

Wellness Policy

PURPOSE:

The North Middlesex Regional School Committee recognizes the relationship between student well-being and student achievement, as well as the importance of a comprehensive district wellness program. Therefore, the school district will provide developmentally appropriate and sequential nutrition and physical education as well as opportunities for physical activity. The wellness program will be implemented in a multidisciplinary fashion and will be evidence-based.

District Wellness Committee

The school district will establish a wellness committee that consists of, at a minimum, representatives from a wide range of school health and health-related disciplines, including school nurses, school nutrition and physical activity staff, community agencies serving youth, parents, students, and the school committee. The members of the District Wellness Committee will appoint one of the members as the District Wellness Program Coordinator. Only employees of the district who are members of the wellness committee may serve as wellness program coordinators. Wellness coordinators, in consultation with the wellness committee, will be in charge of the implementation and evaluation of this policy.

NM District Wellness Committee will work collaboratively across disciplines to ensure:

- A healthy school environment that supports the physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, and social well-being and safety of all members.
- The provision of information and support to adult staff involved in the care and education of students. This will include professional development for staff, support programs, and employee assistance and wellness programs.
- The presence of a school nurse in every building to provide safe nursing care, administer medication, and monitor the health and safety of staff and students. Nursing staff will also provide the mandated health screenings and be a resource for classroom education.

School Wellness & Safety Committees

Each School will have a Wellness and Safety Committee that meets at least three times per year to review safety compliance and implementation of the

wellness policy at the school level. These committees will consist of, at a minimum, a school administrator, the school nurse, and representatives from a variety of departments and disciplines in the school.

Nutritional Guidelines

The NM community has access to up to two meals a day at school. Meals that meet nutrition standards established by the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program aim to mitigate hunger and obesity, as well as model healthy eating.

It is the policy of NM that all foods and beverages made available during the school day are consistent with School Lunch Program nutrition guidelines. All foods sold will meet or exceed the Massachusetts and USDA competitive foods and beverage nutritional standards. Guidelines for reimbursable school meals will meet or exceed the Federal Lunch Program guidelines issued by the Secretary of Agriculture. The district will create procedures that address all foods available to students throughout the school day in the following areas:

- Guidelines for maximizing nutritional value by decreasing fat and added sugars, increasing nutrition density, and moderating portion size of each individual food or beverage sold within the school environment.
[Guidelines can be reviewed here.](#)
- All food offerings will emphasize wholesome, natural ingredients, whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy snacks in alliance with the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.
- [Smart Snack Standards](#)
- The District will offer a variety of allergy-friendly foods to accommodate students' needs.
- Food and beverages sold as a la carte items will meet nutritional standards consistent with the Massachusetts and USDA national standards.
- All food and beverages served in the extended care program, school clubs or after-school programs will comply with Massachusetts and USDA national standards, including Smart Snack standards.
- All food and beverages sold in vending machines after school hours will meet the Massachusetts and USDA national standards.
- The district will continue to transition to non-food celebrations during the school day, by:
 - Each school will limit celebrations/events that involve food during the school day, and they will be school-sponsored events only

- Each celebration that includes food will have no more than one food or beverage that does not meet the nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold individually (above).
- The district will disseminate a list of healthy party ideas to teachers.
- Foods for all grade-level school celebrations must be planned in advance because of the prevalence of food allergies and other serious medical conditions. A building administrator and school nurse must be involved in the planning process for all food-related events. After receiving approval, the staff member responsible for the event must notify parents of the students involved and allow for opt-out and/or an alternative food choice that is consistent with student needs (allergies, dietary restrictions, and culture) and no penalty for non-participation.
- No food shall be sold or served in competition with the school breakfast and/or lunch program.
- Sharing of snacks or food of any kind amongst students is not permitted
- School staff involved in food-related events are encouraged to communicate with the School Food Service Director to assist with cafeteria planning and reducing food waste.
- Food items brought from home for personal consumption are exempt from this policy.
- Nutritional meal data will be made available on the [district website](#).
- Free, safe, non-flavored drinking water will be available to all students at mealtime and throughout the school day.
- Adequate time to eat school meals will be provided. Whenever possible, students will be allowed at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and at least 20 minutes to eat lunch.
- Information regarding the process for determining eligibility for free or reduced-priced meals will be provided to families on the [district website](#). Upon school registration, at the start of each school year, and periodically throughout the year, parents will be reminded where they can find the information.
- The District will protect the privacy of students who qualify for free or reduced-priced meals by utilizing a point-of-sale system that does not identify means of payment.
- Students with documented dietary restrictions will be accommodated whenever possible while keeping within the required nutritional standards. Families should contact the food service manager in their school district to provide specific information regarding the student's

needs. Such requests will be kept confidential to the extent possible and will be treated with cultural sensitivity and respect.

