

**MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Here, Students Succeed



**2024 - 2025**  
**Wellness Committee**  
**Annual Report**

## **Committee Members**

Robert McKee, District Athletic Director, Co-Chairperson

Susan Maffé, RD, Director of Food & Nutrition Services, Co-Chairperson

Jessica Pelletier, RD, School Nutrition Program Specialist, Food & Nutrition Services

### **School Representatives:**

Aimee Boisvert, Teacher, John Barry Elementary

Jeanne Anastasio, Parent and Teacher, Ben Franklin Elementary

Marilyn Velez, Secretary, Nathan Hale Elementary

Meghan Grey, Teacher at Lincoln Middle School, Representing Hanover Elementary

Amy Frederick, School Social Worker, Thomas Hooker Elementary

Francesca Main, Teacher, Casimir Pulaski Elementary

Michael Greenberg, Physical Education & Health Teacher, Israel Putnam Elementary

Kellie Moran, School Social Worker, Roger Sherman Elementary

Kevin Wodatch, Teacher, Lincoln Middle School

Amy Bishop, Teacher, Edison Middle School

Johnathan Pulino, Library Media Specialist, Maloney High School

Sylvia Matias Leal, Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher, Platt High School

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that each local education agency (LEA) or school district participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program develop a local wellness policy that promotes the health of students and addresses the growing problem of childhood obesity. As per the legislation, each school district's local wellness policy, at a minimum, must address/establish:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity
- Implementation measurement, including designation of one or more persons within the local education agency or school, charged with the operational responsibility for ensuring that the school meets the local wellness policy
- Involvement of parents, students and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in the development of the school wellness policy

The Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy requires an annual progress report to the Superintendent and the Board, evaluating the implementation of the policy and the regulations, as well as recommendations for changes or revisions. The Wellness Committee is proud of its accomplishments in the 2024-2025 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

### **Strategic Planning:**

In April 2023, the Wellness Committee met with a professional facilitator to draft a strategic plan for the committee and to set goals for the next three years.

The committees' established initiatives are as follows:

1. Fostering Community Collaboration and Maximizing Engagement Tools
  - a. Communication outlets, such as newsletters and social media
  - b. Sponsoring community health and wellness events
  - c. Empower parents to contribute to their child's education and the school community
  - d. Exploring and securing varied funding opportunities
2. Prioritizing Student and Staff Wellness, Including Social-Emotional and Physical Health:
  - a. Encouraging physical activity outside of the school day and year
  - b. Encouraging consistent policy and program interpretation
  - c. Increasing participation in all federally funded meal programs
  - d. Sponsoring community health and wellness events
3. Advancements in Policy Framework:
  - a. Broaden committee representation, involvement and effectiveness
  - b. Adopt Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework (WSCC)
  - c. Complete Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health Assessment Tool (WellSAT)
  - d. Update Wellness Policy

### **Year 1 Objectives:**

To enhance the effectiveness of the strategic plan's initial implementation for the 2024-2025 school year, committee members who participated in the planning meeting were asked to rank their top priorities using a Google survey. This survey aimed to identify the primary objectives for each of the committee's established goals.

The primary objectives of the committee for the 2024 – 2025 year were:

1. Fostering Community Collaboration and Maximizing Engagement Tools
  - a. Developing a wellness committee newsletter and expanding use of social media
2. Supporting overall wellness and commitment to social, emotional and physical well-being of students and staff
  - a. Increasing participation in all federally funded meal programs
  - b. Encouraging increased physical activity for all, outside the school day and year

### 3. Advancements in Policy Framework

- a. Work towards adopting Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework
- b. Complete Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health Assessment Tool (WellSAT)

### **Year 1 Accomplishments:**

#### **Wellness Committee Newsletter and Encouraging Physical Activity Outside of the School Day and Year**

The Wellness Committee Newsletter highlights upcoming wellness events, including mobile food pantry distribution dates and links to Meriden food resources such as the MPS Express Food Truck. The newsletter features a variety of hyperlinks to informative websites designed to support the Meriden community.

In addition to the newsletter, the Wellness Committee has created a Spring Suggestions Calendar filled with thoughtful, low-to-no-cost activities for local families to enjoy over spring recess. The calendar includes accessible yoga activities with images, a list of local restaurants, a family scavenger hunt, and many more engaging and inclusive options. Building on this initiative, the committee has launched a monthly summer calendar series, beginning in June. Suggestions for July and August will be released at the start of each respective month to encourage continued engagement. All calendar activities and newsletters have been designed in English and Spanish, always keeping our diverse community in mind and reflecting a commitment to equity and accessibility.

#### **Expanding Social Media Use**

Meriden Food and Nutrition Services has a strong digital presence with professionally managed accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and X, collectively reaching several thousand followers. This robust platform is an invaluable asset for effectively disseminating Wellness Committee information and promoting initiatives across the Meriden Public Schools community.

Our social media channels offer a direct and efficient way to:

- **Share Wellness Resources:** Quickly post updates, tips, and links to resources related to physical activity, nutrition, mental health, and social-emotional well-being.
- **Promote Events:** Publicize upcoming wellness fairs, family fitness nights, workshops, and other committee-sponsored activities, reaching a broad audience of students, parents, and staff.
- **Highlight Success Stories:** Showcase positive examples of wellness in action within our schools and celebrate achievements in health and well-being.
- **Drive Engagement:** Encourage interaction through polls, questions, and calls to action that foster a more engaged and health-conscious community.
- **Reach Diverse Audiences:** Leverage the wide reach of social media to ensure wellness messages are accessible to various segments of our school population.

