

## Policy Component: Communication and Promotion

### Goal

School districts will promote clear and consistent messages that explain and reinforce healthy eating and physical activity habits. Districts will engage students, families, the community and the media in promoting a healthy school environment.

### Rationale

The promotion of consistent messages in the school environment reinforces the district's commitment to students' health. Marketing materials in the cafeteria and classrooms should support the concepts and practices in the district's nutrition and physical activity policies. Marketing targeted to children through multiple media channels contributes to their choices about foods, beverages and physically active pursuits. Families have a significant influence on students' eating and physical activity habits. Partnering with the local community increases schools' effectiveness in providing consistent health messages.

### Policy Recommendations

Policies for Communication and Promotion will address the following areas:

- Consistent Health Messages
- Engaging Families
- Engaging Students
- Partnering with Community Organizations
- Food Marketing in Schools
- Media

Specific guidance regarding the implementation of each policy recommendation for Communication and Promotion follows under *Implementation Guidance*, after this section. Resources to assist with the implementation of each policy recommendation are found in *Resources* at the end of this section.

*Each policy component section provides **recommendations** (not requirements) for policy language for Communication and Promotion. This language represents recommended best practice for developing school nutrition and physical activity policies. School districts may choose to use the policy recommendations as written or revise them as needed to meet local needs and reflect community priorities. When developing nutrition and physical activity policies, districts will need to take into account their unique circumstances, challenges, opportunities and available resources. Policies should meet local needs and be adapted to the health concerns, food preferences and dietary practices of different ethnic groups.*

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **Consistent Health Messages**

Students shall receive positive, motivating messages, both verbal and nonverbal, about healthy eating and physical activity throughout the school environment. All school personnel shall help reinforce these positive messages. Foods and beverages sold or served at school shall not contradict healthy eating messages. The school district shall not use practices that contradict messages to promote and enjoy physical activity; for example, withholding recess or using physical activity as punishment (e.g., running laps, doing pushups).

#### **Engaging Families**

The school district shall encourage family involvement to support and promote healthy eating and physical activity habits. The district shall support families' efforts to provide a healthy diet and daily physical activity for their children through effective two-way communication strategies that allow sharing of information from school to home and from home to school. The district shall offer nutrition education for parents which can include providing healthy eating seminars, sending home nutrition information, postings on district website, providing nutrient analyses of school menus in language families can understand and any other appropriate methods for reaching families. The district shall provide families with a list of foods that meet the district's nutrition standards and ideas for healthy celebrations, rewards and fundraising activities. The district shall provide opportunities for families to share their healthy food practices with others in the school community. The district shall provide information about physical education and other school-based physical activity opportunities before, during and after the school day, and shall support families' efforts to provide their children with opportunities to be physically active outside of school. Such supports shall include sharing information about physical activity and physical education through a website, newsletter or other take-home materials, special events or physical education homework.

*Note: Throughout this document the words "parent(s)" and "family(ies)" will be used in the broadest sense to mean those adults with primary responsibility for children. SDE prefers the use of "family" to "parent" because not all responsible agents are parents, but most are family, either by relationship or function.*

#### **Engaging Students**

Schools shall consider student needs in planning for a healthy school environment. Students shall be asked for input and feedback through the use of student surveys and other means, and attention shall be given to their comments. Key health messages shall be promoted by coordinating classroom and cafeteria, and through planned promotions such as health fairs, nutrition initiatives, programs and contests.

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**Partnering with Community Organizations**

Schools shall partner with community organizations (e.g., local businesses, faith-based organizations, libraries, local health departments, local colleges and their students, and local health care providers) to provide consistent health messages and support school-based activities that promote healthy eating and physical activity.

**Food Marketing in Schools**

School-based marketing shall be consistent with nutrition education and health promotion. Thus, schools shall limit food and beverage marketing to the promotion of foods and beverages that meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrient standards for meals, the beverage requirements of state statute and the district's nutrition standards.\* Schools shall promote healthy food choices and shall not allow advertising that promotes less nutritious food and beverage choices. The promotion of healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products, shall be encouraged.

**Media**

Schools shall work with a variety of media, such as local newspapers, radio and television stations, to spread the word to the community about healthy eating and physical activity behaviors, and a healthy school environment.



