

# 2012-2013 Wellness Committee Annual Report

## Committee Members:

Robert Angeli, Chairperson, Associate Superintendent for Instruction  
Scott Hozebin, Board of Education Representative  
Angela Simpson, Health Department Representative  
Kaisha Cave, Parent Representative  
Maureen Suzio, Parent Representative  
Lois Lehman, Curriculum and Adult Education Administrator  
Dan Coffey, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School Principal  
David Levenduski, Ben Franklin Elementary School Principal  
Roberto Soto, Washington Middle School Assistant Principal  
Frank Auletta, Maloney High School Physical Education Department Chairperson  
Ellen Kearney, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School Physical Education Teacher  
Riley Bartolomeo, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Thomas LaBissoniere, Student Representative, Platt High School  
Carrie Marquardt, Meriden YMCA, Fitness Director  
Antionietta Baggetta, Cafeteria Manager, John Barry Elementary  
Susan Maffé, Food Services Director, Co-Chairperson

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that each local education agency (LEA) or school district participating in 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 districts 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 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 their accomplishments in the 2012-2013 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

#### **Coordinated School Health Grant Award**

The Coordinated School Health Leadership project was designed to build a district's capacity to implement policies, practices and programs that reduce health and educational disparities for all students and to align health and wellness strategies to the district's school improvement/strategic plan. Meriden is one of the few districts in Connecticut that was selected to participate in this pilot and received approximately \$13,000 in funds for use over a three year period (July 2010 – June 2013).

Over this three year period, the following objectives were determined and accomplished by the three pilot schools – Nathan Hale Elementary, Washington Middle School and Platt High School:

- Implement a comprehensive health curriculum in Grades K-8 taught by physical education/health teachers
- Increase student understanding of health and wellness
- Provide staff with fitness opportunities
- Increase parent awareness and knowledge of health issues

#### **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Grant Award**

Four Meriden Elementary Schools were awarded a total of over \$130,000 in 2012-2013 to participate in USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The goals of the grant are to: create a healthier school environment, increase the variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that children experience, make an impact in children's diets by increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, and to serve fresh fruits and vegetables to all students for free throughout the school day. With the continued success of the program, all elementary schools were excited to take advantage of the opportunity to apply for the 2012-2013 grants. We are currently awaiting grant awards and anticipate receipt of approximately \$130,000 for the upcoming year.

#### **Fuel Up To Play 60 Grant Award**

The Wellness Committee continues to encourage participation in Fuel Up To Play 60, a partnership by the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, further empowering students to take action to improve nutrition and physical activity at their school and for their own health. Each school is eligible for up to \$4,000.00 of funding each school year.

Under the leadership of Ellen Kearney, Casimir Pulaski was awarded \$3,500.00 for the 2012-2013 year. This money was used to hold another family kick off event, continue exciting student taste tests, cafeteria physical improvements and to purchase fitness equipment to supplement the extended day program. The student committee was active in evaluating student taste test surveys and with public relations. The Fuel Up Play 60 Student Committee was also given the privilege to perform their fitness dance routines at the Connecticut School Breakfast Summit and speak to the health and nutrition benefits offered as a result of the extended day program.

Casimir Pulaski Elementary is in process of applying for a grant for the 2013 – 2014 school year. Ben Franklin Elementary has submitted a grant request for the 2013-2014 school year.

#### **Action for Healthy Kids Grant Awards**

Meriden Public Schools was awarded approximately \$8,500 to promote school breakfast programs and increase participation in school breakfast (Washington Middle School), to promote healthy food choices and good nutrition (Nathan Hale and Casimir Pulaski) and to support wellness events and initiatives (Ben Franklin). Three grants for increasing breakfast participation were submitted to Action for Healthy Kids for the 2013-2014 school year and we are currently awaiting awards.

### **Meriden's Health Heroes Initiative**

Under the continued leadership of Maloney High School Student Representative Riley Bartolomeo, Nathan Hale Elementary has worked to assist students in: increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables, getting one hour of physical activity daily, limiting television to two hours per day and getting eight to ten hours of sleep each night.

This year, the health heroes initiative focused on reaching out to parents and/or guardians. Meetings held with parents to obtain support for the initiative and the response has been extremely positive. The initiative also worked with physical education teacher Keith Moyer to get students from kindergarten to fifth grade more excited about exercise. Students who demonstrate the qualities of a "health hero" have their picture posted in the cafeteria, giving others students encouragement to model similar behaviors.

Based upon the success of the program at Nathan Hale, Washington Middle School has expressed a desire in implementing a similar initiative for their students.

