



**2014-2015**  
**Wellness Committee**  
**Annual Report**

## **Committee Members**

Robert Angeli, Chairperson, Associate Superintendent for Instruction  
Susan Maffé, Director of Food & Nutrition Services, Co-Chairperson  
Scott Hozebin, Board of Education Member Representative  
Stephanie Geremia, Health Department Representative  
Carrie Marquardt, Meriden YMCA, Health and Wellness Director  
Patti Bastiaanse, Meriden YMCA, Child Care Health and Nutrition Services Manager  
Melanie Wilde, Program Manager, School Based Health Services, Community Health Center  
Kaisha Cave, Parent Representative  
Elizabeth Spadory, Parent Representative  
Dan Coffey, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School Principal  
David Levenduski, Benjamin Franklin Elementary School Principal  
Roberto Soto, Washington Middle School Assistant Principal  
Kara Felton, Hanover Elementary School, Grade 3 Teacher  
Kari McKee, Maloney High School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Ellen Kearney, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Lynne Growsky, Thomas Hooker Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Julie Maguder, Lincoln Middle School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Robin Cusachs, Nathan Hale Elementary School, Kindergarten Teacher  
Jessica Marlowe, Israel Putnam Elementary School, Grade 2 Teacher  
Adam Bryers, Roger Sherman Elementary School, Grade 4 Teacher  
Sean Gannon, Platt High School, Social Studies Teacher  
Chris Hanson, Platt High School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Michael Simpson, Venture Academy, Special Education Teacher  
David Salafia, Family School Liaison Coordinator  
Holly Deegan, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Devyn McCarty, Student Representative, Platt High School  
Antonietta Baggetta, Cafeteria Manager, John Barry Elementary School  
Marianna Palmieri, Cafeteria Worker, Washington Middle 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 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 2014-2015 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

#### **Grant Awards:**

##### **AASA Rise and Shine Alternative Breakfast Grant Award**

Eight of the Meriden Public Schools (Ben Franklin, Nathan Hale, Hanover, Thomas Hooker, Washington Middle, Lincoln Middle, Maloney High and Platt High) were awarded a total of \$134,697 to implement alternative breakfast strategies, such as second chance breakfast, grab and go, and vended breakfasts, with the goal of significantly increasing breakfast participation. A recent study found more than sixty percent of students do not eat breakfast each day. Research also shows that consuming a healthy breakfast helps students establish positive eating habits that contribute to academic achievement and a lifetime of overall improved health. It is hoped that with increased participation, ultimately, the district will be able to implement Universal Free Breakfast district wide.

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

The Meriden Public Schools was awarded \$3,200 to promote school breakfast programs and increase participation in school breakfast through the provision of alternative breakfast strategies, in this case, vended second chance breakfast at our high schools.. Maloney and Platt High School each received \$1,600 in grant funds to help defray the costs of purchasing the vending machines. Breakfast participation has increased by 15 % at Maloney and 12 % at Platt.

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

Five Meriden elementary schools were awarded a total of approximately \$170,000 in 2014-2015 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 eligible elementary schools were excited to take advantage of the opportunity to apply for the 2015-2016 grants. We are currently awaiting grant awards and anticipate receipt of approximately \$170,000 for the 2015- 2016 school year.

##### **Washington Middle School Fitness Center**

Washington Middle School was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Council. The grant provided Washington Middle School with strength training equipment, cardio fitness equipment, and interactive exercise games, as well as funded the design, delivery and installation of the equipment within Washington's existing structure.

The goal of this grant was to improve youth fitness by promoting physical activity. Physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic disease, promoting self-confidence by reducing feelings of depression and anxiety, and helping to alleviate behavioral problems by improving concentration and attentiveness in the classroom, leading to improved personal performance and grades.

#### **Meriden Healthier US School Challenge Schools:**

Currently, Washington Middle School, Lincoln Middle School and Casimir Pulaski Elementary School have been awarded Healthier US Schools Challenge Awards from USDA. Currently, less than 7% 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.

As a result of the wellness activities incorporated during the expanded learning time at Casimir Pulaski Elementary School, Casimir Pulaski became eligible and applied for the Healthier US Schools Challenge Gold Award of Distinction – the highest award offered by USDA, which has been achieved by less than 0.5% of schools in the nation. As USDA had strengthened the criteria for awards effective July 1, 2012, Casimir Pulaski's application, submitted in June 2013, became the first school in the nation to receive the Gold Award of Distinction under the revised criteria in October 2014.

Revised, strengthened criteria for the Healthier US Schools Challenge was again introduced on September 1, 2014. The Food Services Program has submitted four new Healthier US School Challenge Applications: Gold Awards for John Barry Elementary School, Maloney High School, and Platt High School as well as a Silver Award for Roger Sherman Elementary School. Under the new criteria, Washington Middle School also became eligible for a Gold Award, and has submitted a new application. Meriden Public Schools hopes to again be first in the nation to be awarded a Healthier US Schools Challenge Gold Award.

