Triennial Assessment Report: MSD Wellness policy (4/2026)
District: MERRIMACK

Introduction

The WellSAT Triennial Assessment is a federally required process that helps school districts evaluate the strength, quality, and implementation of their Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) every three years. Using the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT), districts assess whether their policies include all federally required components related to nutrition education, school meals, Smart Snacks standards, physical activity, wellness promotion, food marketing, and public involvement, while also examining how well daily practices align with those policies.

The assessment compares district policies and practices against evidence-based best practices to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for growth. By comparing policy scores to practice scores, districts can determine where strong practices may need stronger policy language and where stronger implementation is needed to support existing policies. The overall goal of the assessment is to strengthen alignment between policy and practice, ensure compliance with federal wellness requirements, and promote healthier school environments for all students.

The Merrimack School District completed its required triennial wellness policy assessment in April 2026. Our assessment showed strong alignment with some federal requirements and best practices while identifying opportunities for continued growth in nutrition environment and services, nutrition education, physical activity, and employee wellness.
SCORING RUBRIC

POLICY
0 = the topic is not addressed in the wellness policy
1 = it is mentioned with weak or vague language
2 = the policy contains strong, specific, and enforceable language

PRACTICE
0 = the practice is not implemented
1= it is partially or inconsistently implemented
2 = it is fully implemented throughout the district or school

Strong Policies and Aligned Practices

The district excels in five out of the eighteen federal wellness requirements for schools, showing strong alignment between policy and practice. Key achievements include:
-Nutrition Standards: School meals consistently meet all USDA requirements.
-Professional Standards: Nutrition staff meet annual professional development and training requirements.
-Smart Snacks: All "à la carte" items sold in cafeterias comply with federal nutrition standards for competitive foods.
-Triennial Assessment: The district maintains accountability by conducting mandated wellness policy evaluations every three years.
-Public Transparency: Assessment results are shared publicly, detailing compliance, comparisons to model policies, and goal progress.

These successes demonstrate a firm commitment to fostering a healthy school environment that supports both student well-being and academic achievement.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR2	Do your National School Lunch Program meals (and, if applicable, School Breakfast Program meals) meet all federal standards for meal patterns, nutrient levels, and calorie requirements for the grade levels served?	**2**	**2**	
FR5	Do all school nutrition program directors, managers, and staff meet or exceed the annual continuing education/training hours required by the USDA's Professional Standards requirements?	**2**	**2**	
FR7	Do all a la carte foods and beverages sold in the cafeteria meet Smart Snacks standards?	**2**	**2**	
FR16	Is wellness policy implementation evaluated every three years?	**2**	**2**	
FR17	What is included in the triennial assessment report to the public?	**2**	**2**	

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Create Practice Implementation Plan

The district's Local School Wellness Policy scorecard shows that several areas have strong written policy language, but practice implementation is not yet consistently as strong across all schools. To address this, the district will create a formal Practice Implementation Plan to ensure that daily practices fully align with the expectations outlined in the LSWP and meet all applicable federal requirements.

The District Wellness Committee will be responsible for creating the Practice Implementation Plan, which will identify each area where policy is strong but practice is limited or inconsistent and create specific action steps for each requirement.

The Practice Implementation Plan will be created by December 2026 and put into place by March 2027. During this time, the Wellness Committee will review the scorecard results, prioritize areas needing improvement, assign responsibilities, and establish clear timelines for completion.

Implementation will be monitored throughout the school year and reviewed annually.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR4	Is free (i.e., no cost to students) drinking water available to students during meals?	**2**	**1**	
FR10	Are there fundraisers that sell foods or beverages to be consumed during the school day? If yes, do the foods and beverages sold meet Smart Snacks standards?	**1**	**0**	
FR12	Is there food or beverage marketing on the school campus during the school day? If yes, do the marketed items meet Smart Snacks criteria?	**1**	**0**	
FR13	Which groups are represented on the district-level wellness committee?	**2**	**1**	
FR14	Is there an official who is responsible for the implementation and compliance with the wellness policy at the building level for each school?	**2**	**1**	
FR15	How is the wellness policy made available to the public?	**2**	**1**	
NE1	Are skills-based, behavior-focused, and interactive/participatory methods used in nutrition education to develop student skills?	**1**	**0**	
PEPA12	 Are there opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity before and after school?	**1**	**0**	
IC2	Is there an active school-level wellness committee?	**1**	**0**	

Update Policies

The district recognizes that several areas identified in this section of the WellSAT scorecard reflect practices that are already being implemented either fully or partially, but are not yet strongly reflected in the written Local School Wellness Policy. Based on this assessment, the district recognizes the need to review and update policy language to more clearly and comprehensively align with current practices and all federally required wellness policy components.

The district Wellness Committee will review current policy language alongside the WellSAT assessment results to identify gaps between policy and practice. District leadership and the school board will oversee the review and approval process to ensure that updated language reflects both federal requirements

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and district priorities.

