

Triennial Assessment Report: 2025 WellSAT (4/2025)

District: MERIDEN

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Final Rule: Local School Wellness Policy Implementation and the Healthy Free Kids Act of 2010 require that each district or local educational agency participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) complete an assessment of their local school wellness policy at least once every three years known as the "Triennial Assessment". The assessment must indicate:

- the extent to which schools are in compliance with the district policy;
- the extent to which the local wellness policy compares to model local school wellness policies; and
- the progress made in attaining the goals of the local wellness policy.

Districts and Local Education Agencies must complete the first Local School Wellness Policy assessment by June 30, 2025, and make this assessment available to the public.

Various departments within Meriden Public Schools collaborated to complete the assessment. This group consisted of members from the Wellness Committee, including the Director of Food and Nutrition Services, the Athletic Director, district Registered Dietitians, Social Workers, Teachers, and other district professionals.

Strong Policies and Aligned Practices

In our most recent triennial assessment using the WellSAT 4.0 tool, we identified multiple policy items that received the highest possible score of "2" for both policy and practice, indicating that we not only have strong written policies but are also effectively implementing them in our schools. Our district continues to meet and implement essential federal wellness requirements. We have clearly defined goals for nutrition education, comply with Smart Snack standards, and ensure that our wellness policies and assessments are accessible to the public on our website. In the area of nutrition environment and services, our schools offer breakfast and lunch daily, actively promote student participation in school meal programs, and follow nutrition standards for fundraising activities. These efforts create a supportive environment where students are encouraged to make healthy food choices. We also excel in nutrition education, providing comprehensive and engaging instruction across all grade levels. Lessons are integrated into a variety of subjects, helping students develop a solid foundation that supports lifelong wellness. Physical education and physical activity are also priorities across the district. We implement a standards-based curriculum led by certified educators, and we ensure students have regular opportunities for physical activity throughout their day. Our district also takes a positive approach by using physical activity to support student well-being rather than as a form of discipline. Finally, our active district wellness committee plays a critical role in coordinating efforts and guiding wellness policy implementation. Overall, Meriden Public Schools continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to student and staff wellness by maintaining high standards in both policy and practice.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR1	Does the district have specific goals for nutrition education designed to promote student wellness?	2	2	★
FR4	Is free (i.e., no cost to students) drinking water available to students during meals?	2	2	★

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FR6	Do all competitive foods and beverages sold to students during the school day meet or exceed the USDA's nutrition standards, commonly called Smart Snacks?	2	2	☆
FR7	Do all a la carte foods and beverages sold in the cafeteria meet Smart Snacks standards?	2	2	☆
FR12	Is there food or beverage marketing on the school campus during the school day? If yes, do the marketed items meet Smart Snacks criteria?	2	2	☆
FR15	How is the wellness policy made available to the public?	2	2	☆
FR16	Is wellness policy implementation evaluated every three years?	2	2	☆
FR17	What is included in the triennial assessment report to the public?	2	2	☆
FR18	Has the wellness policy been revised based on the previous triennial assessment?	2	2	☆
NES1	Does the district offer breakfast every day to all students?	2	2	☆
NES4	Does your school use strategies to maximize participation in the school breakfast program and/or school lunch program?	2	2	☆
NES9	Are you familiar with any state laws allowing exemptions for school-sponsored fundraisers during which foods and beverages do not have to meet Smart Snacks?	2	2	☆
NE1	Are skills-based, behavior-focused, and interactive/participatory methods used in nutrition education to develop student skills?	2	2	☆
NE2	Do all elementary school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆

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NE3	Do all middle school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆
NE4	Do all high school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆
NE5	Is nutrition education integrated into other subjects beyond health education?	2	2	☆
PEPA1	✍️ Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is implemented consistently for every grade?	2	2	☆
PEPA2	Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is aligned with national and/or state standards?	2	2	☆
PEPA7	Are all physical education classes taught by state certified/licensed teachers who are endorsed to teach physical education?	2	2	☆
PEPA13	Is there daily recess for all grades in elementary school?	2	2	☆
PEPA15	Does the district have "joint-use" or "shared-use" agreements?	2	2	☆
PEPA18	Do teachers ever use physical activity as a punishment?	2	2	☆
PEPA19	Do teachers ever withhold physical activity as a classroom management tool?	2	2	☆
IC1	Is there an active district-level wellness committee?	2	2	☆