A webpage on the district's progress on Healthier US Schools Challenge Awards and Applications can be found at:

[http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food\\_Services/Meriden-Food-Service-Awards/](http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Meriden-Food-Service-Awards/)

### **District Commitment to Nutrition and Wellness:**

#### **Nutrition Rating System**

In 2013, the 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 in four schools. A goal of the pilot was to 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 nutrition 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 foods 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 assigns each food a color based on ten nutritional characteristics, such as, percent of calories from fat and percent of sugars by weight. Parents are able to view color-coded menus online and help guide their children to make better choices. Color breakfast and lunch menus are created and distributed to all elementary students. This sustainable initiative has been expanded to all schools in the district.

The grant also funded web-based tools for input of nutritional information of single food items from home and a recipe analysis tool to find out its stoplight rating. These tools can be found at:

[http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food\\_Services/Nutrition-Calculator-/](http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Nutrition-Calculator-/).

#### **Smarter Lunchrooms**

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement was started in 2009 with the goal of creating sustainable research-based lunchrooms that guide smarter choices. USDA is placing a major emphasis on trying to change the way children eat and assisting children in developing improved behaviors through the application of evidence-based lunchroom focused principles that promote healthful eating. The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (the B.E.N. Center) as an experimental think tank devoted to child health, school environments and the behavioral sciences (psychology, behavioral economics and business). The BEN Center has driven the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement through combination of the Cornell Food & Brand Lab research with school environments into schools across the country. Many of the strategies are being implemented district wide. Additional information on the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement and criteria can be found at:

<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/resource/lunchroom-self-assessment-score-card>

#### **USDA After School Snack Program**

Based upon the number of hours in the school day, expanded learning time schools are eligible to receive a free "after school snack" during the school day under USDA's After School Snack Program. The working snack consists of a whole grain-based snack and six ounces of 100% juice provided at no charge to the student, the Food Services Program or the Board of Education. This program is available to all expanded learning time schools and afterschool programs which have educational and enrichment activities.

#### **At Risk Supper Program**

Under criteria established by USDA, the REACH Program offered at Washington and Lincoln Middle Schools meets the criteria of an "at-risk after school 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 reduced priced meals, these participating students are able to be provided with a free afterschool dinner meal, meeting the USDA meal pattern and nutrition standards. The program continues to be successful, as evidenced by student participation. The program will again be offered in 2015-2016 at no cost to students, families, the Food Service Program or the Board of Education. The At Risk Supper Program is being considered for expansion at Israel Putnam and with other community partners.

#### **Weekend Back Pack Program**

Thanks to the Connecticut Food Bank, fifty students from Casimir Pulaski and Roger Sherman Elementary Schools are sent home on Friday afternoons with a backpack filled with two days' worth of food for the weekend that is shelf-stable and can be opened and prepared by the students themselves. These students were chosen by the school counselors 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.

The Meriden Salvation Army has expressed an interest in providing a similar program for fifty students at John Barry and Israel Putnam Elementary. This program is tentatively scheduled to be implemented in September 2015.

#### **Summer School - Meriden Public Schools' Summer Food Services Program**

In July 2014, John Barry Elementary School provided a free breakfast program and 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. Over fifteen days, students and children from the community were served over 2,900 free breakfasts and over 5,800 free nutritious snacks.

Summer is a time of food insecurity for many families. 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 students, 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 August 2014, Hanover Elementary School, which houses the kindergarten summer school program, also provided free breakfast to students and children 18 and under in the community. In the ten days of summer school, over 1,100 meals were served.

Pending the outcome of the State of Connecticut's budget, decisions will be made in regards to locations and services to be provided during summer school in 2015,

#### **Promotion of New Opportunities' Summer Breakfast and Lunch Program**

The Meriden Public Schools' Food Services Program has worked closely with New Opportunities to promote its Summer Food Services Program in many locations throughout Meriden. The promotion has included information on student menus, Meriden Public Schools' community access television station, distribution of a one page flyer with site information and a webpage on the Food Services' website.

#### **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.

#### **Fuel Up To Play 60**

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.

#### **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 free or at a reduced cost, such as, wellness, obesity prevention, and exercise classes. Local businesses and organizations within Meriden have also offered wellness opportunities, such as reduced price gym memberships.

#### **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 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.

### **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/)

### **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/)

### **District Participation on Childhood Obesity State Task Force**

Food Service Director Susan Maffé was appointed by State Senator Danté Bartolomeo and served on the State of Connecticut's Childhood Obesity Task Force formed to study the effects of obesity on children's health. Ms. Maffé represented school food service personnel across the state on the committee as a licensed dietitian-nutritionist with a background in food service.