### **Ben Franklin Elementary Wellness Committee**

Ben Franklin Elementary School kicked off the 2012-2013 school year with a new Wellness Committee. Ben Franklin's leadership, teachers, nurse, parents, Central Office Reps and the Meriden YMCA worked together to identify ways in which would encourage Ben Franklin students and families lead healthier and more nutritious lifestyles. A wellness audit and parent surveys were conducted in order to help Ben Franklin set some realistic health and wellness goals for the school year. Accomplishments and future plans include:

- Fruit & Vegetable Fear Factor lunchtime event
- School Wellness Fair with local organizations showcasing their products and/or services that keep families healthy and active
- Walk for Wellness at the Linear Trail for all families
- An offshoot of the Wellness Committee called the Nature Committee which has been focusing on the creation of a butterfly garden
- Blacktop around the school is being repaired so that physical activity and educational stencils can be painted on it over the summer
- Activity stations and Nutrition Trivia Signs will be created over the summer and affixed to the chain link fence that goes around the school

### **Wellness Committee Webpage**

The Food Services program maintains the Wellness Committee webpage at:  
[http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food\\_Services/Wellness\\_Policy/](http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Wellness_Policy/)

### **Resources for Parents and Teachers**

Additional parent and teacher resources were added to the Food Services Website and will continue to be enhanced. The link to the website is:  
[http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food\\_Services/Parents\\_and\\_Teachers/](http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Parents_and_Teachers/)

### **Continued Healthy Food Certification Participation**

Meriden proudly continues to voluntarily certify with the State of Connecticut Department of Child Nutrition to sell only snack items that meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, which focus on limiting calories, fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugars, moderating portion size and promoting increased intake of nutrient dense foods, such as whole grains.

### **John Barry School Garden**

Under the leadership of Marcia Johnson of John Barry Elementary, students proudly planted eggplant, squash, peppers, string beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, Swiss chard, broccoli rabe, pumpkins, sunflowers, herbs and strawberries. Students were quite excited to be able harvest five pumpkins!

Last summer, John Barry's garden club students came to school at least three days per week. They participated in both Meriden Public Schools and New Opportunities breakfast and lunch summer feeding programs. They weeded and watered the garden and learned about gardening as integrated into the curriculum areas of science, math, social studies, reading, writing and art into our garden themed activities. Students helped to prepare recipes with the vegetables they harvested and made: eggplant parmesan, homemade pizza (dough and sauce from scratch using tomatoes from the garden), and they sampled raw tomatoes and cucumbers. High school volunteers come help in the garden to earn community service hours to meet a graduation requirement

John Barry's garden was a featured story on "CNN iReports" in the summer of 2012. The story can be accessed at : <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-815185>. The John Barry School Garden was the only school garden in CT to receive the "Seed Keeper Award" this past year after the Seed Keeper Company saw the story on the CNN iReports website.

Ms. Johnson will again offer the Garden Club to students in grades 2-5 this year. The garden will be doubled in size this summer and will share its bounty with the local soup kitchen and homeless shelter. In an effort to expand the program and the garden, Ms. Johnson has applied for two additional grants: "Annie's Homegrown" and the "2013 Connecticut AgriScience Award Grant".

#### **Healthier US Schools Challenge (HUSSC) Awards and Applications**

Washington and Lincoln Middle Schools have been awarded Healthier US Schools Challenge Silver Awards/Certification from USDA. Currently, less than 6% of the schools in the nation have this five-year certification, which recognizes excellence in nutrition services provided and opportunities for physical education and activity that result in a healthier school environment. Meriden Public Schools also applied for and received the HUSSC Silver Award for Thomas Edison Middle Magnet School.

With the extended day program activities at Casimir Pulaski being offered in 2012, Pulaski has become eligible for Healthier US Schools Challenge Award and will be applying for a Gold Award of Distinction – the highest award offered by USDA. Currently, no school in Connecticut has received an award level higher than a silver award. In addition, USDA strengthened the criteria for awards effective July 1, 2012. Casimir Pulaski hopes to be the first school in the nation to receive the Gold Award of Distinction under the revised criteria.

#### **Summer School Breakfast and Expansion of Meriden's Summer Feeding Program**

In July 2012, John Barry Elementary provided a free breakfast program and piloted a free working snack program through the seamless summer food service program for our elementary students entering grades 1, 2 and 3 enrolled in summer school.

Summer is a time of food insecurity for many families and breakfast was offered in the classroom to each student enrolled at the beginning of the school day and was also offered to all children 18 and under from the community for a 45 minute period on the patio outside of the cafeteria. A healthy working snack was provided prior to dismissal to student as well as all children 18 and under after dismissal for a 45 minute period. Due to differing regulations for the seamless summer food service program, these meals and snacks were able to be provided at no cost to families or the food services program.