#### **Increasing Participation in Federally Funded Meal Programs**

In the 2024-2025 School Year, 689,717 Breakfasts and 1,105,245 Lunches were served. Taking enrollment into consideration, this represents a .6 % decrease in lunches served as compared to the 2023-2024 School Year; however, it also represents a 5.1% increase in breakfasts served. The increases in breakfast were most significant in our High Schools, where second-chance vending breakfasts/snack packs increased significantly. Additional efforts to increase district breakfast and lunch participation are ongoing, such as: increasing vegetarian options, increasing entrée options, implementing more theme days/special events, and incorporating more locally grown products. Additional initiatives to expand participation in the 2025-2026 School Year are being planned.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), served 29,071 breakfasts and 51,252 lunches in the summer of 2024. This represents a 9.2% increase in breakfasts and a 17.3% increase in lunches as compared to summer 2023. Additional marketing, promotion, and expansion of meal sites, services and service locations are planned for the summer of 2025.

#### **Innovation in Nutrition Education Award**

Meriden Public Schools received a Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Award for our Innovation in Nutrition Education from Action for Healthy Kids, Chef Ann Foundation, and RMC Health for our innovative strategies that provide nutritious school meals. Innovation in Nutrition Education Award winners implemented nutrition education activities that made classroom, cafeteria, community, and home connections for students and parents/guardians. To date, Meriden is the only school in Connecticut who received this prestigious award.

## Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community

In recent years, the reciprocal relationship between student health and educational outcomes has gained considerable attention. Researchers and practitioners have advanced an integrated model of health and well-being and consider physical, behavioral, social, and emotional wellness as separate entities. The need for and benefits associated with integrated health and learning have been formally recognized through the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model.



The WSCC model includes the following components:

- The center depicts meeting the needs of the whole child by ensuring each child is healthy, safe, supported, engaged, and challenged.
- The next layer depicts the need for coordination of policies, processes, and practices related to child well-being.
- This coordination occurs across 10 core domains related to health and learning —physical education and physical activity, nutrition environment and services, health services, counseling, psychological, and social services, social and emotional climate, physical environment, employee wellness, family engagement, community involvement, and health education.
- Finally, the entire model is surrounded by community factors to acknowledge that schools reflect the communities in which they are situated and require their collaboration and resources.

Meriden Public Schools recently participated in a comprehensive research study that evaluated the Board of Education policies across 54 Connecticut school districts. This study rigorously assessed both the comprehensiveness and strength of policy language.

Meriden's policies demonstrated exceptional performance in comprehensiveness, with eight out of ten core domains exceeding the statewide average. Notably, our policies regarding behavioral support and community involvement achieved a perfect 100% score for comprehensiveness, indicating highly thorough and detailed policy language in these critical areas.

In terms of policy strength—reflecting the enforceability and impact of the language—Meriden also excelled, with seven out of ten core domains surpassing the mean. Our commitment to engaging with the community was further highlighted as community involvement policies received a perfect 100% strength score.

These results underscore Meriden Public Schools' dedication to developing robust and well-defined policies that serve our students, staff, and community effectively.

## **Complete UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health Assessment Tool (WellSAT)**

WellSAT 3.0 (Wellness School Assessment Tool Version 3.0) is a crucial online assessment tool designed to help school districts thoroughly evaluate their local school wellness policies. It provides a standardized, quantitative method to measure how well a district's written policy aligns with both federal requirements, such as those established by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, and recognized best practices in school health and nutrition.

The tool offers two primary scores:

- **Comprehensiveness Score:** This indicates how extensively a policy covers a wide range of recommended content areas, including nutrition education, physical activity, and standards for school meals and competitive foods.
- **Strength Score:** This assesses how clearly and enforceably the policy's content is written, moving beyond vague statements to actionable directives.

By utilizing WellSAT 3.0, school districts can objectively identify the strengths of their existing wellness policies and pinpoint specific areas where improvements are needed. This process helps ensure that policies are not just compliant, but also effective in promoting a healthier environment for students and staff.

## **Complete Triennial Assessment**

The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) requires that every Local Educational Agency (LEA) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) conduct an assessment of their local school wellness policy at least once every three years. This is known as the triennial assessment.

The assessment must specifically address three key areas:

- Compliance with the district policy
- Comparison to model local school wellness policies
- Progress made in attaining the goals of the local wellness policy

Based on the assessment findings, the Wellness Committee will focus on revising the wellness policy to address identified gaps and areas for improvement.

## **Wellness Committee Initiatives for 2025- 2026:**

- Strengthen effective communication channels
- Extend our reach within the Meriden community through enhanced partnerships
- Expand student and parent committee participation and engagement
- Cultivate and sustain robust and inclusive participation from all schools
- Evaluate funding opportunities
- Coordinate a community health and wellness event

## **Committee Recommendations:**

Based on the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services final rule published in July 2016, the Wellness Policy was revised in November 2017. Based on the results of the Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community assessment, the Wellness School Assessment Tool and the Triennial Assessment, the Wellness Committee will be making recommendations for policy changes or revisions over the next year.. A copy of the current wellness policy and annual progress reports can be located at: [http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food\\_Services/Wellness\\_Policy/](http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Wellness_Policy/)

The committee looks forward to another productive year and to assisting our students, families and staff in meeting the health and wellness challenges they encounter.