\* In Connecticut public schools, all beverages sold to students must meet the requirements of Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS). Districts participating in healthy food certification under CGS Section 10-215f must ensure that all food sold to students separately from reimbursable meals meets the Connecticut Nutrition Standards.

### **Implementation Guidance**

#### **Consistent Health Messages**

Making healthy food choices and physical activity available for students is critical to providing a healthy school environment. It is also important to actively promote healthy eating and physical activity to students, families, school staff members and the community. Positive health messages can be promoted through a variety of activities, including:

- featuring regular messages about healthy eating, nutrition education and physical activity in school media (e.g., newsletters, announcements, bulletin board, communications folders and school menus);
- working with school and student organizations (e.g., student council, PTA/PTO and other parent volunteers/organizations) to develop promotional materials that include consistent nutrition and physical activity messages;
- conducting special nutrition and physical activity promotions and events that involve the entire school community, including classroom and cafeteria;
- providing nutrition and physical activity information and resources at registration, PTA/PTO meetings, open houses, health fairs and teacher in-service training;
- providing signage or labeling for healthy food and beverage options in the cafeteria and throughout the school (e.g., vending machines and school stores), via school menus, menu boards, tent cards, posters and other promotional signage;
- providing signage to encourage drinking water;
- providing materials in school and community venues (e.g., websites, offices of local health providers, School-Based Health Centers and after-school programs) that promote healthy eating and physical activity; and
- sending healthy lunch box ideas on a regular basis to families through communications folders.

Foods and beverages sold at school should not contradict nutrition messages in the classroom and school environment. All beverages sold to students must comply with the requirements of state statute. School foods must meet the nutrition standards developed by the district.\* The Connecticut Nutrition Standards and the beverage requirements of state statute apply only to foods and beverages that are sold to students. However, to promote consistent health messages to students, the SDE also encourages districts to use the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and state beverage statute as guidelines for foods and beverages that are given to students. Information on nutrition standards for foods and beverages is contained in *Section 5 – Nutrition Standards* (see *Requirements for Beverages* and *Requirements for Food*).

**Note:** Schools should provide bilingual signage and materials as appropriate to the local community. Messages should be culturally relevant and reflect the importance of good nutrition and healthy eating and physical activity habits.

\* Districts that participate in healthy food certification under Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes must follow the Connecticut Nutrition Standards for all food sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals (see *Connecticut Nutrition Standards* in *Section 5 – Nutrition Standards*).

### Engaging Families

Families have a significant influence on helping children to develop healthy eating and physical activity habits. They can also be effective allies in promoting support for the district's nutrition and physical activity policies and programs. It is important for districts to communicate with families in ways that respect families' cultural backgrounds and promote their participation in health-related activities at school and home. Districts also need to provide information that encourages families to teach their children about health and nutrition, to provide nutritious meals and to participate in regular physical activity.

Parents need to understand – and help communicate to other parents – the nutrition and physical activity issues that impact their children's health. Parents also need to ensure that healthy meals are served at home and brought to school, and they need to encourage their children to engage in healthy eating and regular physical activity.

Schools can encourage two-way communication by using effective strategies that allow sharing of information from school to home and home to school to better incorporate parents' perspectives in school-developed programs and materials. Strategies for schools to encourage communication, family involvement and support include:

- recruiting parents to serve on the district's School Health Team;
- working with PTA/PTO members and other parent volunteers/organizations to encourage parent involvement in nutrition and physical activity efforts at school;
- encouraging parents to plan, promote and conduct nutrition education activities and events in collaboration with school staff members;
- soliciting parent input prior to developing nutrition and physical activity programs and materials;
- providing information to families on nutrition and physical activity issues, e.g., newsletters, fact sheets, health fairs and workshops (see *Handouts for Children, Parents and School Staff Members* in Section 3 – *Nutrition Education and Promotion*);
- sending cafeteria menus and nutrition information home with students;
- providing a tear-off form at the bottom of newsletters, handouts and other informational materials that parents can use to respond with questions or concerns about specific issues;
- using local media (e.g., television, radio and newspapers) to provide information and resources on nutrition and physical activity issues, such as district policies, local health issues, programs and activities;
- including home activities on nutrition in student assignments, e.g., interviewing family members about personal food habits, recording food intake, looking at food labels, reading nutrition-related articles or newsletters, creating a healthy snack or meal, and talking about media's effect on food choices;
- including home activities on physical activity in student assignments, e.g., maintaining physical activity logs, planning games for a family picnic and helping with chores at home;
- providing ideas for healthy alternatives to fundraising, celebrations and food as a reward (see Section 5 – *Nutrition Standards for School Foods and Beverages*);

