

MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Here, Students Succeed



2018-2019
Wellness Committee
Annual Report

Committee Members

Miguel Cardona, Chairperson, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
Susan Maffé, Director of Food & Nutrition Services, Co-Chairperson
Stephanie Denya, Health Department Representative
Carrie Marquardt, Meriden YMCA, Health and Wellness Director
Patti Bastiaanse, Meriden YMCA, Child Care Health and Nutrition Services Manager
Anna Ramos, Registered Dietitian, Community Health Center
Michael Rhode, Director of Community Relations, Community Health Center
Dona Ditrio, Director, New Opportunities of Greater Meriden
Lynn Faria, Director of Community Relations, Central Region, Hartford Healthcare
Kaisha Cave, Parent Representative
Elizabeth Spadory, Parent Representative
David Levenduski, Supervisor of Instruction and Learning
David Salafia, Family School Liaison Coordinator
Dan Coffey, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School Principal
Jonathan Addoriso, Thomas Hooker Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher
Jessica Marlowe, Washington Middle School
Adam Bryers, Roger Sherman Elementary School, Grade 4 Teacher
Danielle Rios, Washington Middle School, Family & Consumer Science Teacher
John Dematteo, Lincoln Middle School, Physical Education & Health Teacher
Cari McKee, Maloney High School, Physical Education & Health Teacher
Sean Gannon, Platt High School, Social Studies Teacher
Chris Hanson, Platt High School, Physical Education & Health Teacher
Joceline Horan, Student Representative, Maloney High School
Morgan Brandon, Food Corp Service Member
Taylor Sterling, Food Corp Service Member
Jessica Schellas, Registered Dietitian, Food & Nutrition Services
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 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 2018-2019 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

Grant Awards Totaling \$130,500:

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

Three Meriden elementary schools, John Barry, Casimir Pulaski and Roger Sherman were awarded a total of approximately \$105,000 in 2018-2019 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 2019-2020 grants.

New England Dairy and Food Council

Both Maloney and Platt High Schools were awarded a grant of approximately \$2,000 to institute the service and marketing of "Hot Cocoa" during breakfast. Although Connecticut State statute prohibits the service of coffee, tea and hot chocolate to students, the service of hot chocolate milk is acceptable. With the addition of hot cocoa/hot chocolate milk to our offerings, approximately 300 more servings of nutrient dense, low-fat chocolate milk were consumed by high school students weekly.

The New England Dairy and Food Council also awarded Food and Nutrition Services \$1,500 for additional equipment, marketing and participant incentives for the Summer Food Service Program.

Share Our Strength

Meriden Public Schools was awarded \$10,000 by Share Our Strength to expand participation in the Summer Food Service Program. Of the four grants that were awarded nationwide, Meriden Public Schools was the only school district awarded. This grant will fund the June 1, 2019 "Party in the Park" Summer Meals Kickoff on the Meriden Green, as well as marketing and participant incentives.

United States Department of Agriculture

The Healthier US Schools Challenge (HUSSC) is a USDA program that recognizes excellence in nutrition services provided and opportunities for physical education and activity that result in a healthier school environment. Currently, less than 7% of the schools in the nation have this five-year certification, however, seven of the Meriden Public Schools and Thomas Edison, for which Meriden Public Schools provides meal services, qualify for and have been awarded this prestigious designation. Along with this recognition, Meriden Public Schools received \$12,000 in funding to be invested in the Food and Nutrition Services Program

As of August 2018, 3,498 schools nationwide held this designation. Only thirty five of these schools were in Connecticut. These thirty five schools are further broken down by four levels of award: Gold Award of Distinction – one award (Casimir Pulaski), Gold Award – six awards, all in Meriden (John Barry, Roger Sherman, Washington, Lincoln, Maloney, Platt), Silver – 3 awards, one of which is Thomas Edison and 25 Bronze awards.

The Gold Award of Distinction, obtained by Casimir Pulaski Elementary School for the second time, is achieved by less than half a percent of the schools in the nation.

New Initiatives:

Summer Food Service Program Sponsorship

In its first year as a sponsor of the Summer Food Service Program, Meriden Public Schools serviced 24 summer food service program sites in Meriden and served approximately 44,000 meals. As compared to summer 2017, 29% more breakfasts and 51% more lunch meals were served in summer 2018. In summer 2019, we anticipate serving an additional 11,000 meals.