The five goals of the committee were to: 1) gather and maintain current information regarding childhood obesity that can be used to better understand the impact of obesity on children's health; 2) examine the nutrition standards for all food procured by the state; 3) explore ways to increase physical activity in children; 4) recommend the implementation of a pilot program through one local or regional board of education to schedule recess before lunch in elementary school; and 5) advise the General Assembly and the Governor concerning the coordination and administration of state programs that may reduce the incidence of childhood obesity.

### **District Wellness Events:**

#### **Fuel Greatness with School Breakfast Event**

On April 29, New England Patriots defensive back and Super Bowl champion Devin McCourty joined Connecticut dairy farmer and Meriden alumna, Melissa Greenbacker of Greenbacker's Farm in Durham to celebrate the districts commitment to good nutrition and increasing physical activity. The "Fuel Greatness" campaign, sponsored by Fuel Up to Play 60, a joint initiative between the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, mobilizes communities to take action, advocate for and implement alternative breakfast options. "Fueling Greatness" will continue in our district with the economic assistance provided by the AASA Rise and Shine Alternative Breakfast Grant award.

#### **Be Fit Challenge**

On September 27, the Be Fit Challenge held at Platt High school with our community partners to encourage students and families to be physically active and fit, publically supporting an increased focus on promoting physical activity at home as well as in our schools. Statistics show that urban areas, such as Meriden, score lower on physical activity testing than the suburban areas do. With an increased emphasis on physical activity at the state and federal level, Meriden's commitment to health and wellness regarding physical activity in the schools will continue to be emphasized.

### **Nutrition Education Partnerships:**

#### **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. This year, the Food Services Program was fortunate to have hosted two dietetic interns from the University of Connecticut for a month each. Susan Maffé, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, has been asked to represent school food service programs in Connecticut by participating in The University of Connecticut's Dietetics Program Advisory Council.

#### **Food Corp**

Food Corp, originating with 50 service members in 2012, is a national service organization of Americorp leaders working alongside educators and community leaders. FoodCorps members partner with schools to put in place a three-ingredient recipe for healthy kids, creating a nourishing environment for all students. Food Corp members provide food and nutrition education that gives kids the information they need to make smart choices, hands-on activities like gardening and cooking that foster skills and pride around healthy food and promote and encourage access and consumption of locally grown produce.

For school year 2015-16, 182 service members are being placed nationwide, with 15 in Connecticut. Meriden is proud to be chosen as host site for a Food Corp member for school year 15-16, with the member scheduled to complete 1700 hours of service this

school year primarily in Thomas Hooker, Hanover and Israel Putnam. It is hoped that all schools in Meriden will have the opportunity to benefit from a Food Corp member in future years.

### **Wellness Policy Updates:**

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

Based upon the continued accomplishments of the Wellness Committee and the resultant multiple benefits to the students and the families of Meriden Public Schools, the Wellness Committee has solicited a minimum of one representative from each building to serve on the committee. This achieves the committee's goal of expanding the network of wellness ambassadors within the district and expanding programs, opportunities, and initiatives within the district with minimal resources.

#### **Connecticut State Department of Education Review of District Wellness Policy**

During a recent Administrative review of the Food and Nutrition Services Program conducted by the State Department of Education, a review of the districts Wellness Policy and Wellness Committee was completed. Dr Jean Mee, Connecticut State Department of Education Comprehensive School Health Education and Physical Education Consultant conducted the review of Meriden's Wellness Policy. The following comments were included in the response:

- "Meriden's is probably the best one - and possibly the only living-breathing one I've seen"
- "Meriden's School Wellness Policy is well-developed, shows evidence of continual review and updating as well as expanding membership and representation as locally warranted. The Wellness Committee states in its annual report that it is proud of its accomplishments, and this reviewer agrees that it should well be. The policy, the Committee process and documentation, and the initiatives and ongoing activities described are evidence of a living, breathing and representative process that invites, involves and engages students and their families, school staff and the community overall in health and wellness promotion that undoubtedly contributes to a positive environment for all and a foundation for student success, and assisting students, families and staff in meeting the health and wellness challenges they encounter"

#### **Wellness Policy Revision**

The Wellness Policy was reviewed, revised and approved by the Board of Education in April 2015. A summary of the revisions are below:

- Offering water and at least one fruit and/or vegetable option (may be fruit or vegetable juice) for purchase at concession stands
- Further discouraging the use of food items as student incentives
- Promoting nutrition education resources provided by USDA such as Team Nutrition materials, MyPlate and the most current Dietary Guidelines

### **Committee Recommendations:**

As the Wellness Policy was just revised in April 2015, the Wellness Committee currently has no recommendations for policy changes or revisions. Under the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, additional guidance and requirements for strengthening wellness policies for schools was required of USDA. A proposed rule and comment period closed on April 28, 2014. A final rule has not yet been published. Upon a final rule being published, the Wellness Committee will begin to assess what, if any, revisions are necessary to the current Wellness Policy.

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