriculture education) for allowing all students to maximize outdoor learning opportunities and the physical and mental benefits associated with the connection to nature?

- Are there practices and equipment in place to encourage active transportation for students and staff to walk or ride to and from school?
- Do students have sufficient recess time to socialize with other students, and does the timing of recess encourage them to take full advantage of eating a complete meal? What changes might need to be made so students do not rush through lunch or are not hungry enough to eat but rather just “snack” instead?
- Are there measures put in place to accommodate students with special needs to ensure equity and if this is not the case, what improvements need to be implemented?

access to outdoor spaces, experiences and learning. By including both nature-based and environmental education, students achieve educational learning standards while becoming stewards of their environment to offset problematic issues such as climate change. Learn more about Thriving Communities and the Action Challenge [here](#).

- Do all schools in the district have a safe and usable space to accommodate the number of students able to play and learn outside? If not, what physical improvements need to be made to ensure equity across the district?
- Identify if there are chemicals being applied both inside and outside the school that are potentially harmful to both students and staff. What alternative practices or products can be used to mitigate health risks? Check out Beyond Pesticides to

get informed about [hazards and alternatives](#) to pesticide use on school grounds.

- What practices could be put in place to test, improve, or replace HVAC systems to decrease the transmission of illnesses?
- How can the district educate and promote preserving the environment to reduce the amount of damage and littering on school campuses and surrounding neighborhoods?
- How can districts contribute to solving environmental problems such as climate change by adding tree canopies and/or storm water infrastructures to school grounds?
- How can teaching and learning address food and environmental justice?

## Outdoor Learning

## Installing and Maintaining Healthy School Campus Environments

The vast benefits to outdoor learning according to the Children and Nature Network are illustrated within the

numerous resources available [here](#). The evidence is clear: spending time outdoors, in nature, is essential for children’s healthy development. From improving academic and social-emotional learning, to supporting physical and mental health, children thrive when they have frequent

## Installing and Maintaining Healthy School Campus Environments



## Curriculum Integration and Professional Development

What professional development opportunities are available internally – from community partners or universities – to provide staff with the tools and resources necessary to implement nutrition education, outdoor learning, and more? How can the curriculum department offer professional learning that also satisfies certification and recertification of teaching licenses?

Identify state or national learning standards in the following content areas that can be aligned with the district wellness policy, such as:

- Sciences
- Social Studies (student participation as a member of the wellness committee could be connected to school work)

- Reading, Language Arts, English
- Environmental literacy
- Foreign Language
- Art, Music, Theater
- Intervention
- Career pathways, Family Consumer Science, agriculture education, culinary education
- Physical Education
- STEM, STEAM, and project-based learning
- The whole child
- Social-emotional learning
- After-school, break day, and summer school programming

## Curriculum Integration and Professional Development

# Tool #2

## Reference Guide for Writing a Local School Wellness Policy

The reference guide can be used to inspire discussion or as a checklist for wellness committee members when considering writing a customized LSWP. Once customized, a school district can use this format to share the components of the LSWP with the public.





## WHY IS A DISTRICT WELLNESS POLICY IMPORTANT?



Nutrition-security & Disease Prevention



Improves Mental Health & Social Skills



Academic Success & Improved Attendance



Promotes Student and Community Involvement



Attends to Environmental Issues & Food Waste



Increases Equity & Nutritious Food Access

## STEPS TO UPDATING OR WRITING A WELLNESS POLICY

### 1. Form a Diverse Writing Policy Committee with Representation From:

School Staff & Curriculum Managers

Foodservice & Nutrition Staff

Health & Phys Ed. Educators

District Wellness & Sustainability Directors

Students & Caregivers

Community Members & Partners

Garden & Farm to School Coordinator

School Nurse & City Health Department

Administrators & School Board Members

### 2. Add Relevant Content to the Wellness Policy Based on District Goals:



Integrated experiential food & nutrition education



Professional development & staff wellness



Farm to School programs & local food purchasing



Outdoor learning on natural surfaces



More time for lunch



Social Emotional Learning



Reduce or eliminate ultra-processed foods & marketing



Reduce food & material waste



Community engagement & student involvement

### 3. Implement, Document & Assess Policies:

Include language for:



Diversity, Inclusion, Equity & Justice



Partnerships



Joint funding opportunity



Measurable outcomes

### 4. Share and Celebrate Impact with the School District and in the Community:

Consider joint-use spaces

Implement wellness community events

Share impact with elected officials

For more information & resources, check out Slow Food USA & Whole Kids Local School Policy Toolkit

# Tool #3

## Writing Policy Statements Guide

Because policy is the main driver of widespread change to improve systemic disparities, policies should be written with the understanding that improvements are gradual and take time. In crafting policy, consider these assumptions and questions:

- Assume school districts and food service operations may be overburden with administrative responsibilities, are potentially understaffed, and are having to address unexpected food-chain issues and student/family dilemmas
- Lean on evidence-based strategies to implement policy for improvements needed such as increasing the consumption

of more grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes while decreasing plate waste

- Instead of adding more time and work, ask what can be eliminated or reallocated to effectively put a policy in place
- Use place-based, cultural language options
- Who will be responsible for implementing the policy?
- What partner organizations are well-positioned to implement policy if internal staff cannot?
- What partner organizations may already have funding in place to support certain policies? Perhaps knowing this before writing policy will eliminate a few steps and save time



- How will the plan be carried out and what is the benefit or positive outcome (increases school meal participation, reduces youth risk factors, etc.)?
- Does a time frame need to be associated with each policy (minimum of 20 minutes each week, after lunch, by the end of the school year)

How should policy be worded so that it does not single out one entity who is responsible for large scale change but rather relies on collaboration? Find a balance in the language used. Terms like suggests, recommends, encourages may have the opposite effect, which results in no action at all. School wellness sample policy language can be found [here](#).