Create Practice Implementation Plan

To move toward full compliance with all elements of our Local School Wellness Policy, Meriden Public Schools is committed to developing implementation plans in areas where current practice is either limited or not yet in place. Our most recent triennial assessment identified several items where we have policy language, either strong or in need of strengthening, but corresponding practices are not yet fully

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implemented. Among the federal requirements, there are key areas that need attention. While our district policy addresses Smart Snack compliance for fundraisers during the school day, actual practice needs stronger monitoring to ensure all items sold meet these standards across 13 schools. Additionally, although classroom celebrations and parties are addressed in policy, the implementation needs clearer expectations and more consistent oversight. We also noted the importance of having more diverse representation on the district wellness committee, as well as the need to identify specific individuals responsible for ensuring compliance with the wellness policy at each building. To enhance implementation in these areas requiring more attention, the district wellness committee will review these areas and work together with school administrators, teachers, and the food and nutrition services department to create clear, actionable next steps. These may include standardized fundraising approval procedures, classroom celebration guidance, updated communication protocols for committee participation, and the assignment of wellness policy liaisons in each school. The Director of Food and Nutrition Services and the district wellness committee will lead the planning process, with input from school principals and other relevant staff. Progress will be monitored through periodic check-ins with school leadership and wellness committee reviews to ensure meaningful and sustained improvements. By addressing these practice gaps with thoughtful planning and cross-department collaboration, Meriden Public Schools will continue to build a strong foundation for wellness policy compliance and a healthier school environment for all students and staff.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR10	Are there fundraisers that sell foods or beverages to be consumed during the school day? If yes, do the foods and beverages sold meet Smart Snacks standards?	2	1	
FR11	Does your district regulate foods and beverages served at class parties and other school celebrations in elementary schools?	1	0	
FR13	Which groups are represented on the district-level wellness committee?	2	1	
FR14	Is there an official who is responsible for the implementation and compliance with the wellness policy at the building level for each school?	2	1	
NES13	Do teachers or school staff give students food as a reward?	1	0	
NE6	Do school nutrition services staff members use the following methods to collaborate with teachers to reinforce nutrition education lessons taught in the classroom?	2	1	


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PEPA4	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in elementary school receive?	1	0	
PEPA5	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in middle school receive?	1	0	
PEPA14	 Do teachers provide regular physical activity breaks for students in the classroom?	2	1	

Update Policies

The most recent triennial assessment highlighted several areas where strong practices are in place, but the written policy either lacks the language needed or includes only weak references. To strengthen alignment between policy and practice, we will be updating our policy to include clearer, more comprehensive language in these key areas. Among the federally required items in need of policy language updates or expansion are the following: compliance with USDA meal pattern and nutrition standards for school meals (FR2), annual training for school nutrition staff per USDA Professional Standards (FR5), and Smart Snack compliance for items sold in vending machines (FR8). While practices in these areas are fully implemented and meet or exceed federal standards, this work is not currently well-documented in our wellness policy. Updating the policy language to reflect these expectations is a priority to ensure transparency, sustainability, and compliance. These updates will also help ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the standards guiding food service and wellness efforts across the district. The Director of Food and Nutrition Services, in collaboration with the district wellness committee, will be responsible for drafting revised policy language. The district will also work with site administrators and food service managers to improve consistency with these policies, which may include scheduling additional training sessions, updating vendor contracts, and conducting periodic compliance checks. By ensuring that our wellness policy accurately reflects both our goals and our practices, Meriden Public Schools will strengthen accountability, maintain federal compliance, and continue creating a healthy school environment for all students.









		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR2	Do your National School Lunch Program meals (and, if applicable, School Breakfast Program meals) meet all federal standards for meal patterns, nutrient levels, and calorie requirements for the grade levels served?	1	2	

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FR5	Do all school nutrition program directors, managers, and staff meet or exceed the annual continuing education/training hours required by the USDA's Professional Standards requirements?	0	2	
FR8	Do all foods and beverages sold in vending machines meet Smart Snack standards?	0	2	
NES5	Are marketing strategies used to promote healthy food and beverage choices in school?	0	2	
NES6	Do students have at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and at least 20 minutes to eat lunch, counting from the time they are seated?	1	2	
NES7	 In your district, is it a priority to procure locally produced foods for school meals?	0	2	
NES8	Do you know where to access the USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards to check and see if an item can be sold in school during the school day?	0	2	
NES10	Are foods or beverages containing caffeine sold at the high school level?	0	2	
NES11	Do all foods or beverages SERVED (not sold) to students after the school day on school grounds (including aftercare, clubs, and afterschool programming) meet federal nutrition standards (e.g., CACFP or Smart Snacks)?	0	2	
NES14	Do students have consistent and easy access to free drinking water throughout the school day?	0	2	
PEPA3	How does your physical education program promote a physically active lifestyle?	1	2	
PEPA8	Is ongoing professional development offered every year for PE teachers that is relevant and specific to physical education?	1	2	

