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Empowering Strong and Healthy Students: The NYCPS School Wellness Policy

Empowering Strong and Healthy Students: The New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) School Wellness Policy, inspired by feedback from families and students,[i] is the written wellness policy for all NYC public schools. We wrote it from your point of view to help you understand and use it. It explains what you should expect from your school, related to your wellness, based on federal, state, and local laws and policies.

Research shows that good nutrition and physical activity help students do well in school[ii]. We want you to enjoy tasty, healthy food and have fun learning and being active. School can teach you skills to feel good about yourself and your relationship with others. It can also connect you with your community, including the streets, parks, and environments around you. When you feel nourished, energized, valued and safe, it helps you learn, connect, and succeed in and out of school. *Empowering Strong and Healthy Students* describes ways that we can work together to make your wellness a priority so that you can focus on learning.

Our hope is that this information can empower you and your families to help make your school a more active, nourishing, supportive, resilient, and collaborative community. Empowering you to be strong and healthy makes a stronger, healthier City.

Access and oversight

As a New York City public school student, I have access to:

1. A written school wellness policy on a public website. I can share and read this policy with my caregivers in a language we speak at home. Also, my family and I can learn more on the NYCPS website about school wellness, school meals, school health, and sustainability.
2. The instruction, health and food services, and other programs and activities related to my health and wellness in this policy, which:
    1. include and honor who I am. This includes but is not limited to my race, culture, language, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation.
    2. are open to me without any limitations due to my background, physical abilities, or health status.
    3. are provided in a safe and supportive environment where all students feel valued.
3. Information about how I can join my school's wellness council, or related club or committee. I can also learn more about my district and Citywide leadership roles, where my voice and the voices of my peers, family, and school community can help shape and improve school wellness policies and programs.
4. Information on how NYC public schools follow what is in the NYCPS School Wellness Policy. I can also learn how I, along with my peers and other community members, can be involved in updating it every three years.
5. The names of NYCPS administrators who make sure that all public schools follow the policy according to federal, State, and local requirements. (See below.) These directors work with superintendents, principals, school food managers, and other staff to oversee the policy Citywide.

Table 1. Name(s), title(s), and contact information of Central staff providing Citywide Wellness Policy oversight

NYC Public Schools

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Offices of	Name	Title	Email Address
Academic Policy and Systems	Katie Hansen	Executive Director	Khansen5@schools.nyc.gov
Energy and Sustainability	Meredith McDermott	Chief Sustainability and Decarbonization Officer	Mmcdermott10@schools.nyc.gov
Food and Nutrition Services	Christopher Tricarico	Senior Executive Director	Ctricar@schools.nyc.gov
School Health	Gail Adman	Assistant Commissioner	Gadman@schools.nyc.gov
School Wellness Programs	Despina Zaharakis	Senior Executive Director	Dzahara@schools.nyc.gov
School Wellness Programs	Alice Goodman	Senior Director of Policy & Partnerships	Agoodman@schools.nyc.gov

Physical education (PE) and physical activity

As a New York City public school student, I am provided with:

1. Physical education (PE) that is matched to my age and abilities. PE teachers are qualified and have access to regular professional learning. (A certified PE teacher is the most qualified to teach physical education.) Also, teachers help me to move confidently in different activities (called physical literacy). They develop my teamwork and social skills for lifetime healthy habits.
2. Physical education every year, K-12, using a comprehensive physical education curriculum that is based on national and State standards. This will help me develop a physically active lifestyle.
    1. When I am in 3-K or pre-K, I move and play so I can get ready for kindergarten PE.
    2. When I am in elementary school, I have PE for at least 120 minutes per week, which includes regular PE classes and can include Move-to-Improve activities.
        1. In grades K-3, I have PE daily.
        2. In grades 4-5, I have PE at least three times a week. If I am in grade 6 in a school for grades K-6, K-8, or K-12, I have PE 3 times a week.
    3. When I am in middle school, I have at least 90 minutes of PE per week in regular PE classes. If I am in grade 6 at a school for grades 6-8 or 6-12, I have PE 90 minutes per week.
    4. When I am in high school, I have 180 minutes of PE per week for seven semesters or 90 minutes per week for eight semesters. I need these classes to graduate.
    5. In every grade, my caregiver and I can review my NYC FITNESSGRAM assessment results on my NYC Schools Account or with my PE teacher to help me set fitness goals.
3. Opportunities to participate in moderate-to-vigorous physical activities before, during, and after school so I can reach at least 60 minutes of activity on school days. Activities include:
    1. Recess, which is separate from mealtime and PE. If I am in elementary school, it should be at least 20 minutes and outdoors whenever possible.
    2. Physical activity breaks.
    3. Active transportation, such as walking and biking to school.
    4. School-, district-, and City-sponsored physical activity programs, events, and opportunities. Learn more about CHAMPS and PSAL programs.

4. Opportunities for physical activities that are promoted school wide as something fun, important, and beneficial to my well-being. Physical activity should not be used as punishment. Also, activities like recess and outdoor playtime during the school day should not be withheld as punishment for unrelated conduct.
5. Access to appropriate space for safe physical activity, outdoor learning, and play, whenever possible. Learn more about extreme weather conditions and air quality concerns that may limit time outdoors.

