

Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools Wellness Policy

Introduction

In the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, the U.S. Congress established a requirement that all school districts with a federally funded school meal program form a Wellness Committee to draft a Wellness Policy by the start of the 2006-2007 school year. The law requires that these policies must, at a minimum:

1. Include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.
2. Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity.
3. Provide assurance that guidelines for reimbursable school meals shall not be less restrictive than regulations and guidance issued by the Secretary of Agriculture.
4. Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.
5. Involve parents, students, and representatives of the school authority, school board, school administrators, and the public, in development of the local Wellness Policy.

There are several basic principles that served as a guide for this Wellness Policy:

- Healthy children are the foundation of a healthy society;
- Healthy, well-nourished children are better able to learn;
- All children deserve nutritious, safe, and deliciously prepared food;
- Eating habits developed in childhood will affect health throughout life;
- Knowledge of food—how it is grown, who grows it, how it is prepared, its connection to tradition, and its influence in shaping the future of society—is integral to a healthy education;

There are several general goals for this Wellness Policy:

- Integrate core curriculum with learning experiences in cafeterias;
- Build skills linked to meal preparation;
- Emphasize fresh, local, seasonal, and whole foods;
- Model recycling, reduction, and composting of waste;
- Develop positive social interactions, good manners, and enjoyment of meals through positive dining experiences;
- Lead to a basic understanding of the principles of sustainability;
- Enhance respect for cultural and agricultural values;
- Include families and the community as a resource in the learning process.

Mission

The Advisory Board of the Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools recognizes that there is a link between nutrition education, the food served in schools, physical activity, and environmental education, and that wellness is affected by all of these. The Advisory Board also recognizes the important connection between a healthy diet and a student's ability to learn effectively and achieve high standards in school. The most important connection is our spirituality. "Grace, the church teaches builds on nature". If we want our children to have a healthy spiritual life, we need to start with a healthy temple of the spirit of our bodies.

The Advisory Board recognizes that it is the role of GTACS, as part of the larger community, to model and actively practice, through policies and procedures: the promotion of family health, physical activity, good nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and environmental restoration Christ teaches his message on every page of the Gospel, through the use of the communal or family meal. It is at the table where we learn to love our neighbor, and ourselves starting with our bodies. We cannot love our neighbor well if we do not first love ourselves correctly.

The Advisory Board further recognizes that the sharing and enjoyment of food, and participation in physical activities, are fundamental experiences for all people and are a primary way to nurture and celebrate our cultural diversity. These fundamental human experiences are vital bridges for building friendships, forming inter-generational bonds, strengthening communities, and learning about the spiritual life. It is no coincidence that Christ gives himself to us in the form of a sacred banquet. The banquet is where we learn to love him and each other.

Wellness Policy Requirement 1

Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.

Nutrition Education

To help ensure the health and well being of each student attending Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, and to provide guidance to school personnel in the areas of nutrition, health, physical activity and food service, the Advisory Board encourages teachers, principals, and nutrition services employees to recognize the lunch period as an integral part of the educational program of the district, and work to implement the goals of this policy. The following are the goals:

- No student goes hungry during school;
- An economically sustainable meal program makes available a healthy and nutritious lunch to every student at every school so that students are prepared to learn to their fullest potential;
- Sampling and tasting shall be encouraged as part of nutrition education;
- Staff is encouraged to utilize food from local farms based upon availability and acceptability;
- Schools shall use food as an integrator and central focus of education about human events, history, and celebrations, and shall encourage classes to use food and cooking as part of a learning experience that sheds light on the customs, history, traditions, and cuisine of various countries and cultures;
- Eating experiences, cooking experiences, and nutrition education are integrated into the core academic curriculum at all grade levels;
- Schools shall promote food-centered activities that are healthful, enjoyable, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, and participatory, such as contests, promotions, taste testing, farm visits, school gardens, and kitchen classrooms;
- Lunch periods shall be scheduled so that students do not have to eat lunch unusually early or late, and ideally, so that they come after periods of exercise;
- All school eating areas shall contain free, safe, drinking water sources and facilities for washing hands;
- At each school site, students shall play a role in a recycling program that begins with the purchase of recycled products and maximizes the reduction of waste by recycling, reusing, composting and purchasing, recycled products;
- Meals will be attractively presented and served in a pleasant environment with sufficient time for eating, while fostering good eating habits, enjoyment of meals, good manners, and Christian respect for others;
- The Maintenance Department shall include kitchen facilities, food preparation and storage of equipment as a high priority in its comprehensive maintenance policy;
- Food Services shall work to modernize computer equipment and programs, and institute an automated accounting system and payment system to protect student privacy.

Physical Activity

The Advisory Board recognizes the positive benefits of physical activity for student health and academic achievement. Recognizing that physical education is a crucial and integral part of a child's education, the district will provide opportunities to ensure that students engage in healthful levels of vigorous physical activity to promote and develop the student's physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. Besides promoting high levels of personal achievement and a positive self-image, physical education activities should teach students how to cooperate in the achievement of common goals.