Meriden Public Schools will be hosting "Party in the Park" event on June 1, 2019 to raise community awareness of the summer meals programs in Meriden. Nationally, only one in seven students who receive a free or reduced priced lunch during the school year participate in the summer food service program. As summer is a time of food insecurity for many, the district continues to support and expand this initiative and assist our students and families. All children 18 and under are eligible for free summer meals.

Food Rescue

Food Rescue is a national program that encourages students to "rescue" certain food items that otherwise would be thrown out. State and local health code requirements determine what products can be safely rescued. The only items currently authorized to be rescued in Meriden Schools are: unwanted, unpeeled and unopened food, such as whole bananas, oranges, clementines or tangerines, individual shelf stable commercially packaged applesauce, shelf stable aseptic juice boxes, hermetically sealed raisins, and bagels or dinner rolls that are commercially individually wrapped and sealed. These food items are then redistributed to the community through local community agencies. According to foodrescue.net, "40% of our food is wasted; while 1 in 6 people are food insecure in America". In Meriden, where in excess of 70% of our student's qualify for free or reduced priced meals, the need is even greater, with many in our community seeking assistance through our soup kitchens and food pantries.

Prior to rescuing food, Meriden Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services conducts a 9 week nutrition education and plate waste study with our students during lunch. In this study we focus on milk, fruit and vegetable waste. The goal of the study is to reduce food waste by educating our students on the importance of healthy eating, food sustainability, and the impact of food waste in our environment. After the completion of our study, Food Rescue is implemented with the collaboration of school administration, cafeteria staff, Midstate ARC and New Opportunities of Greater Meriden. Daily, cafeteria tables are prepared with baskets to collect rescued food. Members from Midstate ARC collect the rescued food and drop it off at the New Opportunities Food Bank.

To date, Food Rescue has been successfully implemented in three elementary schools: Israel Putnam, Ben Franklin and Hanover. With the help of an \$8,000 from the James H. Napier Foundation, we plan to continue and expand this initiative in three more elementary schools in 2019 – 2020: Nathan Hale, Thomas Hooker and Roger Sherman.

District Commitment to Nutrition and Wellness

Nutrislice Menu App and Digital Signage

Meriden Public Schools implemented a Menu App and Digital Signage powered by Nutrislice. Users can access menu offerings, menu item descriptions, nutrition information, allergens and see where entrees fall in our Slow, Go, Whoa nutrition rating system. Users can also rate our foods which will provide immediate feedback to Food and Nutrition Services, assisting us in improving our menu offerings. In addition, there is a Summer Meals Finder function that allows residents to locate a summer meal location near them, see what is being offered, and view a map to the location. The app is also available in Spanish. In a twelve month period, we have had over 350,000 views of the App.

USDA's Community Eligibility Provision and SNAP Outreach

The Meriden Public Schools recognizes the multiple health and academic benefits that eating nutritious meals provides students and that school meals play a critical role in meeting students' nutritional needs. In the 2018-2019 School Year, Meriden expanded the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) to all 12 Meriden Schools and Thomas Edison Middle School.

USDA's Community Eligibility Provision provides a nutritious breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to students, families or the Board. This federally funded program provides eligible schools with a higher reimbursement rate, eliminates stigma, increases participation, eliminates meal debt, and streamlines the process for parents and staff, enabling all students in these schools to receive school meals without having to complete an annual meal benefit application.

It is anticipated that an increase of 10.6% of lunch meals will occur, increasing the districts number of lunches served by over 110,000 to an estimated 1,152,000 lunch meals and 730,000 breakfast meals.

Meriden Public Schools has continued to partner with End Hunger CT! and New Opportunities of Greater Meriden to conduct SNAP outreach and help connect families with additional benefits they may be entitled to.

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. John Barry will serve over 72,000 after school snacks this year. This program is available to all afterschool programs which have educational and enrichment activities.

At Risk Supper Program

Under criteria established by USDA, "at risk" after school care centers are able to provide a free afterschool supper meal, meeting the USDA meal pattern and nutrition standards. An "at risk" after school care center is defined as: an after school care center that provides organized, regularly scheduled activities in a structured and supervised environment, including education or enrichment activities and has 50% or more of its students eligible for free or reduced priced meals.