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- encouraging parents to send healthy snacks and meals to school and refrain from sending or bringing in foods and beverages that do not meet the state beverage statute or the district's nutrition standards;
- inviting parents and family members to eat with their children in the cafeteria;
- requesting parents' input on nutrition and physical activity issues through surveys, forums, focus groups, school committees, school organizations and other means;
- inviting families to attend exhibitions of student nutrition projects or health fairs;
- involving families in school garden projects;
- offering nutrition education activities at family nights and other school events;
- providing opportunities to share culturally diverse eating practices and traditions;
- providing nutrition workshops;
- providing opportunities for physical activity that involve the whole family, e.g., family sports night, dances, games that involve physical activity, walk-a-thons; and
- promoting opportunities for physical activity at school and in the community.

### **Engaging Students**

Students can be a powerful force for creating change in the school community. Students can serve on the local School Health Team and be actively involved in the local policy development process. *Playing the Policy Game* (California Project Lean, 2003) is one resource to help districts involve students in developing nutrition and physical activity policies in the school and community. (<http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/>).

Schools may also want to consider encouraging the development of a Student Wellness Council, which brings students together to learn about and promote nutrition, physical activity and wellness. A Student Wellness Council also serves as a link between students, school nutrition personnel, administrators and the community.

In addition to inviting students to serve on the local School Health Team or Student Wellness Council, schools can encourage student involvement by empowering students to act on various nutrition and physical activity initiatives. Sample activities might include:

- conducting meetings to discuss nutrition and physical activity topics;
- conducting nutrition, health and wellness fairs;
- coordinating classroom and cafeteria education efforts;
- coordinating nutrition and/or physical activity contests;
- decorating the cafeteria and other areas of the school, e.g., nutrition and physical activity posters and displays;
- educating the school community about nutrition and physical activity, e.g., bulletin boards, newsletters, fact sheets, websites, assemblies and school events;
- providing input to school food service personnel on menu development;
- taste testing new food products;

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- conducting student nutrition and fitness surveys;
- planning special events for promotions, e.g., National Nutrition Month ([http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/NNM\\_2007\\_home.htm](http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/NNM_2007_home.htm)), National School Lunch Week (<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=54>);
- developing school wellness programs;
- researching a nutrition or physical activity topic for a report to the School Health Team, an article for the school newspaper or a feature story for school-operated television;
- planning and promoting food drives;
- planning and promoting healthy school fundraisers;
- participating in physical activity events to raise money for charity, e.g., walk-a-thons, bike-a-thons, jump roping and basketball tournaments;
- educating other students about timely nutrition and physical activity issues; and
- conducting peer-to-peer programs and peer mentoring programs.

**Partnering with Community Organizations**

Partnering with community organizations allows districts to more effectively promote consistent health messages. Many organizations are willing to work with local school districts to support and promote nutrition and physical activity initiatives. Examples of potential partners include:

- nonprofit health organizations, e.g., American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and American Diabetes Association;
- Cooperative Extension, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP);
- YMCA/YWCA;
- Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts;
- Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H clubs;
- local civic organizations, e.g., Kiwanis, Lions or Rotary Club;
- faith-based groups;
- School Readiness Councils;
- local elected officials;
- law enforcement officials;
- armed services;
- town park and recreation programs;
- youth sports leagues;
- libraries;
- local hospitals, clinics and medical associations;
- local medical professionals;
- local health organizations and coalitions;
- local businesses;



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- commercial fitness centers;
- physical fitness programs for children with disabilities, e.g., Unified Sports and Special Olympics;
- local universities/colleges and their students; and
- local health departments/districts.

