

Q&A

School Wellness Policies

Parent Fact Sheet

Fact: Many children have poor eating habits.

Fact: Many children are not physically active.

Fact: There has been a major increase in the number of children who are overweight or obese.

Finding solutions to these problems is not an easy task. It involves many areas of our society, including schools. Schools can play a key role in addressing the nutrition, health and weight issues affecting children today.

The good news is that schools are making changes. Schools now have wellness policies that encourage good nutrition and physical activity habits. Wellness policies promote student health, now and into the future. And they can help students reach their full academic potential – because healthier students are better learners.

Q *What is a wellness policy?*

- Federal law requires schools that take part in the National School Lunch Program to have a wellness policy.
- A wellness policy helps promote student health and encourages children to eat healthy foods and be more active.

Q *Who writes the wellness policy?*

- Parents, students, school foodservice staff, school board members, school administrators, and the public must be involved in creating the school wellness policy.

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Q **What must be included in the wellness policy?**

- Goals for physical activity, nutrition education and other school activities.
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available during the school day.
 - À la carte items.
 - Foods and beverages in vending machines and school stores.
 - Foods and beverages for fundraising activities.
 - Rewards and foods served at school parties.
- A plan to measure how the school is putting the policy into action.
- One or more persons who ensure that the school follows the policy.

Q **Who determines what foods and beverages are available in schools?**

- Foods served as part of the lunch and breakfast programs must meet Federal guidelines. Each school's foodservice department decides what foods to serve.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) wrote Nutrition Standards for all other foods available in the school. A school may use these standards or develop its own. You can read these standards online at www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition.
- If a school uses PDE's Nutrition Standards, the school can receive extra money from the state for each meal served through the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program.

Q **Where can I find more information about wellness policies?**

- Visit the following Web sites for more information about wellness policies.
 - PDE Division of Food and Nutrition
www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition
 - Project PA
<http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa>

These resources include items such as:

- Snack ideas for classroom parties.
- Ideas for fundraising activities.
- Examples of how Pennsylvania schools put their local wellness policy in action.
- Examples of how schools can encourage nutritious eating habits.

For more information:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Food and Nutrition
333 Market Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
Phone: 1-800-331-0129
Web: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition