

Our Recommendations for a Stronger Chicago Public Schools Wellness Policy

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**HEALTHY SCHOOLS
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Healthy Schools Campaign's Wellness Policy Recommendations to Chicago Public Schools

A healthy school environment is an important foundation for learning and academic success. One of the most effective tools in shaping healthy school environments is a strong wellness policy, the name given to policies addressing school food, physical activity and physical education in schools.

The wellness policy, a federal requirement established in 2004, guides the district's efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity, support student learning and help address our nation's obesity epidemic. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has adopted three policies that promote healthy eating and physical activity. They include: the Local School Wellness Policy, the Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy and the Physical Education (PE) Policy (hereinafter referred to collectively as wellness policy).

CPS has made great progress in promoting health and helping schools implement the wellness policy, and, in fact, CPS has one of the strongest wellness policies in the nation and many schools are making great progress in meeting its high standards. To build on this important work and ensure that all schools have the tools, resources and support to create healthy environments and allow all students to thrive, Healthy Schools Campaign is presenting the following recommendations to CPS and the Chicago Board of Education. These recommendations, when adopted and implemented will support and deepen CPS' ability to positively impact student health and wellness and allow all schools to fulfill the vision and requirements of the district's wellness policy.

1. Support all CPS schools in meeting wellness policy requirements

The CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness (OSHW) is charged with overseeing individual schools' implementation and compliance with the wellness policy. This includes giving schools resources and

support to meet policy requirements. Overall, the OSHW has been successful in establishing the district infrastructure to support the implementation of the wellness policy at the school level, but structural barriers and district practices make it difficult for all CPS schools to receive and access support for wellness policy implementation. The OSHW and the district overall should have the direction, resources and support to help all schools—whether they be neighborhood, low-performing, charter or AUSL-managed—to meet the district's wellness policy requirements and create a culture of health that allows students to thrive.

2. Include wellness goals within the Continuous Improvement Work Plan

The Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) is the two-year school improvement plan that is required of all CPS schools and must be approved by a school's Local School Council (LSC). These plans provide an opportunity for schools to think and plan strategically and address the needs of the whole child, incorporating health and wellness goals into education planning. Since the CIWP drives the allocation of some resources, it is important for health and wellness to be incorporated into all school plans. This is especially important for low-performing schools that are directed by CPS to focus solely on the goals and plans articulated in the CIWP. Integrating health and wellness policy goals into this key accountability measure will send a clear message about the importance of prioritizing health and wellness and meeting the requirements of the wellness policy.

3. Clearly articulate and make public CPS' school meal standards and related commitments

By federal requirement, the wellness policy must articulate nutrition guidelines for all foods available during the school day, with the goal of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity. CPS has a strong and dynamic school meal program, but many of its elements have been documented informally or only in its contracts with vendors. To ensure the significant progress made in the school food

environment is sustainable, CPS must document its school meal standards and related commitments and make them available to the public. This work is timely as CPS will be accepting bids for a new school meal contract in 2017, and the new school food policy will inform the request for proposals that will be used to select the district's school food vendor.

4. Improve data collection, validity and access

Data, metrics and accountability play an important role in encouraging and ensuring implementation of the wellness policy. CPS must develop and implement a strong and transparent data collection and evaluation plan that allows principals, teachers, parents, other school stakeholders, district officials and the public to understand how schools are implementing the wellness policy and making progress over time. CPS should not rely solely on a self-reported and voluntary survey to monitor and report on a school's ability to meet wellness policy requirements. CPS should develop a stronger data collection system that follows best practices and leverage existing internal communication channels with peer departments to increase coordination, awareness and data collection around the wellness policy. In addition, CPS should engage parents and partner organizations in efforts to document wellness policy implementation and barriers.

5. Recognize schools' progress to incentivize continued success

The CPS wellness policy calls for the district to recognize school success in meeting the provisions of the wellness policy through an annual healthy school indicator on school's annual report cards. This accountability is an important motivator for school-level success. Until recently, the indicator reflected success in meeting the wellness policy provisions. For the 2016-2017 school year, CPS updated and expanded this indicator to include a broad range of school health issues including chronic disease management and provision of medical services, organized into four categories and multiple sub-categories. Some of these subcategories go beyond the requirements of the wellness policy. While the scope of this indicator reflects an important acknowledgement of the breadth of school health issues that are relevant to student learning, it misses an opportunity to provide

an incentive for schools to continue making progress on wellness policy compliance by not including public recognition of progress toward 100 percent compliance. CPS must refine this indicator to reflect the hard-earned success of schools making progress in implementing the wellness policy, thereby providing an incentive for continued progress.

6. Include wellness policy goals in network chief and principal performance evaluations

School principals and chiefs of schools (also known as network chiefs) lead CPS schools, and their leadership around school wellness can achieve dramatic results. Incorporating wellness policy implementation goals into the performance evaluations of network chiefs and school principals will effectively increase awareness of the wellness policy and create a strong accountability system that will help ensure that all schools abide by the district's wellness policy.

