



Montana School Wellness Policy Best Practices

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Obtain buy-in from a variety of stakeholders

Educate school staff and key stakeholders, such as students, parents, and community members, on the learning connection between student health and better student academic performance and behavior. Ask school administrators and parents (be sure to include the parent organization) to be school wellness champions to help lay a strong foundation for obtaining buy-in from the school staff. Support worksite wellness for staff. Engage students in the wellness challenge by creating a Student Nutrition or Health Advisory Committee.

Maintain a committee, appoint a chair, and develop meeting schedule

One of the most important factors for creating a culture of wellness in a school environment is a strong team. Maintaining a school health or wellness committee comprised of a variety of stakeholders and chaired by a school administrator and/or community health professional is critical to achieving sustainability. Link school wellness to the school improvement plan and develop a regular meeting schedule (3-4 meetings/year).

Set realistic goals for one school wellness area based on need

There are five areas of school wellness: nutrition guidelines, nutrition education, nutrition promotion, physical education/activity, and other related wellness topics. Schools find success when measurable goals are set in one or two of these areas per year. By limiting the number of goals, administrators and school staff have time to learn about and realistically develop an action plan with a timeline to meet them.

Communicate the wellness policy plan

It is recommended to host staff training on school wellness on an annual basis to ensure staff are educated on the school wellness goal(s), the action plan and their role in the implementation process. Communicating the wellness policy plan to all stakeholders, including students, is vital and can be done by utilizing the school website, newsletters or social media. Maintaining good communication lines between the wellness committee chairperson, school principals, and the parent group associations is important.

Evaluate progress and provide yearly report

It is important to track goal progress and monitor the overall implementation of the wellness policy. There are tools to assist your evaluation and reporting process. Check out the *Resource to Sustain and Strengthen Local Wellness Initiatives* (www.nfsmi.org) and Montana Team Nutrition's newly released *School Wellness Policy Implementation Plan Report* located at <http://www.keysurvey.com/f/704854/10f2/>. While it is recommended to provide an annual school wellness report to the school board to keep them updated, this also provides another avenue for keeping the community apprised on the steps the district is taking to support student wellness.

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