



School **Wellness** Policy **Snapshot**

In 2004, in response to the alarming rise in childhood obesity, the **U.S. Congress passed legislation that required virtually every school district in the country to have a wellness policy in place by July 2006.** This school wellness policy mandate identifies a **key role for schools in the prevention of childhood obesity:** promoting proper nutrition and adequate physical activity among students.

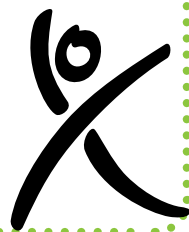
While the federal **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004** describes what the policy must cover, the details of the policy's content and how it is implemented are left up to local school districts. Furthermore, the federal mandate came without funding or accountability requirements. Some states have provided additional requirements or guidelines that districts must follow.

This fact sheet summarizes national and State of Texas school wellness guidelines as well as Houston Independent School District's school wellness policy.

National Guidelines

According to the federal **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004**, any school district that participates in the national school meals programs must have a wellness policy in place.

- A school district's wellness policy must **set goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other programs that promote student wellness.**
- The policy must also **provide nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus**, and reimbursable meals must **meet national school meal program standards.**
- **A wide range of community members**—parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public—**should help to develop the policy.**
- The policy should include a **plan for monitoring** its success.



State of Texas Guidelines

In addition to complying with national wellness guidelines, Texas school districts must comply with state guidelines.

- The State of Texas has a **Public School Nutrition Policy** and mandates that all school districts have a **School Health Advisory Council.**
- Texas requires a **school nutrition director** for each district as well as a school nutrition director for each school. Texas also has numerous **guidelines prohibiting "junk food"** and providing **healthier food alternatives.**
- The State of Texas employs a **state health education coordinator** and a **state physical education coordinator** and also requires each district to have a physical education coordinator. Texas also calls for districts to follow **National Health Education Standards** and **National Standards for Physical Education** and requires new health education and physical education teachers to have undergraduate or graduate training in their fields and to be certified, licensed, or endorsed by the state. While Texas **requires physical education at all levels** (from elementary through high school), the state **does not require or recommend regularly scheduled recess** for elementary students.

Houston Independent School District (HISD) Wellness Policy

HISD adopted its wellness policy on August 14, 2006. Recognizing that good student health fosters student attendance and education and that schools play a vital part in influencing and promoting wellness, HISD's wellness policy emphasizes lifelong wellness practices and consistent wellness messages for students, families, and school staff.

The district Superintendent or designee is required to oversee the implementation and monitoring of this policy. And, HISD will continue to develop guidelines and goals for this wellness policy with input from the School Health Advisory Council and from students, parents, school administration, school food service personnel, the Board, and the public.

At the heart of the HISD wellness policy is a **coordinated wellness program that reaches:**

- **students** (through the classroom, the cafeteria, and before- and after-school activities);
- **staff and teachers** (through the school day, before- and after-school activities, and professional development opportunities);
- **families** (through parent education and outreach).

The HISD wellness policy targets three key areas:

1. Access to healthful foods

In addition to ensuring that reimbursable meals meet federal regulations and Texas Public School Nutrition Policy guidelines, HISD schools also provide healthy foods as follows:

- **Foods distributed throughout the school day** (e.g., food used as a classroom reward and food served at classroom parties and school celebrations) must also **meet nutrition standards**.
- **Foods sold individually**—including foods sold a la carte, in vending machines, for fundraising purposes, and at school-related events (such as sporting events)—**must include healthy options**.
- **Guidelines for food marketing must be clear**, and companies that sell foods on campus must be **sensitive to displaying logos and trademarks**.
- Students must have **at least 30 minutes to eat meals** in clean, safe, comfortable lunchrooms.

2. Nutrition education

HISD's coordinated nutrition education program emphasizes **healthy eating behaviors** and the importance of **proper nutrition**. Nutrition education is shared across the curriculum, in health education classes, in the cafeteria, and with families and the general public.

3. Physical activity

HISD schools encourage physical activity for students, teachers, staff, and parents.

- *During the regular school day*, physical education classes emphasize **moderate to vigorous activity** and stress the **benefits of physical activity and healthy lifestyles**. In addition, **physical activity is integrated in classes across the curriculum**, and teachers are **prohibited from using or withholding physical activity as punishment**.
- *Throughout the entire school environment*, **all students**—including those not involved in competitive sports—have opportunities to participate in **safe and enjoyable fitness**. HISD schools provide **before- and after-school physical activity for students and staff**, and the district encourages **community use of its recreational facilities** outside of the school day.

The full text of the HISD wellness policy can be found on the Texas Association of School Boards Web site:

[http://www.tasb.org/policy/pol/private/101912/pol.cfm?DisplayPage=FFA\(LOCAL\).pdf&QueryText=WELLNESS](http://www.tasb.org/policy/pol/private/101912/pol.cfm?DisplayPage=FFA(LOCAL).pdf&QueryText=WELLNESS).

Additional links:

State of Texas Public School Nutrition Policy: www.squaremeals.org

State of Texas School Health Advisory Councils: www.eatsmartbeactive.org; www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/sdhac.shtm

Texas Education Agency Health and Physical Education Requirements: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/hpe/index.html>

National Health Education Standards: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHER/standards/index.htm

National Physical Education Standards: www.aahperd.org/naspe/publications-nationalstandards.html