7. Support Local School Councils' oversight of wellness policy implementation through training and resources

A key accountability provision of the wellness policy is the requirement that the principal provide quarterly reports to the LSC and that the LSC monitor progress in policy implementation. To equip LSC members with the tools and knowledge to monitor school-level implementation of the wellness policy, the mandatory training for LSC members should be updated to include wellness policy responsibilities and resources and information on how to include wellness goals in the CIWP. In addition, we recommend that LSCs in low-performing schools be given back responsibility for approving CIWPs.

8. Establish a district wellness advisory group to support staff wellness

Teachers and principals can and should play a very important role in establishing a healthy school environment and promoting wellness policy priorities and requirements. Best practices recommend establishing a staff wellness advisory group that supports the development and implementation of strategies to support staff wellness. The district must work with the Chicago Teachers Union and principal organizations to establish a district-wide committee to address staff wellness, galvanize resources and create a

comprehensive plan for making staff wellness a priority in individual schools and in the school wellness policy moving forward. Educators play a key role in promoting student wellness as they spend significant time with students and serve as critical role models. How principals and teachers approach their own health and wellness makes a big impression on students.

9. Improve and create spaces that support physical education and activity

CPS has strong physical education and recess policies that make the district a leader in prioritizing the importance of physical activity throughout the school day. The lack of access to appropriate indoor and outdoor space has been identified by schools as a common barrier for implementing PE and recess. While CPS has installed new playgrounds, and, through programs like Space to Grow, is leveraging other resources to transform schoolyards, there is still a large unmet need. The district needs to create a comprehensive plan for improving schools' physical spaces and make it possible for all schools to fully implement PE and recess. Additionally, CPS should implement an open use policy that makes school facilities available to the community during non-school hours for play and physical activity.

10. Monitor the use of high school physical education waivers and the implementation of nutrition education

The CPS physical education policy is strong, but the district needs to address concerns about the overuse of waivers so that that all students experience the health and academic benefits of PE and the written policy is not weakened during implementation. The district should monitor and publicly report the number and type of PE student waivers granted by high schools and implement the requirement to report on district-wide and individual schools' compliance with the PE policy to the Board of Education twice per year.

The wellness policy gives the OSHW responsibility for monitoring the implementation of nutrition education. To ensure schools are implementing high-quality nutrition education, the district should report the number of schools utilizing an evidence-based nutrition education curriculum as stipulated in the wellness policy. CPS must also provide more district guidance for

schools on how to choose and integrate curricula in a variety of school subjects.

11. Recommend food and fitness partners and fundraising vendors to schools

Technical assistance and supportive programming that partner organizations (groups that partner with schools to promote healthy eating and physical activity at no or low cost) provide to schools have been key to schools' success in meeting wellness policy requirements. CPS should continue to ensure that the resources provided by food and fitness partners align with evidence-based and best practices, and CPS should disseminate a list of recommended partners to all schools. CPS principals need centralized information and guidance on quality partner organizations that provide wellness resources at no or low cost to CPS schools. Additionally, the district should seek and recommend vendors, including fundraising and vending machine suppliers that provide schools with health-promoting school fundraising options that align with the wellness policy criteria around fundraising practices.

12. Update the wellness policy and related policies to align with state and federal law and follow best practices.

While CPS has a strong and comprehensive wellness policy, the policy must be updated to comply with state law and a recent USDA rule. CPS school fundraising standards should align with Illinois state policy regarding the definitions of the school campus and school day, and vending items sold in schools should meet the USDA's Smart Snacks in School beverage size standards. To bring CPS' written policy in compliance with the recent USDA rule, the policy must require a comprehensive district-wide review of the policy every three years, detail and document involvement with and communication to the public and ensure transparency by implementing provisions for reporting to the public about the policy's content and implementation.

The wellness policy should also follow best practices and prohibit junk food marketing and advertising in schools as well as limit the number of school celebrations that permit food or beverages of minimal nutritional value allowed in schools.

Encourage CPS and the Board of Education to Implement these Recommendations

You can show your support for these recommendations and the health and wellness of Chicago students by signing on to these recommendations. When adopted and implemented, the recommendations will support and deepen the district's ability to positively impact student health and wellness and allow all schools to fulfill the vision and requirements of the district's wellness policy.

Read more about why the CPS wellness policy is so important and sign on to support our recommendations at healthyschoolscampaign.org/chicago-focus/policy.

ABOUT HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC), an independent not-for-profit organization, is a leading authority on healthy school environments and a voice for people who care about our environment, our children, and education. HSC advocates for policies and practices that allow all students, teachers and staff to learn and work in a healthy school environment. Since beginning as a local project in Chicago in 2002, HSC has grown into a vibrant national organization with

diverse strategic partnerships and effective outreach to schools, communities, and policy makers. As HSC works for policy and systems change, it continues to pioneer new strategies through a special focus on Chicago schools and the district's low-income and minority students. HSC co-convenes the National Collaborative for Education and Health, a multi-sector collaboration to create systems that support schools in creating the conditions of student health and wellness.

For more:

Visit healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Contact Rosa Ramirez Richter at rosa@healthyschoolscampaign.org to discuss these recommendations.

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