

Wellness Self-Assessment
June 2, 2021

Summary

The Wellness Committee collected data from two sources, the Healthy Schools Assessment Guide from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and a community wellness survey, to perform a tri annual wellness assessment. The results of this data and the recommended next steps will be presented to the Board.

Description of Agenda Item

Board Policy ADF Foundations and Basics – District Wellness Program requires the local wellness program to be assessed at least once every three years.

Background Information

As required by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 and because the District participates in the National School Lunch program, Policy ADF District Wellness Program was adopted on November 18, 2015 (revised on June 6, 2018). As a result, we are required to evaluate our wellness policy and report this information to the public on a tri annual basis.

Recommendation

For information only.

Motion

None.

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Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

Mary Jo Gruber, CPA, CGMA, SFO
Chief Financial Officer

WELLNESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Schools play an important role in the overall health of children and adolescents. Schools can give children and adolescents more chances to:

- Consume nutritious meals, snacks, and beverages
- Get regular physical activity
- Learn about the importance of lifelong healthy behaviors

Research has linked healthy eating and physical activity with better academic performance and classroom behavior such as concentration, attentiveness, and time-on-task. For example, eating a healthy breakfast has been associated with improvements in memory, mood, and academic performance, as well as fewer absences from school. School-based physical activity has been associated with improved academic achievement, including higher grades and standardized test scores, as well as better cognitive skills, attitudes, and academic behavior. Policy changes at the federal level have helped make it possible for schools to play a leading role in preventing obesity. For example, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that all local education agencies that participate in the National School Lunch Program or other child nutrition programs create a local school wellness policy with goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school activities designed to promote student wellness and set nutrition standards for all foods available on school campuses. Further, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires schools to evaluate their wellness policies and report this information to the public on a tri annual basis.

As required by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 and because the District participates in the National School Lunch program, Policy ADF District Wellness Program was adopted on November 18, 2015 (revised on June 6, 2018). In compliance with the policy, the District has established a Wellness Committee that consists of at least one parent, student, nurse or other school health professional, physical education teacher, school food service representative, Board member, school administrator, member of the public, and other community members as appropriate. Current Wellness Committee members are:

Co-Chairs

Mary Jo Gruber, *Chief Financial Officer*

Dr. Robyn Wiens, *Assistant Superintendent of Student Services*

Liaisons

Stacy Siwak, *Liaison, Board of Education*

Heather Christman, *Nurse, Glenridge Elementary School/District Nurse Coordinator*

Julie Connor, *P.E. Teacher, Wydown Middle School/District P.E. Curriculum Coordinator*

Michelle Fohey, *Director of Dining Services, Chartwells*

Molly Troy, *Fitness Recreation Supervisor, The Center of Clayton*

Cheryl Redohl, *Administrative Assistant to the Business Office/Benefits Specialist*

Voting Members*

Clayton High School

Dr. Dan Gutchewsky, *Principal, Clayton High School*

Marissa Pendegraft, *Parent, Clayton High School*

Sarah Centeno, *Student, Clayton High School*

Wydown Middle School

Christine Schneiderhahn, *Health/PE Teacher, Wydown Middle School*

Christina Blankenship, *Parent, Wydown Middle School*

Captain Elementary School

Dr. Jennifer Martin, *Principal, Captain Elementary School*

Mina Nashan, *Parent, Captain Elementary School*

Glenridge Elementary School

Jennifer McDaniel, *Parent, Glenridge Elementary School*

Meramec Elementary School

Tina Murtha, *Parent, Meramec Elementary School*

Family Center

Debbie Reilly, *Director, Family Center*

Angela Flotken, *Parent, Family Center*

**Voting members will serve a three-year term*

Committee meeting dates and agendas are posted on the District's website in advance of each meeting and advertised in the District e-News and principal newsletters to reach students, staff and members of the community. All Wellness Committee meeting agendas include a public comment period in which students, staff and members of the community are encouraged to provide input on the District's wellness program. Meetings, records and votes of the Wellness Committee adhere to the requirements of the Missouri Sunshine Law.

The Wellness Committee adopted a mission statement and purpose:

Mission Statement

The School District of Clayton recognizes that the physical, social and emotional well-being of our students, staff and parent body are all crucial elements of a student's academic success and lifelong health and wellness.

