



Overview

This is the first in a series of eight handouts summarizing the statewide results for each category of the School Wellness Policy Report. All handouts are available at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322168>.

Background

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-265) required that schools participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's child nutrition programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, After-School Snack Program and Special Milk Program) establish a school wellness policy by the 2006-07 school year. At a minimum, the district school wellness policy was required to:

1. include goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the local educational agency determines appropriate;
2. include nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus during the school day, with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity;
3. provide an assurance that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture;
4. establish a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including the designation of one or more persons within the local education agency or at each school, as appropriate, charged with ensuring that the school meets the local wellness policy; and
5. involve parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.

To assist districts with meeting federal requirements, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) developed specific guidance for recommended policy components and language. CSDE's *Action Guide for School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies* includes detailed information on the steps, strategies and resources involved in developing, adopting and implementing school policies (<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#Action>). CSDE also conducted numerous statewide trainings and provided additional resources to assist districts with this process (see *Summary of Training and Resources* at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#SW>).

Policy Assessment

During the 2007-08 school year, CSDE requested that districts submit their school wellness policy and any accompanying regulations, guidelines, action plans or other policy implementation documents. A review of policy content was conducted in partnership with the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University. The review did not address policy implementation. In June 2008, each district received a *School Wellness Policy Report*, which includes district, state and District Reference Group (DRG) scores for comprehensiveness and strength. The *School Wellness Policy Report* is based on 96 policy items (including federal requirements and 91 state standards) in seven policy categories:

- Nutrition Education
- School Meals
- Other School Food and Beverages
- Physical Education
- Physical Activity
- Communication and Promotion
- Evaluation

For each policy item, districts received a score of 2 (strong statement), 1 (weak statement) or 0 (not mentioned). Weak statements are hard to enforce because they are vague and/or only recommended. They often use words such as *may, can, could, should, might, encourage, suggest, urge, some, partial, make an effort* and *try*. Strong statements include a concept followed by specific plans or strategies for implementation and wording that indicates action is required, such as *shall, will, must, have to, insist, require, all, total, comply* and *enforce*. Detailed information on the policy scoring is contained in the *Coding Tool for Connecticut School Wellness Policies* at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/SWP/SW_CodingTool.pdf.

Results

Based on 166 policies, Figure 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and range of the total strength scores for each policy category. *Other School Food and Beverages* received the highest average strength score, due to the number of school districts participating in healthy food certification (see next page).

Figure 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Range of Total Strength Scores*

*Based on a scale from 0 to 100

Policy Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Nutrition Education	44	21	0 to 89
School Meals	30	17	8 to 92
Other School Food and Beverages	49	20	24 to 79
Physical Education	31	13	18 to 87
Physical Activity	31	21	0 to 100
Communication and Promotion	31	21	0 to 92
Evaluation	38	24	0 to 83

School Wellness Policy Report • Data Summary 1

Overview, continued

Impact of Healthy Food Certification

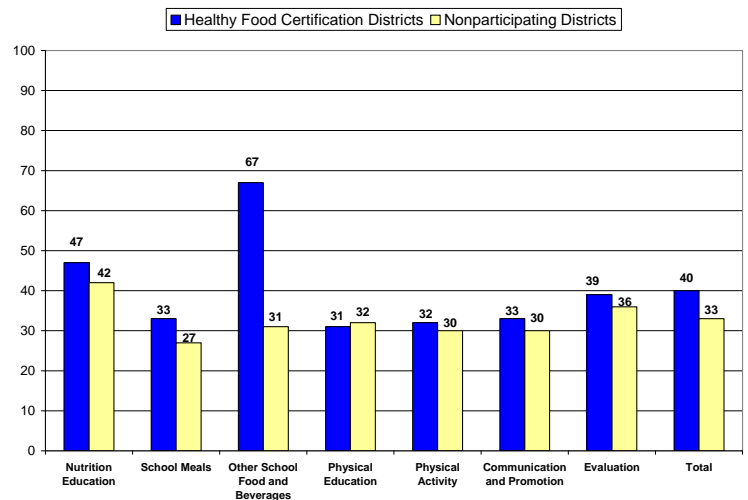
Under Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes, healthy food certification (HFC) requires that all public school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program must certify whether they will follow state nutrition standards. Districts that choose to implement HFC receive a financial incentive and must follow the Connecticut Nutrition Standards for all food sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals, including but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias and any fundraising activities on school premises. (Additional information on HFC is available at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#Standards>.)

