

Superintendent Recommendations for Local School Wellness Policy Implementation

Background



Since the 2006-2007 school year, Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have required that all school districts participating in federal Child Nutrition Programs develop and implement a local school wellness policy (LWP) that sets forth nutrition and physical activity goals for students.¹ School

leaders and administrators – particularly superintendents – play a vital role in the process of successfully implementing LWP and are cited by school professionals as being a critical stakeholder group.²⁻³ However, no studies explore superintendents’ experiences with the recent LWP mandates; a limited number of studies examine their perceptions about school wellness policies.⁴ Given the most recent LWP final rule (see box), it is important to understand the experiences and perspectives of this key stakeholder group to advance implementation of LWP in school districts.

What Is This Brief About?

This brief highlights strategies and recommendations – identified by superintendents – to facilitate implementation of LWPs. These strategies emerged from superintendents’ experiences and perspectives on wellness, which are described in the report [“Superintendent Perspectives on Local School Wellness Policy Implementation.”](#)

Recommendations for LWP Implementation

FORM or SUPPORT A WELLNESS COMMITTEE AND DELEGATE TASKS

While superintendents from smaller school districts tended to assume many roles in LWP implementation, most superintendents from larger districts described a “*differentiated approach*” supported by a wellness committee, where implementation, assessment, and reporting activities were delegated to various roles in the district. Not only did this approach allow school professionals with expertise to tackle the appropriate implementation activities (e.g., food service director overseeing school meal program provisions), it allowed the superintendent to provide oversight without having to be directly involved with every step.

FINAL RULE FOR LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICIES



The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010⁵ prompted adoption of a final rule⁶ that renewed and expanded the LWP requirements. The requirements took

effect for the 2017-2018 school year and included new provisions such as:

- Policies for food and beverage marketing that allow advertising of only those foods and beverages that meet *Smart Snacks in Schools*;
- Permission for stakeholders (e.g., parents) to participate in policy development, implementation, review, and updates;
- A requirement that the district annually inform and update the community about the policy’s content, implementation, and any updates; and
- A requirement that the district triennially measure and make available to the public an assessment on implementation, including school compliance, alignment with model wellness policies, and a description of progress made in attaining the wellness policy goals.

I think most superintendents I can think of understand the significance of wellness in their districts...One of the things I offer to my colleagues is the understanding that, **while you need to lead it, you don’t have to do it...** for me, that’s the most important part of our wellness policy. Who is the coordinator and that the committee is functioning.

PARTNER WITH EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Superintendents recommended forming partnerships with external organizations as a common strategy to implement wellness initiatives. Partnership organizations provided services or resources to facilitate implementation, such as nutrition education or grant funding to purchase equipment for wellness activities. While some superintendents were directly involved with reaching out to create partnerships, others delegated staff members. Superintendents liked that partners provided research-based resources that aligned with the goals of the school districts' LWP plan.

Work closely with state technical assistance organizations: Of the many partnerships noted, Superintendents most commonly worked with state technical assistance organizations and found them to be helpful.

The state director does a very good job of disseminating information, if you have questions you can call him directly. That department does a really good job of getting that information out and working with us on anything we need.

We've also worked with one of the state universities. They have an outreach program, especially for the parent education, with nutrition and physical activity.

We've partnered with a [physical activity initiative] kind of organization. We have a local organization in our city, so the elementary district has partnered with that group to try to increase physical activity for the community, but focusing on starting in schools.

OBTAIN BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR EVALUATION



Superintendents expressed that there was strong potential and interest in linking LWP implementation to academic achievement as a key outcome.

However, many reported that this relationship was challenging to measure due to many confounding

factors and activities at the school district. In response, superintendents expressed a need to have access to best practices tools, practices, and repositories where resources to facilitate assessment and evaluation could be shared.



Example of best practice tools for evaluation

The Wellness School Assessment Tool or (WellSAT-I) (<http://www.wellsat.org/>) offers a comprehensive and evidence-informed tool to measure implementation of LWPs. Aligned with the WellSAT 3.0 tool that measures the quality of the wellness policy, application of both tools allows a school district to monitor and assess their progress with policy and practices. The tool provides guidance and additional resources based on the uniquely generated results.

Everybody wants to tie the work that you're doing to academics, no matter what it is. Whether it's wellness or other... everyone is like, "how does that impact learning?"

Methods Summary

This policy brief summarizes findings from a qualitative study of 39 Superintendents from 22 states who participated in focus groups at The School Superintendents Association (AASA) annual meeting in March 2017, followed by individual telephone interviews conducted between March and July 2017, with 14 of the focus group participants. Detailed information about study methods can be found [here](#).

If there was a tool we could use that had been vetted, that would help us evaluate our wellness program, that would be easy to administer to principals and teachers and provide reasonable data to help us gauge over the course of 5 years to say...we're making a difference, we're not making a difference...and where can we make changes.

Resources

- National Wellness Policy Study www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts
- The Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT-I) (<http://www.wellsat.org/>)
- National Wellness Policy Study www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts
- USDA Local School Wellness Policy Final Rule Summary (https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tn/LWPsummary_finalrule.pdf)
- USDA Local School Wellness Policy Toolkit (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy-outreach-toolkit>)
- Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) Model School Wellness Policy Resources (<http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/resources.html>)
- Local Health Department and School Partnerships: Working Together to Build Healthier Schools (http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.chronicdisease.org/resource/resmgr/school_health/NACDD_Health_Department_and_.pdf)
- CDC Healthy Schools Tools and Resources (<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/resources.htm>)

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief, prepared from superintendent focus groups and interviews, was written by staff from the National Wellness Policy Study at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity as part of the United States Department of Agriculture School Wellness Policy Cooperative Agreement (USDA-FNS-OPS-SWP-15-IL-01). The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the University of Illinois at Chicago, or the University of Connecticut nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement. Graphic design and layout by Claudia M. Grosz (www.claudiagrosz.com). Photos obtained from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Asada Y, Hughes A, Read M, Schermbeck R, Schwartz M, Chiqui JF. Superintendent Recommendations for Local School Wellness Policy Implementation. Chicago, IL: National Wellness Policy Study, Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018, www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts.

INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH RESEARCH AND POLICY



UCONN RUDD CENTER
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

REFERENCES

- ¹ Local school wellness policy implementation under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, final rule. 81 Federal Register 50151. 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17230.pdf>.
- ² Asada Y, Ziemann M, Chiqui J. *Food Service Director Experiences Implementing Revised School Meal Standards: Summary of Qualitative Findings*. Chicago, IL; 2015. www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts
- ³ Lucarelli JF, Alaimo K, Mang E, Martin C, Miles R, Bailey D, Kelleher DK, Drzal NB, Liu H. Facilitators to promoting health in schools: Is school health climate the key? *Journal of School Health*. 2014;84(2):133-140.
- ⁴ Agron, P., Berends, V., Ellis, K., & Gonzalez, M. (2010). School wellness policies: perceptions, barriers, and needs among school leaders and wellness advocates. *The Journal of School Health*, 80(11), 527-35-2.
- ⁵ Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. PL 111-296; 124 Stat 3183. 2010 (111th Congress). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ296/html/PLAW-111publ296.htm>
- ⁶ Local school wellness policy implementation under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, final rule. 81 Federal Register 50151. 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17230.pdf>.

