

ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITY:

Farm to school in your district wellness policy



What is a district wellness policy?

A district wellness policy is a way for schools to specifically set individualized policy around improving the health and wellness of its students. First required of districts receiving federal school lunch funding in 2006, it now serves as an excellent tool for parents, local education agencies and school districts to work together in promoting student wellness, preventing and reducing childhood obesity, and providing assurance that school meal nutrition guidelines meet the minimum federal standards. Beginning in 2012, all school districts that have a federally funded school meal program must update their school wellness policies as authorized by passage of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010.

The Child Nutrition Act sets forth specific requirements to be addressed in school wellness policies:

- A preamble or purpose statement, and
- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity, school-based learning experiences, waste reduction, professional development, public involvement, and evaluation.

Why Farm to School?

Farm to school programs focus on increasing the amount of and preference for fresh fruits and vegetables among school children, emphasizes nutrition education based on whole foods, and helps kids develop an understanding of where food comes from. The inherent goals make farm to school a natural option for your district's wellness policy. In fact, in 2009 the Centers for Disease Control identified farm to school programs as an effective mechanism to improve the quality of school meals, enhance effectiveness of nutrition education, and provide opportunities for experiential learning through food and agriculture ¹.

How does farm to school fit in to your school's wellness policy?

Specific themes and opportunities to bring farm to school activities in to the wellness policy include:

- ➔ Encourage and support the procurement of locally grown food.
- ➔ Emphasize hands-on learning opportunities including school gardens, farm tours, taste tests, and cooking demonstrations.
- ➔ Decrease the amount of processed foods available to students at school.
- ➔ Integrate food and nutrition into other areas of curriculum including math, science, language arts, social sciences and elective subjects.
- ➔ Provide a mechanism to link students with farmers, community groups, health and agriculture professionals.

More information

Georgia Organics
georgiaorganics.org/farmtoschool

Community Food Security Coalition
foodsecurity.org/farm_to_school

National Farm to School Network
farmtoschool.org

Centers for Disease Control
cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/wellness.htm

The National Public Health Law Center
publichealthlawcenter.org/programs/healthy-eating

EcoTrust
ecotrust.org/farmtoschool

DeKalb Board of Health
dekalbhealth.net

DeKalb County School System
dekalb.k12.ga.us

¹ Centers for Disease Control Congressional Testimony, Benefits of Farm-to-School Projects, Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for School Children. Friday, May 15, 2009, before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry United States Senate, by William H. Dietz, MD, PhD, Director, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity.



Recommended Wellness Policy Language for Farm to School

Wellness Policies include several sections where farm to school initiatives may be incorporated in the policy language. **Georgia Organics suggests the following model policy language for inclusion in school wellness policies throughout Georgia:**

**Wellness Policy Goal:
Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.**

The school cafeteria will serve as a “learning laboratory” to allow students to apply nutrition skills taught in the classroom. The promotion of healthy foods, especially locally and organically grown fruits and vegetables, will be encouraged.

Staff may integrate experiential education activities such as gardening, cooking demonstrations, farm and farmers' market tours - into existing curricula at all grade levels.

As part of nutrition education, staff members are encouraged to utilize food from school gardens and local farms in kitchen classrooms and cafeterias based upon availability and acceptability.

Nutrition education messages from the classroom will be modeled in the cafeteria and across campus by offering locally-grown food whenever possible within the reimbursable federal meal program as well as a la carte sales, including vending machines.

School food service, in partnership with other school departments and community organizations, will work to creatively market and promote locally and organically produced food to students, through activities such as:

- Featuring food grown in the school garden in the cafeteria through sampling and inclusion in school meals based upon availability and acceptability.
- Develop cafeteria themes relating to local farmers and products grown in the region.
- Developing creative campus fundraisers based on healthy food items, integrating local and organic produce where appropriate.

The district recognizes that school gardens and farm visits can offer physical activity opportunities, as well as agricultural education, by engaging students in activities such as planting, harvesting, and weeding. Teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of these physical activity opportunities during the school day as well as through field trips and after-school activities.

Wellness Policy Goal:
Establish nutrition guideline for all foods available on campus during the school day.

Meals served within the federally reimbursable meal program will be designed to feature fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods from local sources to the greatest extent possible.

Wellness Policy Goal:
Assure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the USDA.

The School Nutrition Director will review this policy and ensure that the policies are not less restrictive than those set by the Secretary of Agriculture or state law.

Wellness Policy Goal:
Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.

Evaluation of farm to school programs should include the effects of including locally sourced farm products in the school meal programs as well as the effects of any in-class or experiential education programs. The nutrition and financial aspects should be evaluated, as well as the knowledge gained as a result of the overall farm to school program. Some possible indicators/methods include:

- the impact local purchasing on participation in the school meal programs;
- and pre and post studies on what students have learned about healthy eating;
- pre and post studies on change in student preferences of fresh local food.
- the percentage of food purchased from local sources;
- the budgetary impact of increasing local purchases;

Wellness Policy Goal:
Involve parents, students representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.

In addition to the stakeholders mentioned, farm to school programs offer a wide variety of stakeholders to involve. They may be: farmers, the local Future Farmers of America group, 4-H, organizations that represent farmers such as cooperative extension, farmers' market representatives, agricultural industry representatives, representatives from community organizations that work to promote local foods, local public health professionals, chefs, nutritionists or health educators.