Our Mission is to promote the health and wellness of our students, staff and community through education and efforts that:

- *Encourage habits of wellness*
- *Increase awareness of factors and resources that contribute to well-being*
- *Inspire and empower individuals to take responsibility for their own health*
- *Support a sense of community in which the health and overall well-being of our students is recognized as an essential element of their success*

Purpose

- *Communicate*
- *Assess*
- *Create*
- *Support Development*

The committee collected data from two sources to perform the wellness assessment.:

- Healthy Schools Assessment Guide from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation
- Wellness survey was made available online to the community, District employees, and secondary students during April 2021.

Healthy Schools Assessment Guide

In 2017, the Wellness Committee implemented the Healthy Schools Framework of Best Practices created by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation has worked with schools, youth-serving organizations, businesses, and communities for more than a decade to empower kids to develop lifelong healthy habits by ensuring the environments that surround them provide and promote good health. This framework identifies specific criteria for a healthy school environment and serves as a guide for policy and practice change. The Healthy Schools Assessment Guide is a subset of questions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s School Health Index that allows schools and districts to assess their health policies and programs in the areas of:

- Policy & Environment
- Nutrition Services
- Smart Snacks
- Health & Physical Education
- Physical Activity
- Employee Wellness

Through a thoughtful analysis of the levels of completion and evidence of success documented in the assessment guide, the following recommendations by program will ensure continuous quality improvement and strengthen the culture of health in the District

Policy & Environment

- The Wellness Committee will meet four times a year instead of two.

Nutrition Services

- Look for opportunities to allow family members to provide feedback on the meal program and beverages sold, served, and offered on the school campus.

Health & Physical Education - None

Physical Activity

- Promote activities such as participation in International Walk to School Week, National Walk and Bike to School Week.
- Provide instruction on walking/bicycling safety to students.
- Create and distribute maps of the school environment (sidewalks, crosswalks, roads, pathways, bike racks, etc.).
- Consider requiring classroom teachers to participate annually in professional development on promoting and integrating physical activity in the classroom.
- Ensure staff/student/parent handbooks clearly state that the school prohibits using physical activity and withholding food, recess or physical education class as punishment.
- Ensure consistency of after school physical activity offerings at the elementary level.

Employee Wellness

- Offer staff members accessible and free or low-cost health assessments at least once a year.

Community Wellness Survey Results and Analysis

Survey Background

A wellness survey was made available online to the community, District employees, and secondary students during April 2021. The public-facing version of the survey, which was shared with District employees and community parents, received 553 responses. A majority of those respondents (65 percent) were parents/guardians with children enrolled in Clayton schools while the remaining respondents were District employees with or without children enrolled in Clayton schools. Overall, more than 60 percent of adult participants reported having a child enrolled at the elementary school level and were the group with the greatest amount of representation across the different school age levels. The student-facing survey had almost 700 responses. More than 65 percent of respondents were in grades 6-8. The remaining students were in grades 9-12. 12th grade students had the fewest responses with only 39 participants.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate that

- A majority of stakeholders have little knowledge of the District's wellness policy and feedback mechanisms.
- Awareness of the PE/health experiences and patterns of nutritional choices change over time.
- Stakeholders aren't sure of nutritional information outside of school menus and would like to see options that are lower in sugar and appropriate to a variety of dietary lifestyles.
- Stakeholders believe mental health should have a more prominent role in District-led wellness initiatives.

Awareness of the District's Wellness Policy

Multiple data points suggest that community stakeholders have minimal awareness of the District's wellness policy and ways to provide feedback on parts of the program. When asked if they were aware of the components of the District wellness policy (Policy ADF), more than 80 percent of adult participants reported that they disagreed or didn't know. In addition, a majority of respondents did not know if the policy had been communicated to students, parents, or staff. Furthermore, 85 percent of adult respondents reported either not having the opportunity or not knowing about the opportunity to provide feedback regarding school meal planning.

Respondents could also submit written comments. Submissions included feedback such as, "I did not know the District has a wellness program," "...many initiatives are communicated by publishing it on a website...[but we] do not regularly, meaningfully and thoroughly interact with all parts of the District's websites," and "I didn't realize how much I [didn't] know what the District is doing until filling out this survey."

