

Position Statement on Nutrition and Physical Activity

April 7, 2010

Student health status and school achievement are directly connected. Healthy eating and regular physical activity are essential components of student health and academic achievement.

Research studies over the past decade, documented by organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, have consistently concluded that children who eat well and are physically active learn better. Conversely, poorly nourished, overweight, sedentary or hungry children tend to have weaker academic performance and score lower on standardized achievement tests. Participation in school breakfast programs is linked with increased academic test scores, improved daily attendance, better class participation and reduced tardiness. Regular physical activity supports better learning while decreasing physical education may undermine the goal of better academic performance. Student fitness levels have been correlated with academic achievement, including improved math, reading and writing scores.

The Connecticut State Board of Education is committed to promoting policies that support a learning environment conducive to healthy lifestyles and that ensure school practices consistently support student health and learning from prekindergarten through Grade 12. Key components include: teaching nutrition as part of comprehensive school health education; providing quality physical education and daily opportunities for physical activity; creating an environment that consistently supports healthy eating and physical activity practices; and supporting and engaging families in promoting healthy habits.

The Board strongly believes that schools must help students develop health literacy — the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. Students must be taught skills, such as critical thinking and decision making, for making healthy lifestyle choices not only in the school building, but also in their daily activities outside of school. Nutrition education should be taught as part of a planned, ongoing, systematic, sequential, standards-based comprehensive school health education program designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and protect their health. To encourage active lifestyles, schools must implement a standards-based, sequential, quality physical education program and provide opportunities for daily physical activity both during and after school.

Schools must create an environment that gives students consistent, accurate and culturally relevant health information and ample opportunity to use it. The classroom, cafeteria and school activities should provide clear and consistent messages that explain and reinforce healthy eating and physical activity. Health messages taught in the classroom should not be contradicted by unhealthy school practices such as food rewards, taking away recess as punishment, and selling unhealthy foods and beverages to raise funds. Foods and beverages available on school premises, including school meals, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, classroom parties and other events, should meet state nutrition standards that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and national health recommendations. These standards focus on decreasing fat, sodium and added sugars, moderating portion sizes and emphasizing nutrient-dense choices such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.

The Board strongly recommends that district policies and practices promote healthy eating and physical activity throughout the entire school environment, as outlined in the Connecticut State Department of Education's *Action Guide for School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*. Programs and practices should also be integrated with the district's local school wellness policy and coordinated school health efforts. When the school environment consistently promotes well-planned and effectively implemented healthy nutrition and physical activity practices, demonstrated outcomes include improvements in students' overall health, behavior and academic achievement.

Guidelines to support nutrition and physical activity are outlined in the corresponding document.

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Policy Guidance for Position Statement on Nutrition and Physical Activity

April 7, 2010

The Connecticut State Board of Education, in its 2010 Position Statement on Nutrition and Physical Activity, calls for school districts to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate policies and practices to promote and support healthy eating and sufficient physical activity throughout the entire school environment. The Board offers the following guidelines to support the implementation of healthy eating and physical activity practices in schools.

State Department of Education Responsibilities

Provide leadership informed by science-based guidelines.

- Provide leadership in identifying and disseminating research and best practice related to nutrition, physical activity and school wellness programs.
- Develop new and use existing program guidelines, sample policies, resource lists, state and local student health data and other information useful for program planning and improvement.
- Align comprehensive school health education and physical education standards, assessments and instruction with the Connecticut State Department of Education's *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*.
- Develop and regularly revise state nutrition standards for all foods available at school based on current science and national health recommendations. These standards focus on decreasing fat, saturated fats, trans fats, sodium and added sugars, moderating portion sizes and increasing consumption of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean meats and legumes.

Provide training, technical assistance and resources.

- Provide outreach to increase district participation in all applicable U.S. Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition Programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, After-school Snack Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program and Special Milk Program).
- Provide training, technical assistance and resources to help districts implement, evaluate and revise local school wellness policies.
- Provide training, technical assistance and resources to districts, schools and community partners to enhance their ability to implement programs and practices to promote nutrition and physical activity throughout the school environment.

Develop and maintain partnerships.

- Strengthen and expand partnerships with state and local agencies and nongovernmental organizations to address nutrition and physical activity for all students.
- Build support among various stakeholders to leverage funding to sustain efforts at the state and local levels.
- Provide professional development opportunities for community partners regarding the implementation and promotion of healthy eating and physical activity practices.

