

# LOCAL WELLNESS POLICY REQUIREMENTS AND RESOURCES

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## I. Introduction

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Schools that participate in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs are required to develop and implement a “wellness policy” by the 2006-07 school year, in accordance with the 2004 reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. The wellness policy should include goals for nutrition education and physical activity and nutrition guidelines for all foods sold on campus. It is up to each school to create its own wellness policy and decide what guidelines are appropriate. Policies should be based on scientific research and existing practices from exemplary states and local school districts around the country.

## II. Rationale

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Over the past two decades, obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents. Other diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes are responsible for two-thirds of deaths in the United States. The road to preventing these diseases and, promoting good health starts with healthy eating and physical activity.

Schools can play an important and unique role in student health and wellness. Creation and implementation of a wellness policy is a prime opportunity to set high standards for the nutritional value of all foods served and set nutrition education and fitness goals that actively promote good health.

## III. Local school wellness policies are required to include (at minimum):

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- 1) Goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness;
- 2) Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school campus;
- 3) Assurance that guidelines for reimbursable school meals are not less restrictive than federal regulations;
- 4) Plans for measuring implementation and designation of at least one person to ensure the school meets policy requirements;
- 5) Plans to involve parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public.

## IV. Sample Policy Language:

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Schools have the discretion to create wellness policies that are relevant to their needs. The sample policy language below does not address all requirements of the local wellness policies, and only provides information on nutrition guidelines and nutrition education and other school-based activities that promote student wellness. Include the sample policy language in your school’s local wellness policy.

## A. Nutrition Guidelines

### 1. School meals

Plant-based diets tend to be low in total fat and saturated fat, contain no cholesterol, and are beneficial for the treatment and prevention of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and some forms of cancer. Therefore, serving more plant-based foods in schools will help promote health. Serving nondairy beverages and foods will help meet the needs of all children, including those who are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk, those who prefer not to consume dairy products, and those who desire a healthier alternative that has no cholesterol and is low in saturated fat.

School meals must, at a minimum, meet all local, state, and federal nutrition requirements; however, because more healthful standards are permitted, PCRM encourages schools to adopt policies that include genuinely beneficial nutrition standards. To address the epidemic of obesity and growing numbers of children exhibiting symptoms associated with diabetes and heart disease, meals should provide less fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than government nutrition standards require, and exceed the standards for fiber and other vitamins and minerals.

Accordingly, wellness policies should include the following nutrition standards:

- Total fat will contribute no more than 20-30 percent of total calories.
- Saturated fat will provide no more than 10 percent of total calories.
- Trans fats will be kept as low as possible and, ideally, eliminated.
- Cholesterol will or should be kept to a minimum and, ideally, eliminated.
- Each meal should provide at least 8-13 grams of fiber.
- All foods and beverages will be low in sodium and added sugar.
- Dairy- and egg-free vegetarian main entrees will be served daily.
- A non-dairy beverage will be offered to all students at no additional cost.
- A variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, including a non-fried vegetable and fruit not sweetened with high fructose corn syrup, will be offered daily.

### 2. Beverages

*Permitted:* water or seltzer water without added caloric or artificial sweeteners; fruit and vegetable juices that contain at least 50 percent real fruit or vegetable juice and do not contain additional sweeteners; soymilk, rice milk and other non-dairy beverages.

Not allowed: flavored dairy milks; soft drinks containing caloric or artificial sweeteners; fruit and vegetable juices containing less than 50 percent real fruit or vegetable juice.

### 3. Snacks

Snacks, including those offered in vending machines, a-la-carte lines, and classrooms will make a positive contribution to health and comply with the following guidelines:

- Contain less than 20 percent of calories from fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat. (exception for nuts and seeds).
- Contain zero trans fat
- Contain zero cholesterol
- Be a good source of fiber (greater than 2.5 grams per serving)
- Contain no more than 230 mg of sodium per serving
- Contain no or minimal added sugars —items should contain no more than 35 percent of weight from added sugar

All snack foods will be assessed annually for their compliance with the nutrition standards, and if they exceed standards they should no longer be offered.

Best choices of snack foods are:

Fresh fruit	Whole grain crackers
Fresh vegetables	Pretzels
Dried fruit	Baked chips
Frozen fruit juice bars	Rice cakes
Low-fat granola bars	Nut mix, nuts and seeds, soy nuts
Whole-grain fruit bars	Energy bars

## B. Nutrition education and other school-based activities that promote student wellness

### 1. Classroom Nutrition Education

Hands-on experience and nutrition education are key to helping students make healthful food choices and learn about new foods. Nutrition education will be included in the academic curriculum at each grade level. Nutrition education will:

- Promote fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plant sources of protein.
- Provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect their health and help them understand the connection between diet and health.
- Educate students on the health benefits of vegetarian diets.
- Introduce students to healthy foods through hands-on experiences. Activities might include the use of kitchen classrooms, school gardens, contests, taste testing, promotions and educational field trips such as farmer’s market tours and visits to community gardens.
- Use healthy food themes in many academic disciplines, including, arts (e.g., use food to create colorful “plate art”), history (e.g., teach students about different cultures through their traditional food practices), and math (e.g., use food for lessons in counting or use the nutrition facts label to teach

more advanced math skills) in order to increase students’ knowledge of and exposure to foods.

- Be shared with families and the community to make a broader impact on student and community well-being.

### 2. Cafeteria Nutrition Education

School cafeterias will promote healthful choices by providing education materials and nutrition information at the point of sale. All cafeterias will:

- Post nutrition tips and information on school Web sites, in cafeterias and on school menus.
- Provide nutrition facts, including calories, fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol content of school meals on menus and menu boards in order to inform students about the nutrition content of the foods they choose.
- Highlight healthy menu items and include their benefits.
- Display posters in the cafeteria and other locations that promote fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains.
- Promote consumption of fruits and vegetables by educating students about the Five-to-Nine-a-Day program (see <http://www.5aday.org/> for educational tools).
- Teach students about the nutrition facts label and how to use it (see <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/learn-it/label.htm> for information on food labels).
- Ban promotions for less nutritious food choices.
- Ban the display of food industry propaganda or promotional materials, such as information from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association or National Dairy Council.

### 3. Fundraising

Schools will establish a list of acceptable fundraising activities. These activities should not support unhealthy choices and, when possible, should promote healthy choices. Thus, for example, the sale of foods or beverages other than fresh fruits and vegetables should not be permitted.

Some ideas for acceptable fundraising activities include:

- Promote physical activity such as a walk or jog-a-thon or a 5K running race
- Promote school spirit by selling school memorabilia
- Promote academic achievement with a book fair or read-a-thon
- Other activities such as selling flowers or magazine subscriptions

## V. Other Wellness Policy Resources:

National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity’s model wellness policy: <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/index.html>

USDA’s local wellness policy Web site:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>

School Nutrition Association wellness policy:

<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/haccp.aspx?id=1075>

Action for Healthy Kids wellness policy toolkit:

[http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources\\_wp.php](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources_wp.php)

Center for Ecoliteracy wellness policy guide:

[http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/wellness\\_policy.html](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/wellness_policy.html)