Schools can partner with community organizations to provide a variety of activities related to nutrition, physical activity and student wellness. Some ideas include:

- conducting meetings to discuss nutrition and physical activity topics;
- participating in community-based nutrition education campaigns (such as the CDC's *Fruits & Veggies More Matters* campaign) sponsored by public health agencies or organizations;
- participating in educational physical activity fundraisers, e.g., the American Heart Association's *Jump Rope for Heart* and *Hoops for Heart* (<http://www.americanheart.org>), and the American Diabetes Association's *School Walk for Diabetes* (<http://schoolwalk.diabetes.org>);
- working with local community leaders to provide *Kids Walk-to-School Program* (<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/index.htm>);
- working with community organizations and businesses to provide time and space for physical activities;
- working with nonprofit health organizations to promote consistent media messages at school and in the community;
- recruiting local organizations and businesses to participate in school health and fitness fairs;
- cosponsoring nutrition and physical activity events in local schools, e.g., Project ACES – *All Children Exercise Simultaneously* (<http://www.lensaunders.com/aces/aces.html>);
- obtaining local funding, services and other resources for local nutrition and physical activity programs and activities;
- working with local hospitals to provide wellness programs for students, families and school staff members;
- inviting local university/college students to conduct nutrition and physical activity initiatives;
- conducting outreach on nutrition and physical activity through Family Resource Centers and School-Based Health Centers;
- volunteering with Unified Sports (a division of Special Olympics) to help with local community events for children with cognitive and physical impairments (<http://www.casciac.org/ciacindex.shtml>); and
- promoting a “loaned executive” program between the school system and local hospitals, organizations and businesses in order to provide additional professional services to schools, e.g., a local hospital donating the time of a registered dietitian to work with the district on policy development policy.

Resources to assist with community-based initiatives are found in *Partnering with Community Organizations* under *Resources* at the end of this section.

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**Food Marketing in Schools**

Many marketing techniques target the promotion of foods of low-nutrient density, i.e., foods that are high in calories from fat and/or added sugars but contain relatively few, if any, vitamins and minerals. In order to promote healthy food choices, schools should not allow advertising that promotes less nutritious food and beverage choices. Acceptable and unacceptable marketing techniques are summarized in the chart below.

**Acceptable and Unacceptable Marketing Techniques****Acceptable Marketing Activities** (*promote healthful behaviors*)

- Vending machine covers promoting water
- Pricing structures that promote healthy options in a la carte lines or vending machines
- Sales of fruit or other healthy foods for fundraisers
- Coupons for discount gym memberships
- Healthy eating messages provided in a variety of venues, e.g., posters, school newsletter, menu backs, school-operated television, intercom announcements, etc.

**Not Acceptable** (*promote foods and beverages of low-nutrient density*)

- Logos and brand names of foods and beverages of low-nutrient density on or in vending machines, books or curriculums, textbook covers, school supplies, scoreboards, school structures and sports equipment
- Educational incentive programs that provide food as a reward
- Programs that provide schools with supplies when families buy foods and beverages of low-nutrient density
- In-school television, e.g., Channel One
- Free samples or coupons for foods and beverages of low-nutrient density
- Fundraising activities using foods and beverages of low-nutrient density

Adapted with permission from *Model School Wellness Policies*. National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, 2005. <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/>

**Promoting School Meals**

When marketing is used in schools, it should promote good nutrition, healthy foods and physical activity. School food service programs can use marketing to promote healthy school meals and food choices. Meals can be marketed in the classroom and related to the curriculum. They can also be marketed in the cafeteria using signage, food samples, giveaways and other promotional events such as theme days. Schools can also involve families through menus, take-home newsletters, invitations to family meals at school and presentations at parent organizations.