The LSWP Committee can consider the following examples below to help craft policy language. The committee should consider writing wellness statements by structuring it as a learning objective (much like educators do as common practice every school day) to include who, how, what and when. Also consider adding the benefit of implementing the policy to make the statement stronger. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention provides this tool on how to write [SMARTIE objectives](#) to address avoidable inequalities.

## Curriculum

- All 6th grade students receive nutrition education during their Health-related courses through a partnership with the city or county health department that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors while learning the benefits of consuming nutritious foods

## Media and Marketing

- Marketing of low-nutrition foods and sodas that is inconsistent with district nutrition education programs is not used in the school setting to avoid mixed messaging. The cafeteria promotes visual messaging and marketing tools that represent the nutrition education program taught in the classroom

## Nutrition Education

- Students in grades K-5th grades receives nutrition education a minimum of 20 minutes per week to teach the skills needed to adopt healthy eating behaviors using the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Serving Up MyPlate: A Yummy Curriculum
- Educational information will be provided to parents and include: handouts such as lists of healthy snacks, transportation service information to increase access to healthy groceries and farmers markets, website postings, articles in school and district newsletters, presentations offered in conjunction with community organizations
- Garden-based learning is integrated into the K-12 curriculum that is aligned with Next Generation Science Standards to allow students to make connections between what they grow and what they consume during school meals and with programming provided by agricultural partners such as county extension services
- The food service department attempts to procure locally produced foods that resemble what is grown in the garden by students

## Nutritional Guidelines

- In an attempt to procure more local foods and support the local economy, the program Sea to School will be implemented with the support of a partner organization such as Cape Ann Fresh Catch, to be the same types of food students may consume at home
- Neither schools nor the district shall sign exclusive contracts with soft drink, fast food, or snack food companies
- Food service operations are to make every effort to eliminate any social stigma associated with free and reduced-price meals and to prevent the overt identification of students who are eligible for them
- Food service operations should make every attempt to eliminate or reduce the food additives and colorings that are shown to affect students cognitive abilities in order to support improved academic performance

## Physical Fitness

- Instruction in Health and Physical Education shall average at least 20 minutes in each school day, or 100 minutes a week. Recess, free play and after-school activities are not counted as PE class time. PE class shall not be withheld or used as punishment
- The district will encourage fundraising activities that promote physical activity and make available

to parent-teacher organizations, teachers, and community organizations a list of fundraising activities that promote wellness

- Physical fitness efforts promoted by the school health coordinator and nursing staff shall be supported by the district wide commitment to such efforts and reflected in the budget to the greatest extent possible

## School District Grounds & Facilities

- Grounds, facilities and equipment for physical activity shall be sustainable, safe and available for students and staff to be active. Thoughtfully designed schoolyards and outdoor school spaces have the potential to be vibrant extensions of the learning environment filled with engaging opportunities for physical activity, outdoor learning and connection with nature.
- In accordance with a joint-use agreement, school spaces and facilities should be available outside of the school day, with the proper approval of school officials, to students, staff, and community members, as well as to community agencies and organizations offering physical activity programs. School policies concerning safety apply at all times
- A maintenance plan is in place to identify the responsible entities who will care for the outdoor learning spaces to ensure safety and sustainability



# Tool #4

## Local School Wellness Policy for Garden-Based Learning Programs

### Assumptions

School Food is political. Grassroots networks and organizations are uniquely equipped to create a society where nutrition-security is the norm for children and their families. Environmental education, school gardens, and nutrition education nurtures biocultural diversity and food sovereignty that is being realized in communities across the United States.

### Roles + Strategies

#### We are Weavers

Collaborating, integrating curriculum and cross curricular alignment

#### We are Builders

Green workforce and social and emotional skills development

#### We are Story Tellers

Growing and consuming culturally appropriate good clean and fair food

#### We are Disruptors

Embedding environmental, climate action and social justice

[Example Wellness Policy for School Gardens](#)  
[School Garden Sample Policy Language](#)

For information about the Wellness Tool Kit, contact Cynthia Walters at [cynthia@greenumbrella.org](mailto:cynthia@greenumbrella.org)



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# APPENDIX

## Aggregated Wellness Data Resources

Sometimes the challenge in crafting a wellness policy is getting lost in a sea of data and determining if studies are valid related to all aspects of health, wellness, food and the environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Dietary Guidelines for America can be considered as a one-shop shop for assessing whether surveys, indexes, and results are information that should be incorporated in a wellness policy.

