

Schools often fail to follow their own written wellness policies

November 19 2014, by Milly Dawson



To receive federal funding for student breakfasts and lunches, public schools must adopt school-wide wellness policies. A new study in the journal *Health Promotion Practice* finds a wide divide between written policies and schools' actual practices.

"Our findings show a disconnect between what's written in [school](#) wellness policies and what school personnel report is happening on a day-to-day basis," said lead author Jennifer Lucarelli, PhD, assistant professor of health sciences at Oakland University in Michigan. Wellness policies typically address nutritional issues, including the foods served at school breakfasts and lunches, at functions and in vending machines, and include physical education and activity goals.

The researchers found that [public schools](#) are generally not sharing or effectively communicating their goals for improvement, which should be guided by their wellness policy, with key stakeholders such as administrators, teachers and parents. This gap impedes the implementation and coordination of wellness efforts. "What's being done isn't being documented and shared across the school community through the wellness policy," Lucarelli noted.

Child nutrition expert Jill Castle, MS, RDN, author of the book *Fearless Feeding*, observed her local school district's first attempts to write a wellness policy in 2004. She recalled that the policy drafters considered the many issues they had to address and, not knowing what other mandates would be coming, opted for a vague policy full of loopholes. "Many other districts responded similarly," Castle observed. Since then, she has participated in the writing of two specific, effective school wellness policies.

Lucarelli examined data obtained in 2007 and 2008 for the School Nutrition Advances Kids (SNAK) study from 48 low-income Michigan middle schools SNAK participants. Within that sample, 41 principals or assistant principals and 46 food service directors completed a survey assessing their schools' nutrition policies and actual wellness practices. Questions covered topics such as discarding damaged produce, displaying food attractively and surveying students about their food preferences and opinions of the service. The researchers used strict rules to grade each school's wellness policy for comprehensiveness and strength.

The researchers found that 40 percent of the federally required policies were included in the school wellness policies and only 19 percent of the policies included "specific and required strategies." Lucarelli suggested that schools and districts use more specific language to guide implementation of their wellness policy.

Nearly all schools in the study used templates – prepared by states, nonprofit organizations or businesses – to create their wellness policies, the researchers found. Since many schools adopted their state's template, the authors wrote that "encouraging states to develop... high-quality templates may be an effective tactic" to enhance [wellness](#) policy quality.

More information: "Little Association Between Wellness Policies and School-Reported Nutrition Practices." Jennifer F. Lucarelli, Katherine Alaimo, Elaine S. Belansky, Ellen Mang, Richard Miles, Deanne K. Kelleher, Deborah Bailey, Nicholas B. Drzal, and Hui Liu. *Health Promot Pract* [DOI: 10.1177/1524839914550245](https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839914550245)

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

Citation: Schools often fail to follow their own written wellness policies (2014, November 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-11-schools-written-wellness-policies.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.