In fifteen days, over 5,400 students and children from the community were served a free breakfast and over 6,600 students and children from the community were served a free nutritious snack. The summer school breakfast and snack program at John Barry will be offered again in July 2013.

Hanover Elementary, which will house the kindergarten summer school program in August 2013, will also provide free breakfast to students and children 18 and under in the community.

#### **Promotion of New Opportunities Summer Feeding Program**

Meriden Public Schools Food Services Program has worked closely with New Opportunities to promote their Summer Food Services Program in its many locations throughout Meriden. The promotion has included information on student menus, Meriden Public Schools community access television station and a webpage with information on Food Services Website.

#### **Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010**

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 required the USDA to develop new nutrition standards for school breakfasts and lunches based upon the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and current science, as reviewed and recommended by the Institute of Medicine. The changes to lunch were implemented in the 2012-2013 school year.

The changes included:

- strict limits on and a reduction of calories (up to 40%)
- sodium reduction
- larger serving sizes of vegetables
- a requirement that a fruit or vegetable serving of a minimum of ½ cup to be selected with each reimbursable meal
- an increase in whole grains
- a reduction in the maximum serving size of entrees and grain products

Based upon proactive menu changes over several years, minimal changes were required by Meriden Public Schools Food Services Program to be in compliance.

Changes to the meal pattern for breakfast are scheduled to be begin to be implemented in the 2013-2104 school year.

### **Nutrition Rating Systems Grant**

Meriden Public Schools was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to develop and implement a new school nutrition rating system pilot program. Meriden is one of only three districts in the state to receive this award. It is hoped that the pilot's success will create a model for schools across the state to use to encourage a healthier eating lifestyle for students.

With the award, Meriden created the stoplight program, a nutritional rating system that allows students to easily identify healthy foods and make better nutritional choices. Foods are labeled green, yellow, or red and each color has a different meaning. Green foods are a "go", meaning you can eat more, yellow signifies "slow", meaning eat only occasionally, and red is for "whoa", meaning these food should be eaten rarely. The color-coded system simplifies awareness of healthier meal options, especially for elementary and middle school students. The food service department will give each food a color based on ten nutritional characteristics such as, percent of calories from fat and percent of sugars by weight. Similar food rating systems are currently used in grocery stores and college dining halls. At least one study has found that the systems have caused an increase in purchases of healthier food options.

Parents are able to view color coded menus online and help guide their children to make better choices. The grant also funded a web based tool for input of nutritional information of food from home to find out its stoplight rating and electronic signage for all pilot school cafeterias. The program was piloted in Benjamin Franklin, Hanover, and Thomas Hooker Elementary Schools; Washington Middle School; and Platt High School.

The food service department will track purchases made over a two year period after the program starts to determine if the rating system works to change students food choices from "slow" and "whoa" foods to more "go" foods. If proven successful, the food services program hopes to expand the initiative to all schools in the district. Additional funding to continue to expand the initiative may be available through the Connecticut State Department of Education in 2013-2014.

### **Meriden Public Schools District Wide Health and Wellness Carnival**

The Nutrition Rating System Grant, funding the "Slow, Go, Whoa" initiative in five pilot schools, officially kicked off during the Meriden Public Schools Health and Wellness Carnival at the Meriden YMCA, a partnering organization, on Saturday, March 23. All district students and their families were invited to attend the kickoff carnival.

Fun activities planned for students and families included an obstacle course, face painting, free swim, bounce house, free pedometers and track, gaming room, mini Zumba classes and exciting free physical activity and educational raffles. To receive raffle tickets, students and families needed to attend a fifteen-minute presentation/educational component on reading food labels and understanding "Slow, Go, Whoa foods" and the Nutrition Rating System Pilot. Before leaving, all students and families were offered snacks from the labeled "Slow," "Go," or "Whoa" tables in order to start introducing students to the new labels that they would begin to see in their schools in the coming weeks. The carnival was a big success with over 500 students and families in attendance. It is hoped that this will become a annual event hosted by Meriden Public Schools and the Meriden YMCA.

### **School Climate Survey Data**

Although there are no specific questions regarding food services on the school climate survey, based upon the number of comments received regarding the program, data was compiled by school and grade and reviewed by the food services program and wellness committee to guide future actions and improvements. Although many comments were too vague to act upon, this review will be instituted annually in an attempt to continue to improve services and evaluate student suggestions.

