
National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria, VA

Sample Policies to Encourage Healthy Eating

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1. PURPOSE AND GOALS

INTENT. All students shall possess the knowledge and skills necessary to make nutritious and enjoyable food choices for a lifetime. In addition, staff are encouraged to model healthy eating as a valuable part of daily life. School leaders shall prepare, adopt, and implement a comprehensive plan to encourage healthy eating that includes:

- a food service program that employs well-prepared staff who efficiently serve appealing choices of nutritious foods;
- pleasant eating areas for students and staff with adequate time for unhurried eating;
- a sequential program of nutrition instruction that is integrated within the comprehensive school health education curriculum and coordinated with the food service program; that is taught by well-prepared and well-supported staff; and that is aimed at influencing students' knowledge, attitudes, and eating habits;
- an overall school environment that encourages students to make healthy food choices;
- opportunities and encouragement for staff to model healthy eating habits;
- services to ensure that students and staff with nutrition-related health problems are referred to appropriate services for counseling or medical treatment; and
- strategies to involve family members in program development and implementation.

The school nutrition program shall make effective use of school and community resources and equitably serve the needs and interests of all students and staff, taking into consideration differences in cultural norms.

RATIONALE. The link between nutrition and learning is well documented. Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Healthy eating is demonstrably linked to reduced risk for mortality and development of many chronic diseases as adults. Schools have a responsibility to help students and staff establish and maintain lifelong, healthy eating patterns. Well-planned and well-implemented school nutrition programs have been shown to positively influence students' eating habits.

DEFINITIONS. For the purposes of this policy:

"Competitive foods" refers to any foods or drinks sold or served on school grounds other than meals served by the school food service program.

"Dietary Guidelines for Americans" refers to the current set of recommendations of the federal government that are designed to help people choose diets that will meet nutrient requirements, promote health, support active lives, and reduce chronic disease risks.

"Nutrition education" refers to a planned sequential instructional program that provides knowledge and teaches skills to help students adopt and maintain lifelong healthy eating patterns.

2. NUTRITION EDUCATION

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN. Nutrition education topics shall be integrated within the sequential, comprehensive health education program taught at every grade level, pre-kindergarten through twelfth. The nutrition education program shall focus on students' eating behaviors, be based on theories and methods proven effective by published research, and be consistent with the state's/district's health education standards/guidelines/framework. Nutrition education shall be designed to help students learn:

- nutritional knowledge, including but not limited to the benefits of healthy eating, essential nutrients, nutritional deficiencies, principles of healthy weight management, the use and misuse of dietary supplements, and safe food preparation, handling, and storage;
- nutrition-related skills, including but not limited to planning a healthy meal, understanding and using food labels, and critically evaluating nutrition information, misinformation, and commercial food advertising; and
- how to assess one's personal eating habits, set goals for improvement, and achieve those goals.

Nutrition education instructional activities shall stress the appealing aspects of healthy eating and be participatory, developmentally appropriate, and enjoyable. The program shall engage families as partners in their children's education.

The school health council shall assess all nutrition education curricula and materials for accuracy, completeness, balance, and consistency with the state's/district's educational goals and standards. Materials developed by food marketing boards or food corporations shall be examined for inappropriate commercial messages.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS. Staff responsible for nutrition education shall be adequately prepared and regularly participate in professional development activities to effectively deliver the nutrition education program as planned. Preparation and professional development activities shall provide basic knowledge of nutrition, combined with skill practice in program-specific activities and instructional techniques and strategies designed to promote healthy eating habits.

EDUCATIONAL REINFORCEMENT. School personnel shall not offer food as a performance incentive or reward and shall not withhold food from students as punishment.

Nutrition instruction shall be closely coordinated with the food service program and other components of the school health program. Nutrition concepts shall be integrated into the instruction of other subject areas.

School instructional staff shall collaborate with agencies and groups conducting nutrition education in the community to send consistent messages to students and their families. Guest speakers invited to address students shall receive appropriate orientation to the relevant policies of school/district.

School staff are encouraged to cooperate with other agencies and community groups to provide opportunities for student volunteer work related to nutrition, such as assisting with food recovery efforts and preparing nutritious meals for house-bound people. School officials should also disseminate information to parents, students, and staff about community programs that offer nutrition assistance to families.

STAFF AS ROLE MODELS. School staff are encouraged to model healthy eating behaviors. Schools should offer wellness programs that include personalized instruction about healthy eating and physical activity.

3. THE FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

INTENT. The state legislature/state board/local school board acknowledges that the feeding of children is primarily a family responsibility. To supplement their efforts, every school shall operate a food service program to ensure that all students have affordable access to the varied and nutritious foods they need to stay healthy and learn well.