Of the 166 policies reviewed, 80 were from HFC districts and 86 were from nonparticipating districts. Figure 2 shows the average policy strength scores for HFC districts versus nonparticipating districts. These scores are based on the 96 policy items (including federal requirements and state standards) in the seven policy categories of the *School Wellness Policy Rating Sheet*

(http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/SWP/SW_RatingSheet.pdf). Districts participating in HFC made stronger policy statements and scored higher than non-HFC districts for both *School Meals* and *Other School Food and Beverages* (e.g., a la carte, vending, school stores and fundraisers).

Figure 2. Average Policy Strength Scores of HFC and Non-HFC Districts*

*Based on a scale from 0 to 100



Key findings of the *School Wellness Policy Report* are summarized below. For more information on each policy category, see the Data Summary handouts at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322168>.

School Meals

- About half of the policies emphasized the importance of creating a pleasant school meal environment, including adequate seating and proper supervision.
- About one-quarter of the policies outlined specific strategies to increase participation in school meal programs.
- Less than a third of the districts have a policy requiring nutritional qualifications of school food service staff or plans for training and professional development of food service staff.
- Only a handful of the policies had clear plans on optimizing the scheduling of meals to improve student nutrition.

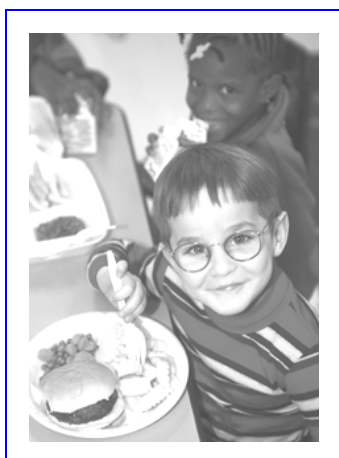
Other School Foods and Beverages

- Policies of the districts participating in HFC were significantly stronger in this category (see Figure 2 above). By default, these districts adopted the Connecticut Nutrition Standards, which provide clear and specific requirements for food sold to students, including a la carte, vending, school stores and fundraisers on school grounds.

- Connecticut districts that did not participate in HFC were very unlikely to set clear and specific nutrition standards on their own. Less than 20 percent set specific nutrition standards for a la carte foods, vending machines, school stores or fundraisers, and less than 8 percent clearly regulated food sales before or after school or at events on school grounds.
- Connecticut districts that did not participate in HFC were also very unlikely to set specific limits on the nutrient content of foods. Less than 16 percent had specific standards to limit sugar, fat, sodium or calories. Less than 10 percent had specific policies to limit ingredients with questionable health effects (e.g., trans fat) or to increase whole foods (e.g., fresh produce, whole grains).
- Food given to students (e.g., class parties or celebrations) is not regulated by HFC. Only 5 percent of HFC districts and none of the non-HFC districts contained specific guidelines for these foods in schools.
- Only 23 percent of HFC districts and 10 percent of nonparticipating districts prohibited the use of food as a reward and/or being withheld as a punishment.

Nutrition Education

- The majority of the policies clearly addressed the importance of quality nutrition education and the importance of nutrition education that teaches behavior-focused skills, is interactive and participatory.
- About half of the policies addressed integrating nutrition education into other academic subjects.
- Less than half of the policies outlined clear plans to extend nutrition education beyond the school environment (e.g., involving families and community groups) or coordinate nutrition education with the larger school community.
- Less than a third of the policies clearly specified that a nutrition curriculum is provided for each grade level.
- Less than a third of the policies clearly addressed the provision of nutrition education training for all teachers.
- Only 1 percent of the policies clearly stated the number of nutrition courses or contact hours that are provided to students.



