



**DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES**  
*Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities*



Vannessa L. Dorantes  
Commissioner

Ned Lamont  
Governor

**Triennial Assessment Report**  
**Albert J. Solnit Center Youth Care: Wellness Policy**

**General Information**

The Albert J. Solnit Center Facilities fall under the category of Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCI) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Facilities are part of the Department of Children and Families Unified School District #2. There are two campuses, a hospital in Middletown that also has a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) for adolescent girls, and a PRTF for boys, located in East Windsor. An assessment was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the Albert J. Solnit Youth Wellness Policy. An assessment of this policy will be conducted every 3 years, at a minimum. The Wellness Policy and the committee was developed based upon the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. This report will be shared with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Unified School District#2, and its' community to understand shared progress on health and wellness in the Albert J. Solnit Facilities. The report pertains to high school grade level (9-12) and will focus on six domains: 1) Nutrition Education, 2) Standards for USDA Nutrition Programs and School Meals, 3) Nutrition Standards for Competitive and Other Food and Beverages, 4) Physical Education and Physical Activity and 5) Wellness Promotion and Marketing. The results will be made available on the DCF Solnit website.

**Assessment Information**

The Youth Wellness Policy was assessed by the University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity using the Wellness School Assessment Tool (3.0). The Youth Wellness Policy is very generalized due to the complexity of the Facility and the vast number of Policies that cover Hospital and Rehabilitation topics. The Procedural manuals go into more detail on the treatment and structure of behavioral environment. Second part of the assessment was conducted using The Wellness School Assessment Tool (WELLSAT1.0). This assessment verifies how the facilities engage the youth in promoting youth wellness. The assessment was conducted by a some of members of the Youth Health and Wellness committee. The committee members are:

- Sarsfield Ford Director of Food Services [sarsfield.ford@ct.gov](mailto:sarsfield.ford@ct.gov)
- Amanda Birkhofer, Health Teacher [Amanda.birkhofer@ct.gov](mailto:Amanda.birkhofer@ct.gov)
- Carolyn Hogrefe , Dietician [Carolyn.hogrefe@ct.gov](mailto:Carolyn.hogrefe@ct.gov)
- Emma Nealy, Supervising Nurse [emma.nealy@ct.gov](mailto:emma.nealy@ct.gov)
- William Stratton, Supervising Chef [William.a.stratton@ct.gov](mailto:William.a.stratton@ct.gov)
- Kevin Lepore, Head Cook [kevin.lepore@ct.gov](mailto:kevin.lepore@ct.gov)
- Chris Juliano, Supervising Nurse, [chrisjuliano@ct.gov](mailto:chrisjuliano@ct.gov)
- Dr. Spencer Joslin Medical Doctor (advisor) [spencer.joslin@ct.gov](mailto:spencer.joslin@ct.gov)
- Patricia Ferraro Staff Development [patricia.ferraro@ct.gov](mailto:patricia.ferraro@ct.gov)



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**Summary of Assessment Domain 1:**  
(Nutrition Education)

The facilities have implemented the health and education curriculum set by the Connecticut Department of Education. The curriculum includes physical education, physical activities and providing nutrition education to the youth. Based upon feedback from the survey all youth have the opportunity to participate in physical activities. The schools use both interactive (70%) and lecture (30%) methods to develop health and wellness skills. Nutritional education is integrated in physical education and science. Youth have instruction on MY Plate program, Food Labeling and Nutrients. Youth also discuss in class how Farms are important to our survival. There is strong integration between the school food environment and nutrition education in the classroom, by covering many topics of the Child Nutrition Program utilizing the cafeteria as an extended classroom. The facility extends the nutrition education afterschool hours in the living units and cottages, which will be addressed in other assessment domains.

**Summary of Assessment Domain 2:**  
(Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals)

All youth in the facilities receive free meals. The parents and guardians receive information about meals during the pre and intake procedure. The lunch meals are served in a dining room like setting or on the living units depending upon the status of the youth. Breakfast is the most challenging meal to meet reimbursement requirements for a few of reasons; 1.) Pandemic breakfast meals served on unit 2.) Responsibility of "offer vs served" falls on the unit staff not the dietary staff. 2.) challenges of having the youth wake up in time for breakfast (reasons: medication and behavioral). To validate the breakfast period on the units for reimbursable meals there are "random spot checks" and documentation. Serving reimbursable breakfast in the dining room has no barriers due to dietary staff having full control of "offer vs served".

Breakfast meal period is 15 minutes and lunch meal periods are 22 minutes. Water fountains were shut down due to the pandemic. There are now water jugs in the dining room and in the schools with single use paper cups. The Infection Prevention Committee does not allow the use of water bottles or reusable water bottles due to the challenges of cleaning and sanitizing.



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The facilities embrace the Farm to School Program using the talents of the school, food service and unit staff. The Food Service takes advantage of the Department of Defense (DoD) Program for produce as well as implementing "The Harvest of the Month" program. Harvest of the Month highlights a fruit or vegetable item each month. During the month the youth are given educational material on the highlight harvest item and taste different menu items made with that harvested item. Each facility has community gardens where fresh produce is grown each growing season. The produce items are utilized and highlighted on the menu. Harvested items include cucumbers, squash, corn, tomatoes, peppers, and herbs. We also require our vendor Hartford Provision Company (HPC) to deliver locally grown product when in season. Recommended that the facilities expand on the community gardens by having the youth create formal presentations of what they have learned in creating and harvesting the gardens.

One facility taps and makes its own maple syrup each year. This year we had a challenge between the facility's Connecticut syrup and a Massachusetts syrup. Governor Lamont and Lt. Governor Bysiewicz and other guests were judges for the competition. The facility's Connecticut produced syrup was declared winner.