The food service program shall aim to be financially self-supporting. However, the program is an essential educational and support activity and budget neutrality or profit generation must not take precedence over the nutritional needs of students.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS. During each school day the school food service program shall offer breakfast and lunch as well as snacks for students in organized after-school education or enrichment programs. Each school shall encourage all students to participate in these meal opportunities. In particular, the school shall make efforts to ensure that families are aware of need-based programs for free or reduced-price meals and that eligible families are encouraged to apply. The program shall maintain the confidentiality of students and families applying for or receiving free or reduced-priced meals.

The school food service program shall operate in accordance with the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1996 as amended and applicable laws and regulations of state. Schools shall offer varied and nutritious food choices that are consistent with the federal government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Menus should be planned with input from students, family members, and other school personnel and should take into account students' cultural norms and preferences. Food-pricing strategies shall be designed to encourage students to purchase nutritious items. Procedures shall be in place for providing to families, on request, information about the ingredients and nutritional value of the foods served.

Upon a physician's written request, modified meals shall be prepared for students with food allergies or other special food needs. Information on the ingredients used in preparation of school meals shall be provided to parents upon request. Parents shall be notified about this option.

All food service equipment and facilities must meet applicable local and state standards concerning health; safe food preparation, handling, and storage; drinking water; sanitation; and workplace safety.

Staff shall cooperate with efforts in the community to recover wholesome excess food for distribution to people in need.

EATING AS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE. Students and staff shall have adequate space to eat meals in pleasant surroundings and shall have adequate time to eat, relax, and socialize: at least 10 minutes after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch. Safe drinking water and convenient access to facilities for hand washing and oral hygiene shall be available.

STAFFING. Each district/school shall employ a food service director, who is properly qualified and certified according to current professional standards, to administer the school food service program and satisfy reporting requirements.

All food service personnel shall have adequate preservice training and regularly participate in professional development activities that address strategies for promoting healthy eating behavior, food safety, and other topics directly relevant to the employee's job duties.

Dining room supervisory staff shall receive appropriate training in how to maintain safe, orderly, and pleasant eating environments.

CONTRACTED SERVICES. Specified elements of the school food service program may be contracted out to food service management companies or other vendors following established open bidding procedures. The contractor(s) shall fully comply with the nutritional standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for school food programs and be subject to district auditing processes. District/school official shall be responsible for administering the contract. The district retains the responsibility for meeting all USDA requirements.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMS. The food service program shall be closely coordinated with nutrition instruction to allow students to apply critical thinking skills taught in the classroom. Food service staff shall also work closely with those responsible for other components of the school health program to achieve common goals.

A child's need for nutrients does not end when school does. Schools are encouraged to offer meals during breaks in the school calendar and to coordinate with other agencies and community groups to operate, or assist with operating, a summer food service program for children and adolescents who are eligible for federal program support.

4. OTHER FOOD CHOICES AT SCHOOL

NUTRITIOUS FOOD CHOICES. Nutritious and appealing foods, such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy foods, and low-fat grain products, shall be available wherever and whenever food is sold or otherwise offered at school. Schools shall take efforts to encourage students to make nutritious food choices.

Food and beverages sold or served on school grounds or at school-sponsored events shall meet nutritional standards and other guidelines set by the state/district/school health council/nutrition committee. This includes:

- à la carte offerings in the food service program;
- food and beverage choices in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and concession stands;
- food and beverages sold as part of school-sponsored fundraising activities; and

- refreshments served at parties, celebrations, and meetings.

FOOD SALES. The sale of all foods on school grounds shall be under the management of the school food service program, except foods sold as part of a fundraising activity. In middle and high schools, food and beverages shall not be sold from vending machines or school stores during school hours/until 30 minutes after the end of the last lunch period unless they are part of the school food service program. Profits generated from sales of foods or beverages in vending machines or school stores will accrue to the food service program/student organizations approved by whom.

Only student organizations and legally constituted, nonsectarian, nonpartisan organizations approved by whom are permitted to engage in fundraising on school grounds at any time. These organizations are encouraged to raise funds through the sale of items other than food. Foods sold for fundraising purposes shall not be sold while school food service meals are being served. Each organization raising funds by selling foods is limited to one event per month during school hours.

Elementary school students shall not have access to food or beverages sold in vending machines or school stores.

CLOSED CAMPUS. Students are not permitted to leave school grounds during the school day to purchase food or beverages.

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING. Partnerships between schools and businesses are encouraged, and business sponsorship of educational activities and materials shall be duly acknowledged. However, such partnerships shall be designed to meet identified educational needs, not commercial motives, and shall be evaluated for educational effectiveness by the school/district on an ongoing basis.

5. SERVICES FOR NUTRITION-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS

NUTRITION-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS. School counselors and school health services staff shall consistently promote healthy eating to students and other staff. These professionals shall be prepared to recognize conditions such as obesity, eating disorders, and other nutrition-related health problems among students and staff and be able to refer them to appropriate services.