



**2016-2017**  
**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  
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  
Susan Mitchell, John Barry Elementary, Grade 4 and 5, Special Education Teacher  
Ellen Kearney, Nathan Hale/Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Robin Cusachs, Nathan Hale Elementary School, Kindergarten Teacher  
Jonathan Addorisio, Thomas Hooker Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Jessica Marlowe, Israel Putnam Elementary School, Grade 2 Teacher  
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  
Olivia Bischoff, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Anna Hendrickson, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Lexi Brenner, Food Corp Service Member  
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 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 2016-2017 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

#### **Grant Awards:**

##### **School Breakfast**

For the 2016-17 School Year, Meriden Public Schools received approximately an additional \$10,000 to continue to fund infrastructure to implement alternative breakfast strategies - \$5,000 from Action for Healthy Kids to support the expansion of reimbursable vending at our High Schools and \$5,000 from Share our Strength to support expanding alternative breakfast strategies at Casimir Pulaski. Additional funding to expand infrastructure and to continue to increase access to school breakfast is being actively pursued

Effective August 29, 2016, all of Meriden's secondary schools became Universal Free Breakfast Schools. Now, all students in all Meriden Schools may receive breakfast at no charge, through the federally funded School Breakfast Program. Through universal free breakfast and implementing alternative breakfast strategies, such as grab and go and vended breakfasts, the district has significantly increased breakfast participation. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) defines exceptional growth in school breakfast as an increase in average daily participation (ADP) of 20% in one school year. Meriden Public Schools had an 86% growth in ADP in 2015-2016, as reported by AASA in their Spring 2017 issue of School Governance and Leadership, and is expected to again see ADP growth in excess of 20% in 2016-2017. Currently, approximately 4,500 school breakfasts are being served daily. Initiatives, product and service changes to improve participation in school breakfast will continue throughout this and next school year.

##### **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

Two Meriden elementary schools, John Barry and Casimir Pulaski, were awarded a total of approximately \$60,000 in 2016-2017 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 2017-2018 grants.

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

Nathan Hale was awarded \$2,750 to implement nutrition and physical activity initiatives and encourage increased participation in school meals. Activities funded by this grant and supported by our Food Corp member included: food and smoothie taste tests and Agriculture Day. 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.

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

##### **Nutrislice Menu App**

This year, Meriden Public Schools purchased a Menu App 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 provides 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. We have had over 200,000 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. 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 qualify for and participated in 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.

Meriden Public Schools has partnered 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. An increase in SNAP participation may make the expansion of the Community Eligibility Program to other Meriden Public Schools possible in future years.

### **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, "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 the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program. 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 2017-2018 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 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 2016, 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 2,700 nutritious breakfasts at no charge.

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, a one-page flyer with site information, a summer meals finder on our menu app, and a webpage on the Food Services' website. Meriden Public Schools will be partnering with End Hunger CT! and New Opportunities on a summer meals "blitz" on June 20, 2017 to raise awareness of the summer meals programs in Meriden through

outreach at schools, businesses, community centers, churches, parks, health centers and residences. Also, Meriden Public Schools is supporting the summer meals program by partnering on a farm to table component in the summer meals program and assisting in hosting a meal site at the Meriden Farmers Market.

### **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**

In the fall of 2016, Meriden again hosted the Be Fit Challenge at Lincoln Middle School with our community partners to encourage students and families to be physically active and fit, consume school breakfast and 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.

### **Buddy Benches**

The Meriden Public Schools has partnered with the Meriden Rotary Club, in conjunction with the Choose Love Foundation, to equip each of our eight elementary schools with Buddy Benches. The Buddy Bench Initiative serves to teach students empathy and helps create an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion. Students who are feeling sad, not included, or alone during recess simply sit on the Buddy Bench. All students in the school are taught to recognize when a student is sitting on the bench, and their job is to go to the bench to ask the student if they would like to join them in their recess activity. All students and staff in each school also take a pledge as a school community to follow these Buddy Bench guidelines.

### **“Getting to Know You” Survey**

After being piloted and revised over the past three 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.

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

1. For me, it is important to eat a healthy diet.
2. I usually drink 3 or more bottles/glasses (36 ounces or more) of unflavored water
3. I usually drink 3 or more bottles/glasses (36 ounces or more) of some type of soda or sweetened drink (Coke, Pepsi, Sprite, Gatorade, Lemonade, Sweet Iced Tea)
4. I usually eat breakfast.
5. I usually eat fruits and/or vegetables.
6. I usually eat sweets such as cake, donuts, candy, cookies or brownies.
7. I usually eat foods like french fries, hamburgers, chicken nuggets or fried chicken.
8. I usually have 3 or more servings of dairy products (milk or yogurt or cheese).
9. Last year, how much did you like physical education (gym) class?
10. Last year, how hard did you work in physical education (gym) class?
11. I am physically fit.
12. It is important to exercise on a regular basis.
13. I am good at physical education (gym) activities.
14. Usually, I am physically active (run, swim, exercise, play sports) for 30 minutes or more.

The questions are answered on a 1-5 scale, correlated with: Strongly disagree, disagree, sometimes, agree, and 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/](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/)

## **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 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.

Our Food Corp member assisted in multiple schools and supported multiple district wide initiatives and activities. Some these activities included: taste tests, cooking classes, garden clubs, plate waste studies, earth day celebrations, breakfast promotions, events such as "Dairy Day the Barry Way" and "Fruit and Vegetable Fear Factor". Our service member also obtained grant funding in excess of \$7,000 to support these initiatives, as well as wrote two other grants in excess for \$7,500 for which we hope to be funded to continue work in these areas.

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 a Food Corp member in 2017-18. In 2017-18, 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 2017-2018:**

- Continue to 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:**

Based upon USDA's Food and Nutrition Services final rule published in July 2016, the Wellness Policy was revised in December 2016. 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/](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.