



**2017-2018**  
**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  
Susan Mitchell, John Barry Elementary, Grade 4 and 5, Special Education Teacher  
Ellen Kearney, Nathan Hale/Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Physical Education & Health Teacher  
Jonathan Addorisio, 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  
Olivia Bischoff, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Anna Hendrickson, Student Representative, Maloney High School  
Tara Mahoney, Food Corp Service Member  
Jaime Traverse, 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 2017-2018 school year. A brief summary of these accomplishments is below.

### **Grant Awards:**

#### **School Breakfast**

For the 2017-18 School Year, Meriden Public Schools received an additional \$7,500 from AASA to continue to fund infrastructure to expand alternative breakfast strategies. Additional funding to expand infrastructure and to increase access to school breakfast continues to be being actively pursued.

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

Three Meriden elementary schools, John Barry, Casimir Pulaski and Roger Sherman were awarded a total of approximately \$90,000 in 2017-2018 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 2018-2019 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 service members 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.

### **New Initiatives:**

#### **Summer Food Service Program Sponsorship and Funding Support**

For the first year, Meriden Public Schools will be the sponsor of 24 summer food service program sites in Meriden and anticipates serving approximately 50,000 meals. As summer is a time of food insecurity for many, we are excited to assume this initiative and assist our students and families. All children 18 and under are eligible for free summer meals.

Meriden Public Schools will be partnering with End Hunger CT! on a summer meals "blitz" on June 19, 2018 to raise awareness of the summer meals programs in Meriden through outreach at schools, businesses, community centers, churches, parks, health centers and residences.

As there are many start-up costs associated with assuming this program, we applied for and received \$32,000 in grant funding – \$25,000 from the National Parks and Recreation Association and the Walmart Foundation, \$5,000 from Share our Strength/No Kid Hungry and \$2,000 from the New England Dairy and Food Council. This funding is defraying the costs of equipment, marketing and the implementation of a nutrition education curriculum at several meal sites.

### **Food Rescue and a James H. Napier Foundation Grant for Expansion**

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 70% of our students qualify for free or reduced priced meals, the need is even greater, with many in our community seeking assistance through our soup kitchen and food pantries.

On January 8, 2018, Meriden Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services started a 9 week plate waste pilot study with our students at Israel Putnam Elementary School. In this study we focused on milk, fruit and vegetable waste. The goal of the study was 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 was implemented with the collaboration of school administration, cafeteria staff, Meriden Kiwanis Club (K Kids), and Midstate ARC. The K kids prepare the cafeteria tables daily with baskets for their rescued food, collect and store rescued food and enter data into the official Food Rescue database with the help of school administration. Members from Midstate ARC collect the rescued food and drop it off at the local agencies. As of May 21, 2018, 206 food items, or the equivalent of 39 meals, have been rescued. Since the successful implementation at Israel Putnam, we have been awarded a grant for \$8,000 from the James H. Napier Foundation to continue and expand this initiative in other Meriden schools.

### **Whole Foods Foundation Grant**

Washington Middle School was awarded \$2,000 from the Whole Foods Foundation to build an edible educational garden. Research has shown that the more kids know and feel connected to their food, the more curious they become about how things grow or taste and the more willing they are to try new foods.

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

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

The Healthier US Schools Challenge (HUSC) 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, more than half of the Meriden Public Schools qualify for this prestigious designation.

The Food Services Program has submitted eight Healthier US School Challenge Applications: The Gold Award of Distinction for Casimir Pulaski Elementary School, Gold Awards for John Barry Elementary School, Washington Middle School, Lincoln Middle School, Thomas Edison Middle School, Maloney High School, and Platt High School as well as a Silver Award for Roger Sherman Elementary School.

#### **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 250,000 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 2017-2018 School Year, Meriden expanded the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) to 5 Meriden Schools.

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. As a result of these efforts and access to Medicaid data,

the number of schools eligible to participate in CEP has expanded and all Meriden Public Schools are now eligible. On May 15, 2018, the Board of Education voted to adopt the CEP program district wide for the 2018-2019 school year.

#### **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 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 2018-2019 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 2017 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 4,300 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.

#### **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 Corey the Dribbler, a former Harlem Globetrotter and holder of four Guinness world records. 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.

#### **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 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. 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/](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.

This year, Meriden had the opportunity to host two Food Corps Service Members. Although they worked primarily at John Barry, Israel Putnam, and Casimir Pulaski 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 30 taste tests in school cafeterias
- Building a new garden at John Barry
- Weekend SNAP outreach events
- Wellness breakfasts
- Created a school cookbook with Casimir Pulaski 3<sup>rd</sup> graders
- Worked with parent and community groups such as Daddy and Me and Moms and More to promote a healthier community
- Assisted in implementing food rescue
- Grant writing

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 chosen as a host site for a Food Corp member and will continue as a host site for two Food Corp Service members in 2018-19. In 2018-19, each member will complete 1700 hours of service, primarily at John Barry, Casimir Pulaski, Israel Putnam and Hanover. 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 2018-2019:**

- 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.
- 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/](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.