Promotions can be powerful marketing tools that have a direct, meaningful impact on customers and their purchasing decisions. As customers of the school food service program, students, faculty and

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staff members have choices to make in deciding what to purchase and what not to purchase. Effective nutrition promotions can encourage choices of healthy foods and beverages. Promotions can be used to:

- show customers that the school food service department cares about them and places a high priority on health and nutrition;
- get customers excited or interested in the programs so that they keep participating;
- highlight specific services or products;
- introduce new items on a continual basis, such as highlighting a new recipe on the menu or featuring a new item each month;
- introduce or reinforce an identity or a marketing theme, such as National School Lunch Week or School Breakfast Week;
- celebrate a nutrition and health awareness event, such as National Nutrition Month and National Diabetes Month (see <http://healthfinder.gov/nho/default.aspx> for a list of national health observances);
- establish a distinctive image or “brand” for the school food service department; and
- reinforce the school food service department’s role in the total school environment by collaborating on special school activities and events.

Promotions are designed to cause action. Ultimately, a promotion is designed to change some attitude or belief and/or cause customers to buy something. For instance, a promotion may be designed to convince students that the fruits and vegetables on the school salad bar taste good or that they want to eat breakfast at school. National School Lunch Week and School Breakfast Week, for example, are designed around annual themes to promote the value of school meals to the entire school community. A promotion may strive to influence students to buy the reimbursable meal in general or to try a new product in particular.

For additional information, see *Marketing* under *Resources* at the end of this section and *Nutrition Promotion* in *Section 3 – Nutrition Education and Promotion*.

### **Media**

The media can expand the reach of school district efforts, reinforce messages throughout the community, and increase public support for a healthy school nutrition environment. Some strategies for using the media include:

- announcing school menus daily on local radio and television programs, and having them printed in the local newspaper;
- writing an opinion piece on school nutrition and physical activity issues for the local paper;
- inviting local media to attend nutrition and physical activity events at your school;
- inviting a local radio station to broadcast from the school; and
- appearing on local television and radio talk shows to discuss local nutrition and physical activity issues, program and activities.

USDA’s *Changing the Scene* (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/changing.html>) contains tips and resources to help schools work with the media. Additional resources are found in *Working with the Media* under *Resources* at the end of this section.

## References

- Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2000: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/changing.html>
- Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MMWR, June 14, 1996/45(RR-9);1-33: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00042446.htm>
- Idaho Implementation Guide for School Wellness Policy*, Idaho Action for Healthy Kids, 2005: <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/wellness/docs/AFHK%20Wellness%20Policy%20rev%202007.pdf>
- New Mexico Action for Healthy Kids School Wellness Toolkit, Part I: Nutrition*, New Mexico Action for Healthy Kids, 2005: [http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/filelib/toolsforteam/recom/NM\\_AFHK%20Nutrition%20Toolkit%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/filelib/toolsforteam/recom/NM_AFHK%20Nutrition%20Toolkit%20-%20FINAL.pdf)
- Wellness Policy Toolkit*, Wyoming Action for Healthy Kids, 2005: [http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/filelib/toolsforteam/recom/WY\\_WY-Wellness%20Policy%20Toolkit.pdf](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/filelib/toolsforteam/recom/WY_WY-Wellness%20Policy%20Toolkit.pdf)

### **Resources**

Resources are listed by main category. Many resources contain information on multiple content areas. For additional resources, consult each policy component section of the *Action Guide*.

#### **Engaging Families**

Click on the SDE's [Healthy School Environment Resource List](#), then click on *Engaging Families* under *School Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles* to access resources on this topic.

#### **Engaging Students**

Click on the SDE's [Healthy School Environment Resource List](#), then click on *Engaging Students* under *School Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles* to access resources on this topic.

#### **Partnering with Community Organizations**

Click on the SDE's [Healthy School Environment Resource List](#), then click on *Partnering with Community Organizations* under *School Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles* to access resources on this topic.

#### **Marketing and Promotion**

Click on the SDE's [Healthy School Environment Resource List](#), then click on *Marketing and Promotion* under *School Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles* to access resources on this topic.

#### **Working with the Media**

Click on the SDE's [Healthy School Environment Resource List](#), then click on *Working with the Media* under *School Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles* to access resources on this topic.

Additional resources can be found in the SDE's *Healthy School Environment Resource List* ([http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Nutrition/hse\\_resource\\_list.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Nutrition/hse_resource_list.pdf)) and *Nutrition-Related Resources* ([http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Nutrition/nutrition\\_resources.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Nutrition/nutrition_resources.pdf)). These lists are updated regularly.