The district anticipates completing draft policy revisions during the 2026/2027 school year.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR3	Does your school take steps to protect the privacy of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals?	**0**	**2**	
FR6	Do all competitive foods and beverages sold to students during the school day meet or exceed the USDA's nutrition standards, commonly called Smart Snacks?	**1**	**2**	
FR9	Do all foods and beverages sold in school stores during the school day meet Smart Snack standards?	**1**	**2**	
NES1	Does the district offer breakfast every day to all students?	**1**	**2**	
NES2	Does your school take steps to address feeding students with unpaid meal balances without stigmatizing them?	**0**	**2**	
NES3	Does your school or district provide information to families about eligibility for free or reduced-price meals?	**1**	**2**	
NES10	Are foods or beverages containing caffeine sold at the high school level?	**0**	**2**	
NES14	Do students have consistent and easy access to free drinking water throughout the school day?	**1**	**2**	
NE3	Do all middle school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	**0**	**2**	
NE4	Do all high school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA1	Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is implemented consistently for every grade?	**1**	**2**	
PEPA2	Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is aligned with national and/or state standards?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA3	How does your physical education program promote a physically active lifestyle?	**1**	**2**	
PEPA7	Are all physical education classes taught by state certified/licensed teachers who are endorsed to teach physical education?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA8	Is ongoing professional development offered every year for PE teachers that is relevant and specific to physical education?	**0**	**2**	

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PEPA10	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to substitutions?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA13	Is there daily recess for all grades in elementary school?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA15	Does the district have “joint-use” or “shared-use” agreements?	**0**	**2**	
PEPA18	Do teachers ever use physical activity as a punishment?	**0**	**2**	
IC1	Is there an active district-level wellness committee?	**1**	**2**	

Opportunities for Growth

The district recognizes several important opportunities for growth in policy and/or practice identified through the Local School Wellness Policy assessment process. Moving forward, the district is committed to developing a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to wellness that promotes healthy school environments and supports the physical, social, and emotional well-being of all students and staff.

One major area for improvement is nutrition education and healthy eating promotion. While some wellness activities currently occur throughout the district, the assessment identified a need for stronger districtwide goals and more consistent implementation related to nutrition education. The district will also consider developing clearer expectations regarding foods served at classroom parties and celebrations, particularly at the elementary level, to encourage healthier options while balancing school traditions and community culture.

Physical activity and physical education were also identified as areas requiring further attention. The district plans to review current physical education schedules at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to assess whether students are receiving sufficient opportunities for structured physical activity.

The district Wellness Committee will work collaboratively to create updated implementation plans, revise policy language, and develop practical strategies that can be consistently implemented across all schools.

		Policy Score	**Practice Score**	
FR1	Does the district have specific goals for nutrition education designed to promote student wellness?	**1**	**1**	
FR8	Do all foods and beverages sold in vending machines meet Smart Snack standards?	**1**	**1**	
FR11	Does your district regulate foods and beverages served at class parties and other school celebrations in elementary schools?	**0**	**0**	
FR18	Has the wellness policy been revised based on the previous triennial assessment?	**1**	**1**	
NES4	Does your school use strategies to maximize participation in the school breakfast program and/or school lunch program?	**1**	**1**	
NES5	Are marketing strategies used to promote healthy food and beverage choices in school?	**1**	**1**	

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NES6	Do students have at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and at least 20 minutes to eat lunch, counting from the time they are seated?	**0**	**1**	
NES8	Do you know where to access the USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards to check and see if an item can be sold in school during the school day?	**1**	**1**	
NES9	Are you familiar with any state laws allowing exemptions for school-sponsored fundraisers during which foods and beverages do not have to meet Smart Snacks?	**1**	**1**	
NES13	Do teachers or school staff give students food as a reward?	**0**	**0**	
NE2	Do all elementary school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	**0**	**0**	
NE5	Is nutrition education integrated into other subjects beyond health education?	**0**	**1**	
NE6	Do school nutrition services staff members use the following methods to collaborate with teachers to reinforce nutrition education lessons taught in the classroom?	**0**	**0**	
NE7	 Does nutrition education address agriculture and the food system?	**0**	**0**	
PEPA4	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in elementary school receive?	**0**	**0**	
PEPA5	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in middle school receive?	**0**	**0**	
PEPA6	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in high school receive?	**0**	**0**	
PEPA11	 Are there opportunities for families and community members to engage in physical activity at school?	**1**	**1**	
PEPA14	 Do teachers provide regular physical activity breaks for students in the classroom?	**1**	**1**	
PEPA16	What proportion of students walk or bike to school?	**0**	**0**	
PEPA17	 Are teachers encouraged to use physical activity as a reward for students?	**0**	**1**	
PEPA19	Do teachers ever withhold physical activity as a classroom management tool?	**0**	**0**	
EW1	 Are there strategies used by the school to support employee wellness?	**0**	**1**	

EW2	Are school staff encouraged to model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors in front of students?	**0**	**0**	

Conclusion

In conclusion, the School District Wellness Committee's completed triennial assessment provided valuable insight into both the strengths and areas of need within the district's current Local School Wellness Policy. While the assessment revealed a limited number of areas where strong policies and aligned practices are already in place, it also highlighted important opportunities for growth across several key areas, including federal wellness policy requirements, nutrition education, nutrition environment and services, physical activity, and employee wellness initiatives. As a result of these findings, the district is committed to developing a comprehensive action plan to review and revise the current wellness policy to better reflect best practices and federal expectations. In addition, the district will create a structured implementation plan focused on strengthening both policy language and day-to-day practices to ensure meaningful, sustainable improvements that support the health, wellness, and academic success of all students and staff.

Key

 **Strong Policies and Aligned Practices** - District has a strong policy and is fully implementing practices that align with the policy

 **Create Practice Implementation Plan** - District has a strong or weak policy, but practice implementation is either absent or limited

 **Update Policies Update Policies** - District is fully implementing a practice but there is no or only weak language in the written policy, or the district is partially implementing practices and there is no language in the policy

 **Opportunities for Growth** - District has either not addressed the topic in policy or practice; or has only addressed the topic in a very limited way

For more resources, visit: wellsat.org/resources

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