### **Summary of Assessment Domain 3:**

(Nutrition Standards for Competitive and Other Foods and Beverages)

There are no competitive foods sold to youth in the school or in the facility. The youth, however, are allowed food brought by family or guardians and are stored up to 24 hours. These are normally comfort food that the youth have enjoyed over the years. These food items cannot be used to substitute for school meals. Family and guardians are discouraged to give the youth food or beverage containing caffeine. The facility tries to educate the family and guardians on the diet of the youth while they are in the care of the facility. Each youth's diet is reviewed by the facilities' medical team and a dietitian. Any allergies or special diet are documented, and a Diet Notification Form is sent to the unit and food service prior to any meal period.

The youth have no access to any vending machines in the facilities. Any snacks that are given to the youth through the food service meet the Smart Snacks standards set by the USDA. The standards can be accessed at [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks). The school store does not offer or sell any food items. No fund raising is done through the school, and any food-based celebration happen on the living units after school hours and on weekends. After school snacks consist of fruit, milk, and a Smart Snack.



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Food is not used as a reward in the school. No food is sold to youth after school in the facilities. The youth are given an opportunity to purchase food while on non-school outings off campus. The staff in the facility continue to educate the youth on outings to make smart food choices and make sure that the youth are following their special diets.

Water stations are set up every morning throughout the school and living units. These water stations consist of 5-gallon container containing fresh water and ice. There are single use cups and garbage pails with each water station. Water is not sold to youth in school or on the living units. The water stations are checked periodically throughout the day and replenished if needed. Any physical activity inside or outside has water stations in proximity.

**Summary of Assessment Domain 4:**  
(Physical Education and Physical Activity)

The Unified School District #2 school's physical education written program follows all state and federal standards. The youth have two hours of physical education a week. During the instruction the youth are engaged and prepared for physical education testing according to the state and national standards. The instruction is led by a certified teacher that has ongoing professional development throughout the year. All youth are required to be actively engaged and cannot substitute physical education class for another class or sport. Physical education and activity are a huge part of the facilities' treatment plan for the youth in our care.

Families may choose to engage in a physical activity with the youth during family visits. Walking the campus is a common activity. After school, the youth have many opportunities to be physically active. The facilities have Rehabilitation Department that engage youth in many activities like walking, hiking, biking, swimming and yoga, karate and basketball. The facilities have multiple gyms, walking paths, bike paths and a pool for the youth to use. The facilities also utilize The DCF Wilderness School in East Hartland, Connecticut for snowshoeing, cross country skiing, fishing, and hiking in the hills of Connecticut.

As the facility treats high school age youth mostly there is no recess during school hours. The teachers provide a physical break if needed to stretch or as a behavioral coping mechanism. The schools are part of the facilities, so the youth and their community milieu have access. The youth have a short walk each day from their living units to the school.



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### **Summary of Assessment domain 5: (Wellness Promotion and Marketing)**

Wellness promotion is encouraged by all staff throughout the facility by encouraging healthy eating habits and physical activity. The dining area provides educational material on eating habits as well as healthy choices for food, using fresh fruits and vegetables at each meal. Salads with protein are a steady alternative and choice. Many staff select salads so that they can be an example of healthy eating for the youth. The facilities also host a Wellness Fair each year for the staff and youth. The Fair has vendors from various fields from chiropractic, local food store dieticians', blood pressure screenings, as well as local gym organizations. Wellness is an important topic that is discussed at youth council meetings each month. Any topics that the youth council believes needs to be addressed are presented to the Health, Wellness and Dietary Committee.

Although teachers may not use physical activity as a reward, the non-school staff may reward youth throughout the day by giving extra walking time outside or setting up a physical activity the youth enjoy like swimming or biking. This is an important aspect of the youth's psychiatric treatment. Physical activity is never used as punishment and is never withheld by teachers as a classroom management tool.

Healthy food and beverage choices are marketed in school and throughout the facilities. Posters promoting, MY Plate, fresh vegetables and milk are throughout the dining area and living areas. Healthy selections are strategically placed at the beginning, middle and end of serving line. Harvest of the Month promotion along with ability of youth to select more than one portion of fresh vegetables helps encourage healthy eating.

Due to the schools being in a RCCI it does not have social media outlets, school radio or TV. Any marketing of health and wellness is done through youth council, posters and staff setting a good example of a healthy lifestyle. The facilities have made great strides in the last year in promoting wellness by having the Health, Wellness and Dietary Committee more engaged in getting the message out to the staff and youth trying to improve the health and wellness culture.



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The wellness policy will be made to the public on the DCF and facility websites. There are also pamphlets describing the facilities services. It is recommended that there is more public communication regarding dietary engagement that happens in the facilities. This could be done by making more information available at pre-admission and admission. Due to being RCCI facilities, making the wellness policy to the public is the most challenging. As discussed, there is no school sponsored TV, radio, or social media outlets, so any communication is directed on the Department of Children and Families website or directly to the parents, guardians, and other community members.

Being RCCI facilities there are some wellness compliance areas that do not pertain to the Albert J. Solnit Centers. Many other compliance areas are addressed in partnership with the other departments within the facilities. The Director of Food Services is responsible for the implementation and compliance with the Wellness Policy through the Health, Wellness and Dietary Committee. The committee does a good job collecting information from the various departments to improve upon implementation and compliance of the policy. Since COVID restrictions have been lifted by the Governor, the facilities are cautiously restarting many programs since prior to the pandemic.

### References:

Alliance for a Healthier Generation  
<http://www.healthiergeneration.org>

United States Department of Agriculture  
[www.usda.org](http://www.usda.org)

Connecticut Department of Children and Families  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>

Albert J. Solnit Children's Centers  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Solnit-Center/North>  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Solnit-Center/South>

Unified School District #2  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/USD2/Home>