Physical Education

- Approximately two-thirds of the policies emphasized the importance of providing physical education that promotes a physically active lifestyle.
- Less than a quarter of the policies clearly stated that the physical education curriculum addresses each grade level.
- Less than half of the policies discussed the importance of competency assessment (i.e., knowledge, skills, practice) in physical education.
- Less than a quarter of the policies even suggested minimum physical education time for elementary, middle or high school students and none of the districts required daily physical education.
- Less than a fifth of the policies clearly stated the amount of physical education time devoted to moderate to vigorous activity.

Physical Activity

- More than half of the policies addressed the provision of regular physical activity opportunities outside of recess throughout the school day.
- Less than a fifth of the policies clearly stated that physical activity, outside of physical education, was provided for every grade level.
- For districts with elementary schools, about half of the policies addressed recess frequency or amount. Less than half of the policies addressed recess quality in promoting physical activity.
- Only a third of the policies prohibited the use of physical activity as punishment.

Communication and Promotion

- Almost two-thirds of the policies indicated that the school wellness committee is an ongoing committee.
- Less than a fifth of the policies clearly specified who in the district is responsible for communicating information on health and wellness.
- About half of the policies clearly stated how the district engages parents and the community in meeting district wellness goals.
- Less than half of the policies emphasized the importance of having staff role model healthy behaviors.
- About a third of the policies addressed the importance of providing staff wellness programs.
- Less than a third of the policies required that all nutrition messages in school be consistent with wellness promotion. Eighty percent of districts did not specifically require that food marketing in school promotes only healthy choices.
- The majority of the policies did not contain any language addressing the use of the CDC's Coordinated School Health model or other coordinated/comprehensive method.

Evaluation

- About half of districts included a clear plan for policy implementation. About a third of the policies clearly addressed plans for evaluation and policy revision.
- Almost half of the policies did not provide any information on the audience or frequency of district reports on policy implementation.
- Very few policies identified funding support for wellness activities or policy evaluation.

School Wellness Policy Report • Data Summary 1

Overview, continued

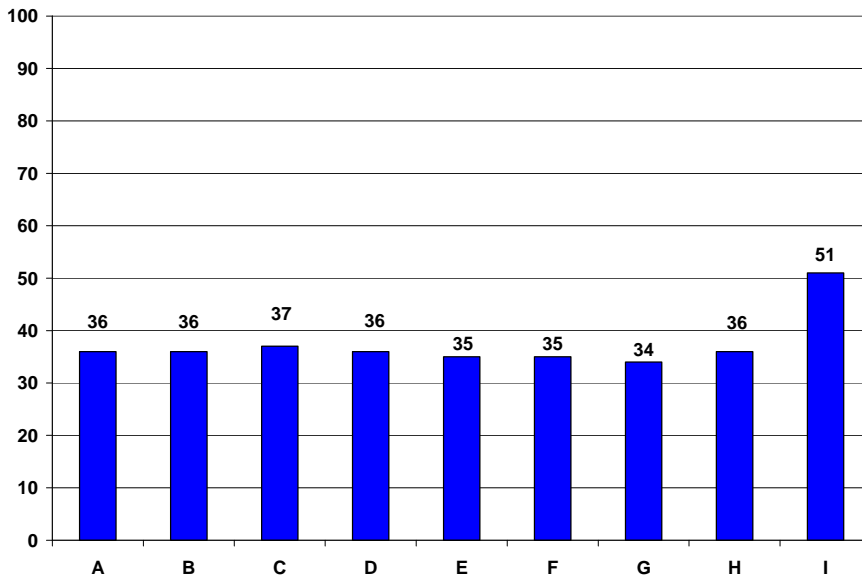
Results by District Reference Group

District Reference Group (DRG) is a classification system in which districts that have public school students with similar socioeconomic status and need are grouped together. DRGs are based on the following seven variables: income, education, occupation, family structure, poverty, home language and district enrollment. They include nine groups, from group A (very affluent, low-need suburban districts) to group I (high-need, low socioeconomic urban districts). Charter schools, Connecticut Technical High Schools and Regional Educational Service Centers are not given DRGs. For additional information, see http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_drg_06_2006.pdf.

