



2015-2016
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 Geremia, 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
Kaisha Cave, Parent Representative
Elizabeth Spadory, Parent Representative
Dan Coffey, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School Principal
Corey Jackson, Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Assistant Principal
David Levenduski, Supervisor of Instruction and Learning
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
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
Susan Mitchell, John Barry Elementary , Grade 4 and 5, Special Education Teacher
Sean Gannon, Platt High School, Social Studies Teacher
Chris Hanson, Platt High School, Physical Education & Health Teacher
David Salafia, Family School Liaison Coordinator
Olivia Bischoff, Student Representative, Maloney High School
Anna Hendrickson, Student Representative, Maloney High School
Melony Edwards, Student Representative, Platt High School
Sarah O'Brien, Food Corp
Ashley Onion, 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 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 2015-2016 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

Grant Awards:

School Breakfast

For the 2015-16 School Year, Meriden Public Schools received approximately \$180,000 to fund infrastructure to implement alternative breakfast strategies - \$134,697 from AASA and the Walmart Foundation, \$20,482 from the New England Dairy and Food Council and \$24,375 from the Connecticut State Department of Education. Through alternative breakfast strategies, such as second chance breakfast, grab and go, and vended breakfasts, the district has significantly increased breakfast participation.

Effective October 1, 2015, all of Meriden's elementary schools became Universal Free Breakfast Schools. Participation in these schools has more than tripled as compared to the previous school year. Secondary schools have seen an increase in participation between 5 and 20 percent since alternative strategies were implemented.

Students, parents and teachers were surveyed in the months of November through February.

Key findings of the survey include:

- 90% of teachers reported no significant disruption in their classroom after implementation of breakfast in the classroom
- 87% of teachers reported improved student attentiveness
- 78% of students reported they were more engaged in class
- 91% of parents thought healthy food options were offered

Secondary schools began a universal free breakfast pilot on May 9, 2016 and have seen growth between an additional 14 to 24 percent. A proposal has been submitted to and approved by the Finance Committee to institute Universal Free Breakfast district wide in 2016-17. The proposal will be submitted for approval by the Board of Education on June 7, 2016. If approved, all students will be offered breakfast at no charge through the federally funded National School Breakfast Program. Additional funding to expand infrastructure and access to school breakfast is being actively pursued.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

Two Meriden elementary schools were awarded a total of approximately \$60,000 in 2015-2016 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 2016-2017 grants.

Fuel Up To Play 60

Casimir Pulaski and Thomas Hooker were awarded \$7,345 to implement nutrition and physical activity initiatives and encourage increased participation in school meals. 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.

At Risk Supper Program

Share our Strength awarded Meriden Public Schools \$2,000 to expand their 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 and Lincoln began serving supper as a part of the REACH program in 2014. This year, the program has been expanded to include the 21st Century Program at Hanover and provides 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 2016-2017 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.

District Commitment to Nutrition and Wellness:

USDA's Community Eligibility Provision

The Meriden Public Schools recognizes the multiple health and academic benefits that eating nutritious meals provides students. Students who attend our Expanded Learning Time schools spend a minimum of 8 hours per day at school; therefore, school meals play a critical role in meeting students' nutritional needs. With over 53% of our students at Expanded Learning Time schools being food insecure, (defined as a SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps] recipient) and free and reduced rates as high as 90% at John Barry, these three schools qualify for USDA's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

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.

A proposal has been submitted to and approved by the Finance Committee to institute USDA's Community Eligibility Program in 2016-17 at our Expanded Learning Time schools. The proposal will be submitted for approval by the Board of Education on June 7, 2016. If approved, all students at Expanded Learning Time schools will be offered breakfast and lunch at no charge through the federally funded National School Lunch and National School Breakfast Programs.

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.

Weekend Back Pack Program

Thanks to the Connecticut Food Bank and the Salvation Army, 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.

Summer School - Meriden Public Schools' Summer Food Services Program

In July and August 2015, Hanover Elementary School provided a free breakfast program through the summer food service program for our students enrolled in summer school. Over twenty days, students and children from the community were served over 2,600 free breakfasts.

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 ages 18 and under from the community for a 45-minute period on the patio outside of the cafeteria.

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.

Be Fit Challenge

On October 3, 2015, the Be Fit Challenge was 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 suburban areas. 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.

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 two 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.

Four nutrition questions and four physical education questions were included on the survey and will be tracked over time. The questions are:

1. I usually avoid sweet drinks and fatty foods.
2. I eat "fast" foods more often than I eat "healthy" foods.
3. I eat fruits and vegetables every day.
4. I eat breakfast every day.
5. Last year, how much did you like physical education (gym) class?
6. Last year, how hard did you work in physical education (gym) class?
7. It is important to exercise on a regular basis.
8. I am a really good athlete.

The questions are answered on a 1-5 scale, correlated with: Strongly disagree, disagree, sometimes, agree, strongly agree.

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, and Ashley Onion, R.D., has been asked to represent school nutrition programs on the University of Saint Joseph's Dietetics Program Advisory Council.

Food Corp

Food Corp, originating with fifty service members in 2012, is a national service organization of Americorp 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.

Meriden is proud to have been chosen as a host site for a Food Corp member for the school year 2015-16 and will continue as a host site for a Food Corp member in 2016-17. In 2016-17, the member will complete 1700 hours of service, primarily at John Barry and Casimir Pulaski. 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 2016-2017:

- Evaluate waste and institute programming to increase consumption of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, milk and whole grains.
- Increase and strengthen community partnerships.
- Increase committee focus on physical activity and wellness opportunities.
- Complete Centers for Disease Control's (CDC's) School Health Index Assessment and develop three-year strategic plan.

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 to assisting our students, families and staff in meeting the health and wellness challenges they encounter.