Conduct regular evaluation.

- Evaluate progress made to improve the health and well-being of students at the school, district and state levels.
- Collaborate with state and federal partners to collect and analyze relevant data on student health outcomes.
- Recognize and promote districts and schools that are successfully implementing model nutrition and physical activity programs.

School Districts' Responsibilities

Develop and implement policies and practices that consistently promote a healthy school environment.

- Provide effective leadership for schools to create a culturally responsive climate that consistently promotes healthy eating and physical activity throughout the entire school environment.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures that assist all administrators and staff with eliminating practices that are counterproductive to students' health and learning or that contradict positive health messages, such as food rewards, taking away recess as punishment and selling unhealthy foods and beverages to raise funds.
- Establish or build upon an existing district-level school health or wellness council that includes a diverse representation of school staff, families, students and members of the community to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate nutrition and physical activity policies, programs and practices, and make recommendations to the local board of education.
- Utilize guidelines, frameworks and other publications developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education to build and strengthen nutrition and physical activity policies, programs and practices (e.g., *Action Guide for School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*, *Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Food in Schools*, *Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach to School Health* and *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*).
- Designate a district-level director to assist with implementing and evaluating the district's nutrition and physical activity programs.
- Ensure compliance with all state mandates related to school nutrition, physical education and physical activity (e.g., beverage requirements, competitive foods regulation, healthy food certification, time to eat, and physical education and physical activity requirements).
- Participate in all applicable U.S. Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition Programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, After-school Snack Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program and Special Milk Program).
- Participate in healthy food certification under section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes.
- Use healthy eating goals and science-based nutrition standards, such as the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, to determine which foods and beverages are allowed for sale or distribution on school premises (e.g., cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, classroom parties, sporting events and other activities).
- Integrate nutrition and physical activity with the district's coordinated school health efforts.
- Require schools to allow sufficient time in the school day for nutrition education, physical education and physical activity and to incorporate these concepts throughout all subjects and connect to programs that extend beyond the school day.

Provide ongoing professional development for staff.

- Provide and support ongoing professional development for school staff regarding nutrition education, physical education and physical activity for all students.

Regularly communicate with students, families and staff.

- Communicate regularly to students, families and staff the district's commitment to healthy eating and physical activity (e.g., feature messages about healthy eating and physical activity in school media, work with school and student organizations to develop materials with nutrition and physical activity messages, and conduct special nutrition and physical activity events that involve the entire school community).
- Promote positive local media coverage of schools' efforts to improve the overall health of students and their families.

Develop and maintain partnerships.

- Collaborate with state and community agencies and organizations to provide consistent health messages and support school-based activities that promote healthy eating and physical activity.
- Strengthen and expand partnerships with local agencies, businesses, health centers, families and schools to implement and promote good nutrition and sufficient physical activity for all students.

Regularly evaluate progress and revise policies and programs as needed.

- Conduct regular evaluation and reporting on the implementation of nutrition and physical activity policies and programs including the impact on student health and well-being.
- Collaborate with state and local partners to provide relevant data on student health outcomes.
- Regularly review and revise district policies, as needed, to respond to changes in student health data, research on health trends and effective programs, national and state standards and guidelines, and state and federal initiatives and legislation.

Schools' Responsibilities

Implement policies and practices that consistently promote a healthy school environment.

- Provide effective leadership to create a culturally responsive climate that supports the implementation of the district's wellness policy and promotes healthy eating and physical activity for all students and staff.
- Support the implementation of a coordinated and integrated approach to school health, and student success plans that address students' health and wellness.
- Organize building-level school health and wellness teams to provide the structure for coordinating nutrition and physical activity efforts. Teams should include a diverse representation of school staff, families, students and members of the community to oversee and evaluate nutrition and physical activity efforts.
- Provide only healthy choices wherever and whenever foods and beverages are available on school premises, including cafeteria meals and a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, classroom parties, sporting events and other activities.
- Implement a high quality health promotion program for school staff, e.g., opportunities for daily physical activity, workshops on health and wellness and programs on stress management.
- Provide opportunities for daily physical activity breaks for students and staff.

Regularly communicate with students, families and staff.

- Provide ongoing communication to all staff regarding the goals and requirements of the district's school wellness policy.
- Support families' efforts to provide a healthy diet and daily physical activity for their children by providing education, resources and activities that help with positive role modeling.