### [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Stories about school districts taking action is illustrated in [Putting Local School Wellness Policies into Action](#) and these resources will help a wellness committee pinpoint the issues to address in the wellness policy that are prevalent within the school community;

- [Obesity Data & Statistics](#)
- [Adolescent and School Health](#)
- Risk Behaviors [Mental Health](#)

- Health Disparities [Health Disparities](#)
- Assessing the health & wellness of school district staff and students
  - [School Health Index](#)

[The Dietary Guidelines for America](#) provides advice on what to eat and drink to meet nutrient needs, promote health, and help prevent chronic disease. This edition of the Dietary Guidelines is the first to provide guidance for healthy dietary patterns by life stage, from birth through older adulthood.

## Additional Data to Support the Implementation of a Local School Wellness Policy

- Results which also indicate that higher proportions of high poverty, majority black, and majority Hispanic schools had both school wellness and SFA wellness policies. Research shows that having a school wellness policy in addition to a district policy improves school



practices and reduces barriers in achieving wellness policy goals over time [55], providing further evidence that high poverty, majority black, and majority Hispanic schools had healthier school food environments than other school types. Bardin S, Washburn L, Gearan E. Disparities in the Healthfulness of School Food Environments and the Nutritional Quality of School Lunches. *Nutrients*. 2020 Aug 8;12(8):2375. doi: 10.3390/nu12082375. PMID: 32784416; PMCID: PMC7468741.

- A literature review of 33 peer reviewed papers (including six studies using large, nationally representative studies) finds increasing evidence supporting the idea that schools' policies on foods, beverages, and physical activity are correlated with calories consumed and expended by school age children, and even to children's body mass indexes.
- Districts with stronger academic performance had more comprehensive overall wellness policy goals and stronger goals in nutrition education and other school-based activities. Lyn R, O'Meara S, Hepburn VA, Potter A. Statewide evaluation of local wellness policies in Georgia: an examination of policy compliance, policy strength, and associated factors. *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2012 Nov-Dec;44(6):513-20. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2010.12.001. Epub 2011 Jul 26. PMID: 21795119.
- Adolescents in states with strong farm-to-school laws had greater whole fruit, lower soda, and snack intakes versus those in states with

no laws. Strong school meal laws were associated with lower soda intake. Adolescents in states with strong competitive food laws had lower soda intake and overweight/obesity odds than those in states with no laws. Strong farm-to-school laws were inversely associated with overweight/obesity odds only in states with strong competitive food laws. Sanjeevi N, Lipsky LM, Nansel TR, Haynie D, Liu A, Simons-Morton B. Stronger State School Nutrition Laws Are Associated With Healthier Eating Behaviors and Optimal Weight Status in US Adolescents. *Am J Health Promot*. 2020 Nov;34(8):857-866. doi: 10.1177/0890117120902346. Epub 2020 Feb 10. PMID: 32036683; PMCID: PMC9530457.

## USDA Resources

The Food and Nutrition Service housed in the USDA provides a one-stop shop for a direct connection to the federal agency who composed the Local School Wellness Policy Implementation Under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 Final Rule. This resource page will provide school districts and inform stakeholders with accurate information for all aspects of establishing a wellness committee, for writing a wellness policy, and funding.

- [USDA Final Ruling Local School Wellness Policy Requirements](#)
- [Local Food Wellness Policies](#)
- [Local Process: How to Develop, Implement, and Evaluate a Wellness Policy](#)
- [Local Wellness Policy Outreach Tool](#)
- [Team Nutrition](#) is an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service

to support the child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance for foodservice, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

- [Farm to School](#)
- USDA grants are available to fund improved cafeteria infrastructure to support scratch cooking, school gardens and Nutrition education.
- [USDA Farm to School Grant](#)
- Healthy Meal Incentives for Small or Rural School Food Authorities
- [Administrative Review Process](#)

## Child Nutrition Reauthorization Policy Resources

Stay up to date on state and federal policies affecting child nutrition:

- An overview of the [Child Nutrition Reauthorization \(CNR\)](#)
- [Updates to the School Nutrition Standards](#)
- [Final Rule-Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) - This rulemaking gradually phases in added sugars limits for the school lunch and breakfast programs and in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, updates total sugars limits for breakfast cereals and yogurt to added sugars limits. This rulemaking addresses a variety of

other school meal requirements, including establishing long-term milk and whole grain requirements. Finally, this rule includes provisions that strengthen Buy American requirements. While this rulemaking takes effect in the school year 2024-25, the Department is gradually phasing in required changes over time. Program operators are not required to make any changes to their menus as a result of this rulemaking until school year 2025-26 at the earliest.

- Legislative Watch:
  - [Universal School Meals Program Act of 2023](#)
  - [States that have passed Universal Free School Meals so far \(2024\)](#)

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The Edible Schoolyards Project: Cover, Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council: Page 18, 37, 39, Rothenberg Rooftop Garden: Page 20, 43, 59, Cincinnati Public Schools: Page 35, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful: Page 38