Washington, Lincoln and Hanover currently serve supper as a part of their Beyond the Bell/REACH Programming. The suppers program has expanded to include service five nights a week to the Boys and Girls Club. As the program continues to be successful, as evidenced by student participation, it will again be offered in 2019-2020 at no cost to students, families, the Food Service Program or the Board of Education. The At Risk Supper Program will continue to be considered for expansion in district and with other community partners.

Weekend Back Pack Program

Thanks to the Connecticut Food Bank, one hundred students from John Barry, Israel Putnam, 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.

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.

Be Fit Challenge

The Be Fit Event is an annual event that reinforces the value of fitness, with an emphasis on understanding the components of the Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment. Each year a presenter is secured who emphasizes the importance of physical fitness, in a fun and engaging way for the students and families. This year we secured Jeff Wodatch, a professional ultimate frisbee player for the Washington D.C. Breeze. The students, a mixture of approximately 175 from elementary and middle school, also participated in various physical activities in the gym that emphasized the movements of the state test items. The activities were organized and led by our district physical education teachers, and assisted by high school student athletes. All students received a "gift bag" and prizes were also auctioned off at the end of the event. Next year's event is planned for the spring of 2020 in collaboration with the Meriden Healthy Youth Coalition.

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.

"Getting to Know You" Survey

After being piloted and revised over the past several years, a new survey measuring grades 3–11 student preferences is currently being instituted in the district. The purpose of this new spring student survey is to provide teachers with information in advance on how to "get to know" their individual students and assist teachers in finding strategies that will best meet their students' educational and other supplemental needs. Nutrition and physical education questions are included on the survey and will be tracked over time.

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/

Wellness Committee Webpage

The Food Services Program maintains the Wellness Committee webpage at:
http://www.meridenk12.org/Departments/Food_Services/Wellness_Policy/

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.

Nutrition Education Partnerships:

Partnerships with University of Connecticut and University of Saint Joseph Dietetic Internship Programs

The Food Services Program has developed partnerships with The University of Connecticut and The University of Saint Joseph's 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 six dietetic interns. 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 fifty service members in 2012, is a national service organization of AmeriCorps leaders working alongside educators and community leaders. Food Corp 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.

This year, Meriden had the opportunity to host two Food Corps Service Members. Although they worked primarily at John Barry, Israel Putnam, Casimir Pulaski and Hanover, and taught over 350 students hands-on nutrition and cooking lessons in these schools, they also completed and assisted with other district wellness projects such as:

- Over 35 taste tests in school cafeterias and after-school events
- Taste tests for different school wide events such as smoothie taste test for STARS program
- Participated in Israel Putnam's PTO and assisted with parent engagement events
- Maintained Israel Putnam, Hanover and John Barry gardens
- Planned and organized weekend SNAP outreach events
- Worked with parent and community events such as Daddy and Me to introduce healthy cooking techniques
- Created school cookbooks at Pulaski, Hanover and Putnam
- Held a conference at Hanover about plant-based diets
- Assisted in the start-up of Hot Chocolate Grant at Platt and Maloney High Schools

Highlights of their year were hearing students after taste tests asking their parents to buy brussel sprouts or zucchini, having kids tell us that although smoothies look gross they actually taste good, and watching the classroom embrace trying something new every week!

Meriden is proud to have been again been chosen as a host site for a Food Corp member and will continue as a host site for two Food Corp Service members in 2019-2020. In 2019-2020, each member will complete 1700 hours of service, primarily at Israel Putnam, Hanover, Ben Franklin and Roger Sherman. It is hoped that all schools in Meriden will have the opportunity to benefit from a Food Corp member in future years.

Wellness Committee Initiatives for 2019-2020::

- Continue to evaluate waste and expand programming to increase consumption of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, milk and whole grains.
- Continue to expand food rescue
- Increase and strengthen community partnerships.
- Encourage active committee participation from all schools
- Develop a three-year strategic plan.

Committee Recommendations:

Based upon USDA' s Food and Nutrition Services final rule published in July 2016, the Wellness Policy was revised in November 2017. The Wellness Committee currently has no recommendations for policy changes or revisions. A copy of the current wellness policy and annual progress reports can be located at: 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.