Figure 3 shows the average total policy strength scores for each DRG. These scores are based on the 96 policy items (including federal requirements and state standards) in the seven policy categories of the *School Wellness Policy Rating Sheet* (http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/StudentNutritionEd/SWP/SW_RatingSheet.pdf). Group I, the DRG containing the state's seven highest need districts (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham), made stronger policy statements and received a higher total average strength score than all other DRGs.

Figure 3. Average Total Strength Scores by DRG*

*Based on a scale from 0 to 100



Connecticut District Reference Groups

DRG A: Darien, Easton, New Canaan, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport, Wilton, Region 9

DRG B: Avon, Brookfield, Cheshire, Fairfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Greenwich, Guilford, Madison, Monroe, New Fairfield, Newtown, Orange, Simsbury, South Windsor, Trumbull, West Hartford, Woodbridge, Region 5, Region 15

DRG C: Andover, Barkhamsted, Bethany, Bolton, Canton, Columbia, Cornwall, Ellington, Essex, Hebron, Mansfield, Marlborough, New Hartford, Oxford, Pomfret, Salem, Sherman, Somers, Suffield, Tolland, Region 4, Region 7, Region 8, Region 10, Region 12, Region 13, Region 14, Region 17, Region 18, Region 19

DRG D: Berlin, Bethel, Branford, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, East Granby, East Hampton, East Lyme, Ledyard, Milford, Newington, New Milford, North Haven, Old Saybrook, Rocky Hill, Shelton, Southington, Stonington, Wallingford, Waterford, Watertown, Wethersfield, Windsor

DRG E: Ashford, Bozrah, Brooklyn, Canaan, Chaplin, Chester, Colebrook, Coventry, Deep River, Eastford, East Haddam, Franklin, Hampton, Hartland, Kent, Lebanon, Lisbon, Litchfield, Norfolk, North Branford, North Stonington, Portland, Preston, Salisbury, Scotland, Sharon, Thomaston, Union, Westbrook, Willington, Woodstock, Region 1, Region 6, Region 16, Woodstock Academy,

DRG F: Canterbury, East Windsor, Enfield, Griswold, Montville, North Canaan, Plainville, Plymouth, Seymour, Sprague, Stafford, Sterling, Thompson, Voluntown, Windsor Locks, Wolcott, Region 11

DRG G: Bloomfield, Bristol, East Haven, Groton, Hamden, Killingly, Manchester, Middletown, Naugatuck, Plainfield, Putnam, Stratford, Torrington, Vernon, Winchester, Gilbert School, Norwich Free Academy

DRG H: Ansonia, Danbury, Derby, East Hartford, Meriden, Norwalk, Norwich, Stamford, West Haven

DRG I: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury, Windham

Summary

On average, all seven policy categories scored below 50 out of a possible 100 points (see Figure 1), indicating that Connecticut school districts have many opportunities to strengthen their school wellness policy language. Districts participating in healthy food certification (HFC), which provides a monetary incentive for using state nutrition standards, made stronger policy statements and scored higher than non-HFC districts for both *School Meals* and *Other School Food and Beverages* (e.g., a la carte, vending, school stores and fundraisers). The state's seven lowest socioeconomic urban districts (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham), made stronger policy statements and received higher total average strength scores than all other districts.

District school wellness policy reports can be accessed online at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#SW>. For additional information, please contact Susan Fiore, Nutrition Education Coordinator, CSDE, at susan.fiore@ct.gov or (860) 807-2075 or Marlene Schwartz, Deputy Director, Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, at (203) 432-0662 or marlene.schwartz@yale.edu.

The State of Connecticut Department of Education is an equal opportunity/affirmative action entity. For more information, please call the Affirmative Action Administrator, State of Connecticut Department of Education, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut 06106, (860) 713-6530.