### **Expanded Services to Extended Day Program**

With the success of Universal Free Breakfast at Casimir Pulaski and over 85% of students participating, Universal Free Breakfast will also be implemented at John Barry Elementary.

Based upon the number of hours in the school day, it appears that both extended day schools are also eligible to receive a free "afterschool snack" during the school day under USDA's After School Snack Program. The working snack will consist of a whole grain based snack and 6 oz of 100% juice provided at no charge to the student, Food Services Program or the Board. This program is currently being further investigated and hopefully will be able to be implemented the first day of the 2013-14 school year.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant/REACH Pilot Dinner Program**

Under criteria established by USDA, the REACH Program offered at Washington and Lincoln Middle Schools meets the criteria of an "at-risk afterschool care center" by providing: organized, regularly scheduled activities in a structured and supervised environment which include education or enrichment activities.

As a result of having 50% or more of its students eligible for free or reduce priced meals, these participating students are able to be provided with a free afterschool dinner meal, meeting USDA meal pattern and nutrition standards. The purpose of the pilot in 2013-

2014 is to further evaluate need, participation and whether this program can be offered on a permanent basis at no cost to students, families, the Food Service Program or the Board of Education.

### **CT Food Bank Back Pack Program**

Starting in November 2012, 60 children from John Barry, Casimir Pulaski and Roger Sherman were sent home on Friday afternoons with a back pack filled with two days worth of food for the weekend that is shelf stable and can be opened/prepared by the students themselves. These families were chosen by the guidance directors and administrators of each school. The Washington Middle School cafeteria staff members pursued this opportunity for Meriden Public Schools, at no cost to the students, schools or Board of Education.

### **CT Fitness and Nutrition Clubs in Motion at RS**

The Connecticut Fitness and Nutrition Clubs *In Motion* (CT FANs *IM*) project will work to lower obesity risk in 9-14 year old children by synchronizing existing programs to include sustainable interventions with innovative physical activity, healthy food demonstrations and community gardening. Supportive objectives include to increase individual self esteem and to increase family involvement. Vital to accomplish this project are to provide and establish the following:

- A 4-H afterschool/ and summer enrichment community garden.
- Train the trainer pedagogy, utilizing teen-adult partnerships and 4-H teens as mentors and adults as 4-H volunteers.
- Family fitness and nutrition nights through schools, involving students, parents and teachers, chefs and fitness leaders.
- Synchronize existing curriculum models (4-H Fitness and Nutrition Clubs aka 4-H FANs and 4-H Junior Master Gardener).
- Sustainability via 4-H clubs in schools and communities.
- Science based practices and dissemination of best practices, including the extension Food, Families and Fitness as a resource tool.

The afterschool program began May 14<sup>th</sup>, at Roger Sherman Elementary School in Meriden. The program is held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Tuesday afternoon's focus is on nutrition and fitness, and on Wednesdays, the students participate in a gardening program based on the Junior Master Gardener Curriculum <http://www.jmgkids.us>. Once the students master 12 core concepts of the program, they will become Certified Junior Master Gardeners.

The program will continue twice weekly throughout the summer. Program activities will focus on fitness, nutrition, and gardening. Raised beds have been constructed and set up at the Roger Sherman School. Students will learn to plant and maintain the gardens. Harvested vegetables will be utilized in food demonstrations, or brought home by students to prepare for meals.

### **Staff Wellness Initiatives**

A voluntary wellness program was offered by the City of Meriden to all Board of Education employees who purchase health insurance. CIGNA, our health insurance provider, has also provided opportunities for reduced cost wellness and exercise classes.

### **Partnerships with University of Connecticut and St. Joseph's College Dietetic Programs**

The Food Services Program has developed partnerships with The University of Connecticut and St. Joseph's College Dietetics Programs and hosted students for School Food Service Rotations, further encouraging Dietitians to choose School Nutrition as a career. Susan Maffe, Food Service Director, has been asked to represent school food service programs in Connecticut by participating in The University of Connecticut's Dietetics Program Advisory Council.

### **Goal of Representation of all Schools on Wellness Committee**

Based upon the continued accomplishments of the Wellness Committee and the resulting multiple benefits to the students and families of Meriden Public Schools, it has been recommended to the Chairperson that one representative from each building be appointed to serve on the wellness committee, with the goal of expanding the network of wellness ambassadors within the district and to expand programs and initiative within the district with minimal resources. This recommendation has been accepted and will be further pursued by the Wellness Committee for the 2013-2014 school year.

### **Recommended Policy Changes and Revisions**

The Wellness Committee currently has no recommendations for policy changes or revisions. Our committee looks forward to another productive year and assisting our students, families and staff in meeting the health and wellness challenges they encounter.