The components of the district's physical education program shall include a variety of kinesthetic activities, including team, individual, and cooperative sports and physical activities, as well as aesthetic movement forms, such as dance. Students shall be given opportunities for physical activity through a range of before-school and/or after-school programs including, but not limited to, intramurals, interscholastic athletics, and physical activity clubs. The Superintendent or designee may grant temporary exemption from physical education if a student is ill or injured and a modified program to meet his/her needs cannot be provided. The following goals apply:

- Physical education teachers shall develop and implement a curriculum that connects and demonstrates the interrelationship between physical activity, good nutrition, and health;
- An appropriate alternative activity shall be provided for students with a physical disability that may restrict excessive physical exertion;
- Physical education staff shall appropriately limit the amount or type of physical exercise required of students during excessively hot weather, or other inclement conditions.

School-Based Learning Experiences

The Advisory Board recognizes that experiential learning activities that assist students to make connections between diet, health, and environment are critical to formation of student understanding of personal wellness within a larger context of environmental health. Schools play a crucial role in educating students on environmental issues and preparing them to be the stewards of their natural resources. The quality of life in future generations will depend upon our students' willingness and ability to solve today's environmental problems and prevent new ones from developing. The following goals apply:

- Staff is encouraged to integrate garden, nutrition education, cooking and eating experiences, and energy and renewable energy experiences into the curriculum for math, science, social studies and language arts at all grade levels;
- Staff is encouraged to establish relationships with local farms so that farmers and farm workers will visit school classrooms and students will visit farms;

- Students are encouraged to recycle, conserve materials, water, and energy, use biodegradable materials when possible, and dispose of wastes in an environmentally sound way at school, in the cafeteria, and in all classroom-based activities;
- Food service and teaching staff shall work cooperatively to integrate experiences in cafeterias and farm field trips with the formal learning experience of all students.

Professional Development

The Advisory Board recognizes that using the local food system as a context for learning, and embedding nutrition education in a school's curriculum, generates new content for students to learn. It also requires teachers to learn new content and new strategies for teaching it. For food service personnel, new menus require new ways of purchasing, preparing, and presenting foods. The transition to an educational model that makes food and health central parts of the academic curriculum requires professional development. The following goals apply:

- Regular professional development will be provided to enable the Food Service Staff to become full partners in providing excellent school meals;
- Regular professional development will be provided to teachers and the Food Service Staff on basic nutrition, nutrition education, and benefits of sustainable agriculture;
- The Food Service Staff will have access to USDA-approved computer software, training, and support to implement nutrient-based menu planning when such flexibility is desirable.

Waste Reduction

The Advisory Board recognizes that school meal programs that utilize pre-packaged, processed foods consistently generate more solid waste than those that cook from whole ingredients. A shift to cooking meals from fresh, whole ingredients usually leads to a reduction in solid waste, and in the expense associated with waste disposal. The following goals apply:

- Meals prepared at school utilize fresh, whole, unpackaged, unprocessed or minimally processed ingredients, to the maximum extent possible, in order to preserve nutritional content and reduce packaging waste;
- Cafeterias model environmentally sound practices, educate and involve students and staff in reducing waste, composting, recycling and purchasing recycled material;
- Packaging containing school meals is made of recycled content and should be recycled.

Wellness Policy Requirement 2

Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the school day.

Part of the educational mission of the Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools is to improve the health of the entire community by teaching students and families ways to establish and maintain life-long healthy eating habits. The mission shall be accomplished through nutrition education, physical education, environmental restoration, core academic content in the classroom, and the food served in schools. The following goals apply:

- All qualified children will become eligible for free meals
- Maximum participation in the school meal program will be achieved by developing a coordinated, comprehensive outreach and promotion plan.
- A shift from food-based planning to nutrient-based planning (as set forth in USDA guidelines) will be considered when it allows for more flexible food selection;
- The nutritional value of the food served will significantly improve upon USDA Dietary Guidelines through provision of nutritious, fresh, tasty, locally grown food whenever possible;
- Schools will provide students with at least 30 minutes to eat after sitting down for lunch;
- The Food Services Staff will coordinate its menus with seasonal production of local farms, so that school meals will reflect seasonality and local agriculture;
- Schools shall develop a “Healthy Snacks” policy, and provide parents and teachers with a list of healthy, affordable food choices for snacks and parties;
- Foods offered to students and employees of the district during the day as a snack, an incentive, or in school offices, whether provided by parents or staff, shall be consistent with the goals of the policy;
- Schools shall limit celebrations that involve food during the school day to shared monthly birthday celebrations, and should discourage serving foods and beverages that do not meet nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold individually;
- The foods used during classes as part of the learning process, for fundraisers that take place at school, for at-school parties, or school-sponsored events, should follow the nutrition guidelines for snacks at school, and should be healthy, safe, and delicious;
- Parents and staff are encouraged to provide party snacks that are consistent with the goals of the policy, and to see to it that such items are served after the lunch hour whenever possible;
- Foods served at school will carry sufficient nutrition information to allow parents and students to make informed dietary choices.

