

Topic: **How can wellness policies be used to increase the use of local foods in school meals?**



Photo courtesy of Bryan Lamont

Cari Beasley, the Salida School District middle school and high school nurse, has been instrumental in developing and implementing the Salida Wellness Policy, albeit with a break in between. The Salida Wellness Policy was originally passed in 2006, when every school was first required by Colorado law to develop one. To write it, various stakeholders were gathered, including administrators, parents, and dietitians, like Beasley. However, there was not an official Salida wellness committee at the time, so the collaborators basically wrote the policy and then disengaged from the process. A few years later, a wellness committee was created, appointing Beasley and the Salida elementary school nurse, Missy Tanner, as chairpersons. Beasley and Tanner resurrected the wellness policy of 2008 and put it into action with some important revisions. “We saw that the original wellness policy wasn’t being followed, and the staff didn’t even know that we had a wellness policy. It was a big problem,” Beasley recalls. In response, Beasley and Tanner determined the most important and feasible wellness goals for

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the school district, and using the Denver Public School’s wellness policy as a model, rewrote the policy, which was approved in December of 2011 by the Salida School Board.

How are you encouraging accountability?

Beasley stresses that accountability, especially from the administration, is crucial to a well-executed wellness policy. The Wellness Policy Council oversees the policy from afar, while it is the responsibility of the administration to deal with it on a daily basis in schools. The Wellness Policy Council is comprised of parents, staff

members, administrators, Superintendent Darryl Webb and Lisa Malde, the Director of LWC Chaffee County. Malda has also been spearheading the Salida Farm-to-School program.



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How does the policy address local foods?

The Salida Wellness Policy includes three main goals for nutrition, one of which urges schools to meet USDA nutrition standards for all food served on site. As part of the goal to meet nutrition standards, the wellness policy suggests that the Salida School District breakfast and lunch program, "... when possible, provide[s] access to fresh fruits and vegetables and shall work to acquire fresh produce from local sources including the school garden." The local food movement was just emerging when Beasley began working on the wellness policy, but she had the foresight and the desire to establish a school garden. Beasley included the recommendation to bring school garden food into the cafeteria. Beasley believes including school garden food in the policy would emphasize the garden's purpose and increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, the language in the policy is weak, not requiring use of local food, merely suggesting it "when possible."

Were there challenges to writing the policy?

Writing the wellness policy was difficult for Beasley and Tanner because it needed to be applicable from kindergarten through high school. Although banning chocolate milk in elementary school may make sense, parents of older children often believe it is important for adolescents to learn to make good decisions on their own. Beasley notes, "mediating between these different needs and values was a big challenge, but we were able to find a middle ground that benefits all students."

How has the wellness policy improved Salida schools?

Since the wellness policy was revised and implemented, there have been major cutbacks of food-based rewards. The wellness policy encourages teachers and parents to avoid the use of pizza and ice cream parties in favor of toys or activities as rewards. The adaptation of the policy and the progress of the school garden have generated the need for a garden committee, which is being developed. This committee will work on the logistics of bringing the food from the school garden into the school cafeterias.

In the long run, the policy will play a critical role in promoting local foods as people become aware of its importance. "The push for local food in Salida schools is due to the passionate teachers, volunteers, and advocates that are willing to make changes, and the wellness policy gives them a foundation from which to start," Beasley points out.

How can other districts use wellness policies to improve school meals?

In order for wellness policies to be effective, implementers need to have support from deci-

sion makers, including the superintendent and the food service director. Beasley notes, “You can’t write a policy that cannot be followed, so you must ask the important questions and understand what is feasible.” In addition to being feasible, Beasley suggests that the policy should have as strong and precise of wording as possible. ■

Resources

School Food Resource Toolbox

LiveWell Colorado

<https://about.livewellcolorado.org/livewell-toolbox/k-12-schools/school-food>

Learn about LiveWell Colorado’s Freshen-Up School Food Initiative to improve school food and find helpful tools, programs, and research.

Colorado Farm to School

<http://coloradofarmtoschool.org/>

Find numerous resources and models to improve and expand Farm to School activities in your district.

Sample Policies

Colorado Legacy Foundation

<http://colegacy.org/tool-and-resources/sample-policies/>

The Colorado Legacy Foundation provides several sample school wellness policies that incorporate health education, nutrition, physical activity, school health services and workplace wellness in a comprehensive policy.

School Wellness Policy

Denver Public Schools (DPS)

<http://www.dpsk12.org/policies/Policy.aspx?-db=policy.fp3&-format=detail.html&-lay=policyview&-sortfield=File&-max=50&-recid=33132&-findall=>

The school wellness policy for DPS was developed by Food & Nutrition Services, the Denver School Health Advisory Council, the Commission on School Nutrition and Physical Activity, parents, nurses, principals, teachers, students and community members

Wellness Policy Tool

Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/for-schools/wellness-policy-tool/>

This helpful tool allows users to post all provisions of their wellness policy, then note progress, next steps, resources needed, and people responsible for each. The tool also provides links to helpful resources based on areas needing improvement.

School Wellness Policy Tool Kit

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/nutriWellnessGuide.htm>

Compiled by the CDE, this toolkit offers step-by-step instructions for implementation of local school wellness policies.

www.coloradofarmtoschool.org