Develop and maintain partnerships.

- Support and participate in district partnerships to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

Regularly evaluate progress and revise policies and programs as needed.

- Assign a staff member to assist with implementing and evaluating the school's nutrition and physical activity efforts.
- Conduct an assessment to determine what policies, services and programs are currently in place and what gaps exist in promoting healthy eating and physical activity throughout the entire school, using a tool such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *School Health Index*.

Teachers'/Staff Responsibilities

Teach standards-based comprehensive school health education and physical education.

- Utilize timely science-based resources to inform instruction, programs and services.
- Deliver high-quality comprehensive school health education and physical education instruction.
- Analyze student work to inform curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- Integrate positive nutrition and physical activity-related messages and actions into instruction and activities throughout the building.
- Participate in district professional development activities offered to promote nutrition, physical activity and wellness.
- Collaborate with peers to improve health outcomes for students.

Communicate positive and accurate health messages to students and families.

- Communicate with families about healthy eating and physical activity they can do at home with their children.
- Advocate for healthy eating behaviors and refrain from advocating dieting behaviors or any specific eating regimen to students, other staff or families.
- Increase awareness of and participate in the implementation of the district's school wellness policy.

Serve as role models for students.

- Participate in health-enhancing activities with students (e.g., daily physical activity and healthy snacks).
- Serve as role models for healthy eating and physical activity behaviors (e.g., enjoying healthy foods and participating in physical activity).

Families' Responsibilities

Create a home environment that supports children's health.

- Discuss nutrition topics at home with children and incorporate health and wellness activities into children's daily life.
- Reinforce messages about the importance of proper nutrition and physical activity and serve as role models for healthy living.
- Prepare nutritious meals and snacks and engage in regular physical activity with children.
- Involve children in preparing meals and snacks and encourage an interest in cooking.
- Encourage safe and positive physical activity every day.
- Encourage children to actively participate in school health and nutrition programs.

Build a relationship with teachers to support children's health.

- Work with teachers to support children's learning about nutrition and health-related issues and encourage safe and positive physical activity.
- Participate in learning activities at home and in the community, including interactive homework and other health-related activities, such as family physical activity and preparing healthy meals.
- Participate in educational open house opportunities and become familiar with the comprehensive school health education and physical education curriculums and school nutrition and physical activity programs.

Advocate for and support healthy changes at school.

- Support school policies designed to improve children's nutrition and physical activity habits, such as providing healthy foods and participating on school health and wellness committees.
- Advocate for a healthy and active school environment for children, including providing healthy foods for events and activities on school premises.
- Understand the value of and encourage children's participation in school meal programs.

Students' Responsibilities (as developmentally appropriate)

Take responsibility for learning and health.

- Examine personal health status, set personal goals for healthy eating and physical activity, and assume responsibility for personal nutrition and physical activity behaviors, such as choosing nutrient-dense foods and participating in regular physical activity.
- Make good decisions to enhance health and encourage and support others in making positive health choices.
- Take advantage of opportunities to learn about nutrition and physical activity and apply this knowledge by making healthy choices.
- Actively engage in comprehensive school health education and physical education and actively participate in a variety of physical activities.
- Use accurate health information to express opinions about health issues.
- Analyze how families, school communities, media and peers influence health-related decisions.
- Use resources and services from home, school and local communities that provide valid health information, products and services.

Get involved in school health and wellness initiatives and activities.

- Plan and engage in school-sponsored nutrition and physical activity, such as participating in health fairs and physical activity programs and serving on school health and wellness committees.
- Take an active role in advocating for healthy food choices at school, not only in the cafeteria, but in vending machines, school stores, fundraising activities and events on school premises.

Communicate the importance of healthy choices.

- Communicate with peers and family members regarding healthier lifestyles.
- Advocate for healthy meals and snacks and family physical activity at home.
- Serve as role models for younger children and family members by choosing healthy foods and participating in regular physical activity.

Communities' Responsibilities

Work with school districts to support and promote students' health and wellness.

- Work collaboratively with schools and families to support strategies that contribute to improved nutrition, increased physical activity and overall healthy lifestyles.
- Provide and seek funds needed to support the school district's healthy lifestyles initiatives.
- Develop and coordinate networks for communicating information and services that support nutrition and physical activity programs.
- Make facilities and programs available, accessible and affordable for the pursuit of individual as well as group physical activities and sports.
- Participate on school wellness and school health teams.

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