PE and Health Programs Over Time

Survey results demonstrate a high level of awareness of physical education (PE) curriculum but that awareness changes as students get older. Approximately 80 percent of adult respondents agreed that their child's school encourages physical education at all grade levels. More than 70 percent of adult respondents agreed that at the elementary level, recess games and activities involved physical activity. Almost two thirds of adult respondents felt their child's school promoted an active lifestyle for students. One parent shared, "PE is crucial to my son's physical and mental well-being. I am grateful the District considers it a priority." However, other parents expressed concerns about the level of physical activity at school as students reached middle and high school. One parent wrote, "Physical activity and nutrition fall dramatically at middle school and even more so at the high school level." Another parent shared, "My biggest complaint is not having more opportunities for physical activity and getting outside at the high school and especially the middle school level." Based on self-reporting, students' frequency of physical activity also decreased as their grade level increased. For example, 84 percent of 6th grade respondents reported participating in activities that increased their heart rate 3 to 7 days a week. At 9th grade, that decreased to 77 percent and at 12th grade, it decreased to 45 percent.

However, even though the amount of physical activity students self-reported changed with age, the pattern was different when it came to nutritional choices. Overall, students' frequency of eating fruits and vegetables was similar at the 6th grade and 12th grade levels with a drop at the beginning of high school. For example, more than 60 percent of 6th grade respondents reported eating 2 or more vegetables the previous day. Among the 12th grade respondents, about 55 percent reported eating 2 or more vegetables the previous day. In contrast, only 37 percent of 9th grade respondents reported the same. A similar pattern was observed in the data regarding the frequency of fruit consumption.

Food Offerings on School Menus

Several points stand out in the data related to school menus, allergy needs and knowledge of USDA meal requirements. First, more than 80 percent of adult respondents agreed that parents have access to school menus and nutritional information. However, about 45 percent of respondents indicated that they didn't know if nutritional information, including information about allergens, was made available to staff and students upon request. Similarly, 45 percent of respondents did not know if school meals in Clayton met the USDA nutritional requirements for the national meal programs.

Adults who participated in the survey submitted substantial feedback related to the items offered on school menus. Major themes in written comments included providing more fresh food items daily, reducing the amount of sugar in meals -- particularly breakfast, and offering more options to meet different dietary needs. Parents requested more fresh fruits and vegetables be added to school menus as well as more information on the farm to school initiative. Other concerns focused on the nature of current food items, especially on the breakfast menu. One parent shared, "...all of the cereals on the menu look to be high in sugar with minimal nutritional value." Other parents made additional comments such as, "...[there are] Too many processed and packaged Pop Tarts, sugary cereals." Parents' perspective on the quality of breakfast meals available in District schools could be influencing where students eat breakfast. While nearly 75 percent of student respondents reported eating breakfast the day they took the survey, four out of five students said they usually eat breakfast at home.

Lastly, multiple respondents shared feedback about providing more plant-based options. For example, one respondent wrote, "More vegan options should be made available in the menu." Another parent commented, "We do not participate in school meals nor school snacks because we care very much that our children eat a plant-based diet and thus we provide their food."

Mental Health

The inclusion of mental health in District wellness efforts came up frequently in survey feedback. Many stakeholders felt mental health was an important piece to caring for the whole child, alongside nutritional and physical wellness. Most comments expressed concern that none of the survey questions directly addressed mental health. One parent shared, "I would like to see the District do more in the area of mental health," and "The wellness program should also include emotional and mental health." Results in the student survey also suggest a need for mental health and wellness initiatives. Two out of five students reported feeling anxious three or more times in the last week.

Next Steps

- Build a clearer communication plan related to the District wellness policy to increase awareness across stakeholder groups and school levels. This plan should include intentional activities to collect feedback from stakeholders about school menu offerings.
- Collaborate with the current food service provider to determine opportunities to increase fresh food offerings to align to the dietary lifestyles represented in the District.
- Create a subcommittee within the District Wellness Committee to focus on initiatives that address mental health and wellbeing of students and staff.
- Implement the recommendations identified through the review of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Healthy Schools Assessment Guide.
- Continue to collaborate with the Center of Clayton to leverage multipurpose programming relevant to District students and staff.