

Frequently Asked Questions about the *Wellness Policy Guidelines*

Why do we need district wellness policies?

Local education agencies are required by the federal Child Nutrition Program legislation and by the S.C. Students Health and Fitness Act to have local wellness policies. These policies must address nutrition standards for foods sold and served during the school day, nutrition education, and physical education and physical activity. These requirements were developed in response to growing concerns over childhood obesity. The obesity rates among children ages six through eleven increased from 7 percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 2008.

Why do we need wellness policy guidelines?

South Carolina's *Wellness Policy Guidelines (Guidelines)* were developed by the Office of Health and Nutrition to help districts monitor compliance with various federal and state laws, regulations, and standards related to nutrition services, nutrition education, and physical activity. These include:

- Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-296)
- S.C. Students Health and Fitness Act of 2005 (S.C. Code Ann. §59-10-10 *et seq.*)
- Nutrition Standards for Elementary Schools (K 5) School Food Service Meals and Competitive Foods (S.C. R. 43-168)
- S.C. Academic Standards for Health and Safety Education
- S.C. Academic Standards for Physical Education

In addition to laws and regulations, recommendations have been developed by a number of organizations concerning what schools can and should do to prevent obesity and promote health among their students. The *Guidelines* organize these recommendations into basic, advanced, and exemplary categories to help districts identify and implement best practices in promoting healthy habits.

How do we use the Wellness Policy Guidelines?

Along with the model local wellness policy, the *Guidelines* can serve as the foundation for reviewing and updating local wellness policies based on credible information. The *Wellness Policy Assessment Tool* can be used to record the current status of local wellness policies and plan for improvements. The steps to review and update local wellness policies include:

- Convene the district Coordinated School Health Advisory Council and other interested parties.
- Review local policies and implementation using the model policy and the *Wellness Policy Guidelines*. This will allow districts to identify guidelines that have been met, those that are in the process of being implemented, and guidelines to work toward in the future.
- Complete the online *Wellness Policy Assessment Tool* to record the results of the assessment, calculate achievement levels, and generate reports.
- Create a written implementation plan that describes what, when, how, and who will turn the wellness policy goals into action.
- Work the plan and track progress.

What is the Wellness Policy Assessment Tool?

The *Wellness Policy Assessment Tool* was modified from a tool developed in Kansas and is based on South Carolina's *Wellness Policy Guidelines*. It will help districts assess the current status of their wellness policy implementation and make plans for improvement. It will also help districts meet requirements of the Students Health and Fitness Act and of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to review policies and policy implementation.

Who needs to be involved in gathering data for entry into the tool?

Under the Students Health and Fitness Act, the Coordinated School Health Advisory Council (CSHAC) is responsible for "assessing, planning, implementing, and monitoring district and school health policies and programs" (S.C. Code Ann. §59-10-330). The CSHAC must be composed of members of the community, school representatives, students, parents, district food service employees, and school board members. It is also recommended that the team reviewing the policies include district staff responsible for physical education, health education, health services, and others who may have access of relevant information.

Who is responsible for entering information into the tool?

While a team approach should be used to conduct the review, assessment, and planning, the district food services director is responsible for making sure that all the data is entered into the *Wellness Policy Assessment Tool*.

How do we learn to use the tool?

Training on the *Wellness Policy Assessment Tool* will be conducted on the following dates. Please contact the Office of Health and Nutrition for more information at 803-734-8186.

June 11 – two sessions at the SNA Conference in Myrtle Beach

June 26 – at the SCDE in Columbia

July 17 – in Greenville

In addition, the *User's Guide* for the tool can be found at www.ed.sc.gov/agency/os/Health-and-Nutrition.

What do we gain by using this tool? How can we use the information from the tool?

The CSHAC and other district staff can use the information from the tool to assess where the district currently stands with respect to wellness-related policies and practices at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. For example, achieving a rating of at least basic on any item indicates that the district meets the corresponding law or regulation. Reports produced by the tool can be posted on the district's Website to inform stakeholders of the district's progress and plans.

Is this required?

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-296) requires districts to monitor their wellness policies beginning in 2013. We are implementing this tool now so that districts can begin the assessment and start improving their plans in advance of these requirements. Districts are **STRONGLY** encouraged to participate in this effort for the 2012-13 school year.