Health education, which includes nutrition education, and health services

As a New York City public school student, I am provided with:

1. Skills-based health education that is matched to my age and abilities. Health education teachers are qualified and have access to regular professional learning to help me learn lifelong healthy behaviors. This includes mental health and how physical and mental health are related.
2. Health education that helps me build my understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that promote health, well-being, and human dignity, using a curriculum that is regularly reviewed to make sure it:
    1. is based on national and State standards;
    2. follows characteristics of an effective curriculum according to public health experts;
    3. is medically accurate, appropriate for my age, and inclusive of my culture.
    4. includes topics required by New York State and that are important to my health, like mental health, substance misuse prevention, and harm prevention.
3. Health education at each grade level. In middle and high school grades, health education includes sexual health lessons, including birth control, and HIV prevention lessons. My caregiver can choose to opt me out of certain lessons related to methods of prevention.
    1. When I am in elementary school,
        1. I have Health Education each year, preferably at least one class period (45 minutes) per week, including mental health education.
        2. In grades K-6, I have five HIV prevention lessons each year.
    2. When I am in middle school,
        1. I have one 54-hour course, preferably in grade 6, that must include mental health and sexual health that is LGBTQ+ inclusive.
        2. In grade 6, I have five HIV prevention lessons each year.
        3. In grades 7 and 8, I have six HIV prevention lessons each year.
    3. When I am in high school,
        1. I have one 54-hour course that is a graduation requirement, preferably in grade 9.
        2. My health education course must include mental health, and sexual health that is LGBTQ+ inclusive and includes condom demonstrations.
        3. In grades 9-12, I get six HIV prevention lessons each year.
4. Opportunities to practice the health education skills I learn--like social and emotional skills; goal setting; finding and using health services; navigating relationships; analyzing information; and, communication skills—through related programs, services, and activities outside of class.
5. Access to various health services and information from trained professionals, including access to on-site nurses, physicians, and health teachers, mental health programs, and vision and dental screening. Also,
    1. If I am in grades 4-12, I have a right to free menstrual products and information.
    2. If I am in grades 6-12, as part of HIV education, I have a right to age-appropriate health information and referrals in school Health Resource Rooms. In high schools, I have access to condoms (unless my caregiver chooses to opt me out).

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Food and beverages served through the school meals programs

As a New York City public school student, I have a right to:

1. Enjoy free, delicious, nutrient-rich breakfast, lunch, after-school snacks, and summer meals that meet my health and nutritional needs, and that meet local, State, federal nutrition standards and requirements. Meal services include:
    1. A variety of fresh fruit and a variety of vegetables daily.
    2. Restricting fat content of meals (total fat limited to 35 percent of total calories over the course of the week, and saturated fat limited to less than 10 percent of the total calories over the course of the week).
    3. Limiting amounts of sodium.
    4. Reducing the added sugars in products and menus (less than 10 percent total calories over the course of the week).
    5. Offering three varieties of milk (low-fat (1%), fat-free, fat-free chocolate milk, with an exception that some special populations may receive whole milk).
    6. Providing free drinking water, including from refrigerated water jets, where meals are served.
    7. Monitoring to limit or prohibit ingredients that are potentially harmful to me.
2. Various service models, based on my school's unique environment, which encourage me to stay nourished, like free grab-and-go breakfast, free Breakfast in the Classroom, cafeteria enhanced experiences, and other service models.
3. Receive school meals from professional food and nutrition services staff who receive annual training in accordance with USDA Professional Standards and are valued members of my school community.
4. Learn more about menus and service (through websites, school announcements, apps), such as culturally appropriate options, seasonal and locally produced foods, plant-based entrees, Farm to School gardening, and ways for me to participate in menu development (e.g., taste tests, surveys) and food waste reduction (shared tables and donations, food waste audits).

Snacks and beverages available in and around the school

As a New York City public school student, I have a right to:

1. Healthy choices for food and drinks that are sold and served outside of school mealtimes (called "competitive foods"), and for sale in the school building.
    1. Snacks and beverages meet strict nutritional standards (e.g., Smart Snack standards) and do not contain certain harmful ingredients (e.g., no artificial colors or caffeine in beverages).
    2. Schools make every effort to limit food and beverage marketing, such as on vending machines, school equipment, education materials, or through school media.
    3. Review more information about what is and is not allowed in Chancellor's Regulation A-812.
2. Access to free drinking water throughout the day.

Food promotion and learning experiences in and around the school

As a New York City public school student, I have access to:

1. Healthy school-wide policies and practices consistent with health and nutrition education messages. Policies and practices that promote healthy food choices and environments, which

can include not using food as an incentive or reward, and having non-food celebrations and fundraisers whenever possible. For more on fundraisers, see Chancellor's Regulation A-812.
2. Food education that is interactive and happens in many subjects beyond health education. Food education teaches about the larger food system, from how food is grown (farming and agriculture) through what happens after it is consumed, and how these processes interact with the environment, economy, community, public health, and more.
3. My school's wellness council, or related committee or club, so that I can participate in nutrition promotion and food education programs, events, experiences, and school-based policies that can improve school wellness.

Connections between wellness and sustainability

As a New York City public school student, I am provided with opportunities to:

1. Learn and live in a sustainable environment that promotes the wellness of my school and community, as well as my own, and that encourages me to:
    1. participate in waste-reducing practices like recycling, composting, food-sharing tables and donations, and food waste audits;
    2. engage in green initiatives like gardening, energy conservation, outdoor learning, and other climate action projects. These activities will build my understanding of sustainable, resilient environments that support my health and well-being, and allow me to thrive.

A more detailed school guide for *Empowering Strong and Healthy Students: The NYCPS School Wellness Policy* is available on the InfoHub.

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[i] 2022-23 and 2023-24 Citywide Wellness Advisory Councils and Student Wellness Advocates committees.

[ii] Notes

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