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PEPA9	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to exemptions?	0	2	
PEPA10	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to substitutions?	1	2	
PEPA12	 Are there opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity before and after school?	1	2	
PEPA16	What proportion of students walk or bike to school?	0	2	
EW1	 Are there strategies used by the school to support employee wellness?	0	2	
EW2	Are school staff encouraged to model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors in front of students?	1	2	











Opportunities for Growth

Meriden Public Schools recognizes the importance of addressing all federally required components of the Local School Wellness Policy, including those not currently well-illustrated in policy or practice. Our most recent assessment identified FR9—regarding Smart Snack approved foods and beverages sold in school stores during the school day—as an area for growth. While this is not currently a widespread practice in our district, the absence of clear policy guidance presents an opportunity for improvement. To address this gap, we will work to both establish a clear policy position and communicate clear expectations to the schools. The updated policy will state that any food or beverage sold in school stores during the school day must meet USDA Smart Snack standards. This addition will ensure that any future use of school stores aligns with federal regulations and supports our district’s nutrition goals. The Director of Food and Nutrition Services, in collaboration with the district wellness committee and school administrators, will lead the development of both the policy language and the practice implementation plan. The plan will begin with a review of current school store operations, followed by the creation of guidelines, vendor expectations, and communication materials for school staff. Success will be measured through site-level check-ins, occasional reviews of school store offerings, and feedback from school administrators and staff. Policy language updates will be drafted alongside the practice implementation plan to ensure alignment between what is written and what is carried out. The policy will be updated as part of the district’s next round of wellness policy revisions, with school board approval sought during that period. Addressing this opportunity for growth will help Meriden Public Schools close remaining compliance gaps while continuing to support a consistent, health-promoting school environment.

	Policy	Practice	
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		Score	Score	
FR9	Do all foods and beverages sold in school stores during the school day meet Smart Snack standards?	0	1	
NES12	Do all foods or beverages SOLD (not served) to students after the school day on school grounds (including aftercare, clubs, and afterschool programming) meet federal nutrition standards (e.g., CACFP or Smart Snacks)?	0	0	
NE7	 Does nutrition education address agriculture and the food system?	0	1	
PEPA6	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in high school receive?	1	1	
PEPA11	 Are there opportunities for families and community members to engage in physical activity at school?	0	1	
PEPA17	 Are teachers encouraged to use physical activity as a reward for students?	0	1	
IC2	Is there an active school-level wellness committee?	0	0	

Conclusion

Meriden Public Schools remains committed to creating a healthy school environment that supports the physical, social, and emotional well-being of all students. Our most recent Local School Wellness Policy assessment highlights many areas of strength. We have strong policies in place and are fully implementing practices that promote healthy eating, physical activity, and nutrition education across all grade levels. These successes reflect the dedication of our staff and the collaboration of our district wellness committee. The assessment also enabled us to pinpoint areas for improvement. In certain instances, while our policies are robust, their application in practice varies across the 13 schools. In other situations, we are making progress in our practices, but have not formally addressed them in our written policy. We also recognized a few key opportunities for growth, particularly in areas that are not currently addressed in either policy or practice, such as regulating food sold in school stores and creating clearer guidance for classroom celebrations and fundraising efforts. Moving forward, we will focus on updating our policy language, strengthening

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implementation where needed, and building practices to ensure district-wide consistency. Our wellness committee, along with key district leaders, will be responsible for developing and rolling out these improvements over the next planning cycle. We are proud of the progress we have made and are committed to continued growth. By involving staff, students, families, and community partners, we will promote healthy habits and make wellness an essential part of every student's school experience.

Key



Strong Policies and Aligned Practices - District has a strong policy and is fully implementing practices that align with the policy



Create Practice Implementation Plan - District has a strong or weak policy, but practice implementation is either absent or limited



Update Policies Update Policies - District is fully implementing a practice but there is no or only weak language in the written policy, or the district is partially implementing practices and there is no language in the policy



Opportunities for Growth - District has either not addressed the topic in policy or practice; or has only addressed the topic in a very limited way

For more resources, visit: wellsat.org/resources

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