- Food and nutrition service staff will be provided with annual training on nutrition standards by the contracted food service company.

Nutrition Education

- Nutritional education will be developmentally appropriate, skill-based, behavior-focused, participatory, culturally relevant, and consistent with the [CDC's Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum](#).
- Explain to students the relationship among dietary intake, eating behaviors, physical activity, and emotional health.
- Students receive nutrition education that teaches the skills they need to adopt and maintain healthy eating behaviors.
- Nutrition education is offered in the school cafeteria and coordinated by the cafeteria staff.
- Students receive consistent nutrition messages from all aspects of the school program.
- Nutrition is integrated into the health education of core curricula.
- The district links nutrition education activities with the school food environment.
- Nutrition education will be taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as a sequential, comprehensive, standards-based program designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and protect health (MGL Chapter 71, Section 1).
- Marketing in all schools and campuses, in the form of signage, written materials, digital media, and verbal communication, will promote healthy food and beverage choices that reflect the Smart Snack Standards.
- Advertising of any food or beverage that may not be sold on campus during the school day is prohibited. Advertising of any brand on containers used to serve food or in areas where food is purchased is prohibited."

Physical Education

- NMRSD has a physical education curriculum for grades K-12 that aligns with the Massachusetts Health Curriculum Framework and the National Standards for Physical Education and promotes a physically active lifestyle.
- Physical education teachers will be certified through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and be

provided with opportunities annually for specialty-specific professional development.

- Physical education is offered at least weekly at the elementary level and twice a week at the middle school level. At the high school level, students are required to take one physical education/health course annually.
- Exemption from PE participation requires a note from a medical provider. Based on the reason for the excuse, the appropriate student support personnel (school nurse or counselor) will collaborate with the teaching staff to provide the student with an appropriate substitution, based on physical ability and student interests.
- All playgrounds and physical activity facilities will meet safety standards.
- The District will address special health care needs and adaptive PE as needed.
- Teach students self-management skills as well as movement skills.
- Actively teach cooperation, fair play, and responsible participation in physical activity.
- Promote participation in physical activity outside of school.
- Provide options for gender and cultural differences in students' interests and those students who are not athletically inclined.
- Focus at the high school level on helping adolescents make the transition to an active adult lifestyle.
- Teachers will aim to develop and foster students' self-confidence, as well as maintain a safe psychological environment free of embarrassment, humiliation, shaming, taunting, or harassment of any kind.
- All elementary students will have at least 20 minutes of active daily recess. Recess or breaks at the middle school level will be provided as an academic break to promote physical activity. Principals will consider weather conditions, including temperature and wind chill, when determining whether to hold outdoor recess or other activities.

Physical Education Activities

- Students are given opportunities for physical activity during the school day through physical education (PE) classes, daily recess periods for elementary school students, and the integration of physical activity into the academic curriculum where appropriate.

- Students are given opportunities for physical activity through a range of before and/or after-school programs, including, but not limited to, intramurals, interscholastic athletics, and physical activity clubs.
- The district works with the community to create safe ways for students to walk, bike, rollerblade, or skateboard safely to and from school.
- The District encourages parents and guardians to support their children's participation in physical activity, to be physically active role models, and to include physical activity in family events.
- The district provides training to enable staff to promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among students.

Other School-Based Activities

- Food shall not be used as a punishment or reward or given out as a treat by school staff at any time with the exception of school-approved celebrations/curricular events; and in the rare situation where food is part of an Individualized Education Plan or behavior management plan. All foods served must meet USDA guidelines.
- Staff may not provide candy to students unless indicated in a child's IHP/IEP/504 plan or as directed by a medical professional.
- Soda and candy will not be available for sale to students during school hours.
- The use of food as manipulatives will be limited to uncooked items, such as dry pasta, rice, and beans, provided the food does not endanger or exclude a student with life-threatening food allergies or other health concerns, such as Celiac disease or diabetes.
- No food items brought in from home will be used as part of birthday celebrations. The school can provide a list of healthy party ideas to parents, as needed. Alternatives to food, such as recognizing the birthday child, will be building-based decisions.
- Physical activity may be used as a reward, individually or for classes, in order to reinforce a physically active lifestyle (i.e. extra recess, extra gym time, dance party, etc.). Physical activity or the withholding of physical activity will not be used as a form of discipline for an infraction that occurs during learning time.
- During the school day, profit generation will not take precedence over the nutritional needs of students. (school stores, fundraisers, vending machines, ice cream trucks.)