- Schools shall offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, at least two non-fried vegetables and two fruit choices each day, and five different fruits and five different vegetables over the course of a week;
- Elementary schools shall not have vending machines or school stores accessible by students;
- Vending machines and school stores shall only offer approved items.

Wellness Policy Requirement 3

Assure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the Secretary of Agriculture.

- The Food Services Director will review this policy and ensure that the policies are not less restrictive than those set by the Secretary of Agriculture or state law.

Wellness Policy Requirement 4

Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.

In conjunction with adoption of a Wellness Policy, the district shall establish a standing Wellness Committee to remain actively engaged with food service in monitoring the implementation of the Wellness Policy and in presenting recommendations to the Advisory Board. The Wellness Committee and Food Service should work cooperatively in evaluating success. The Wellness Committee shall present to the Advisory Board an Annual Report each year, with the following content:

- Review and comment on the profit and loss statement, marketing plan and business plan;
- Recommendations for improving the delivery and cost effectiveness of food services;
- Recommendations to increase the amount of fresh, local produce offered through the School Meal Program;
- Solicit student preferences through taste tests, surveys, and interviews, and through student participation on the Wellness Committee;
- Describe the level of service for each site and level of participation for each site;
- Report on the progress in meeting the Wellness Policy goals;
- Nutritional quality of the food being served;
- Inventory of equipment;

- Budget for maintenance and replacement equipment;
- Annual review of school food sales to determine:
 - Percentage of food purchased from local sources and the total dollar amount spent on local food;
 - Income benefit or loss due to increases in local purchasing;
 - Opportunities to increase purchase of local and seasonal items;
 - Impacts on participation, and on fruit and vegetable consumption;
 - Degree of nutrition education students are receiving and how it is administered.

Wellness Policy Requirement 5

Involve parents, students, and representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public, in development of the local Wellness Policy.

Establishing a Wellness Committee

The Wellness Committee is a working group of the Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools Advisory Board, instrumental in reviewing and modifying the Wellness Policy. The Wellness Committee is responsible for addressing food-related topics of concern to the school community and making Wellness Policy recommendations to the Advisory Board.

The Wellness Committee shall be a diverse and inclusive working group, representative of the demographics of the school district as a whole. The membership of the Wellness Committee shall be as follows:

- Superintendent
- Director of Food Services
- A minimum 2 administrative employees
- A minimum 2 teachers
- A minimum of 1 principal
- A minimum of 2 students
- A minimum of 3 community/parent representatives

The Wellness Committee shall meet at least two times a year at hours convenient for public participation, and for sufficient time to conduct the group's business.

Resources

Center for Ecoliteracy

The Center's *Rethinking School Lunch* program uses a systems approach to address the crisis in childhood obesity, provide nutrition education, and teach ecological knowledge. The Center spent five years researching 10 interrelated dimensions vital to achieving this vision.

www.rethinkingschoollunch.org

The Center provides a collection of brief essays entitled *Thinking outside the Lunchbox* that form the conceptual framework for change. Leading thinkers, educators, and policy makers probe the connections that link childhood obesity and other health issues, the interdependence of human and ecological communities, education for sustainability, and access to safe, fresh, and nourishing food for all people. New essays are added regularly.

www.ecoliteracy.org

Chez Panisse Foundation

The Chez Panisse Foundation is committed to transforming public education by using food traditions to teach, nurture, and empower young people. The foundation envisions a curriculum, integrated with the school lunch service, in which growing, cooking and sharing food at the table give students the knowledge and values to build a humane and sustainable future.

www.chezpanissefoundation.org

The Edible Schoolyard

The Edible Schoolyard, in collaboration with Martin Luther King Middle School, engages 950 public school students in a one-acre organic garden and a kitchen classroom. Using food as a unifying concept, students learn how to grow, harvest, and prepare nutritious seasonal produce. Experiences in the kitchen and garden foster a better understanding of how the natural world sustains us, and promote the environmental and social well-being of our school community.

www.edibleschoolyard.org

The School Lunch Initiative

The School Lunch Initiative (SLI) envisions revolutionizing school lunch by making food a central part of the academic curriculum. SLI includes gardens, kitchen classrooms, and lunchrooms as contexts for learning. It restores connections between what children are taught and what they experience, between nutrition, health, and the ability to learn, between local communities and the farms that feed them.

www.schoollunchinitiative.org

Slow Food USA

Slow Food USA's *Slow Food in Schools* is a unique national program of garden-to-table projects for children that cultivates the senses and teaches an ecological approach to food.

www.slowfoodusa.org

National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA)

The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity advocates national policies and programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity to help reduce the illnesses, disabilities, premature deaths, and costs caused by diet- and inactivity-related diseases such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.

www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/nana.html

National Farm to School Program

The National Farm to School Program is a project of the Center for Food and Justice, a division of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College. The project brings together nine partners from four states to work on promoting farm-to-school programs nationwide.

www.farmentoschool.org