Fundraising Activities

Fundraisers or Fundraising groups at NM are encouraged to seek non-food items for fundraising. In the event that food sold as a school-sponsored fundraiser does not meet the USDA and state guidelines, it shall be restricted to delivery and consumption after school hours.

- After-school hour sponsored events: Every attempt should be made to ensure that foods and beverages sold at school-sponsored events outside of the school day will meet USDA nutritional standards, including Smart Snack Standards. Each school will be allowed up to 3 exempt fundraisers per school year during which any food or beverages may be sold.
- All fundraising activities or school store sales involving food that occur during the school day (The school day begins at midnight the night before and goes until 30 minutes after the final bell on a given day) must meet the state and federal nutrition standards.
- Include healthy choices and age-appropriate selections for food and beverages sold at fundraisers at elementary, middle, and high schools.

Health Services:

School nurses in each building will provide care for all students, including first aid, emergency care and assessment, management of chronic conditions, support for mental health concerns, preventive services, and communication with the school team, families, and community providers.

- Massachusetts-mandated screenings, including vision, hearing, height, weight, postural, and SBIRT will be conducted per the required schedules for each screening.
- Comply with all Department of Public Health standards and regulations. These include, but are not limited to, medication administration and delegation, immunization requirements, and health screening requirements.
- Collaborate effectively with the Public Health Department in monitoring compliance, promoting health and wellness, and reporting communicable diseases.
- Students who require feeding and /or support due to medical needs are required to have a physician's note documenting the medical condition and the specific manner in which they will receive the food. Food services will not be required to make a determination regarding the nutritional standards in these situations.

Employee Wellness

Staff wellness is considered essential, and all staff are encouraged to practice and model healthy eating and physical activity habits.

- Staff wellness is supported by professional development opportunities and trainings regarding wellness, well-being, safety policies, and procedures
- Free, confidential counseling, resources, and support are available to all staff through the [employee assistance program](#).
- Harassment and anti-bullying will be included in staff handbooks, and concerns will be investigated promptly by administrators when reported.
- Staff will be provided with mental health-related professional development opportunities in order to be better prepared to identify and support student needs.

Mental Health

- The district is committed to providing school communities with social and emotional learning (SEL) opportunities. SEL is the process through which individuals develop self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These learning experiences will be developmentally appropriate, and opportunities that are not embedded in the school curriculum will be conveyed to families through school newsletters, building administration, and/or individual teachers.
- NMRSD staff will be provided with mental health-related professional development opportunities in order to be better prepared to support student needs and to identify those who may require additional assistance.
- All staff are responsible for creating a sense of belonging and connectedness with our students. Some students may require additional support and services to maintain their mental well-being. All students will have access to mental health support in the school setting with assistance for referrals to community resources as needed.
- For individuals who wish to independently seek services, our district community is provided with mental health referral services. [Care Solace](#) is a referral agency partner that coordinates mental health care for students, staff, and families in NMRSD. With this service, a multilingual team of Care Companions may be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.
- The North Middlesex Regional School District offers a strong Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan [on the District Website](#), which details how school officials will be trained to collaborate with families and law

enforcement agencies to prevent bullying and how to respond to such circumstances, should prevention measures fail.

Family Engagement

- The district recognizes that a strong relationship between families and school staff reinforces student health and academic development. Families are encouraged to be actively involved and engaged in their child's learning.
- The district will make every effort to provide information to families in their primary languages.
- Families will be kept informed of district wellness activities and other health-related information via email or newsletters.

Evaluation

- The current wellness policy will be posted on the District Website.
- The wellness policy content will be included in the new staff orientation and in mandatory annual staff training modules.
- The wellness advisory committee will compile data and report the findings and goals to the school committee annually.
- The Wellness committee is responsible to review and update the wellness policy at a minimum of every three years. A report will be posted on the district website and will include information on the district's wellness accomplishments, and progress towards goals and identify areas for growth.
- The Wellness Program Coordinator shall be responsible for devising a plan for implementation and evaluation of the district wellness policy and is charged with operational responsibility for ensuring that schools meet the goals of the district wellness policy.

References

Alliance for a Healthier Generation (2023), School Wellness Committees.
<https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/schools/wellness-topics/policy/school-wellness-committees>

CDC (2018), School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide E-Learning Module.

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/professional_development/e-learning/shi.html

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SWITCH (2023), The School Wellness Initiative for Thriving Community Health. <https://massschoolwellness.org/>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service (2022), Local School Wellness Policies. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy#:~:text=Summary%20of%20the%20Final%20Rule,strategies%20in%20determining%20these%20goals.>

WellSAT.org (2021), WellSAT:3.0 Wellness School Assessment Tool. <https://www.wellsat.org/>

Adopted by the NMRSD School Committee:

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