

**STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS RECOMMENDATIONS
COMMUNITY FORUM – FEBRUARY 21
OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION**

1. In general, there is consensus that the philosophy behind a policy that promotes and supports healthy activities, educational offerings, and nutritional food choices for students is a positive step. The focus should be on this is what is “good for students”, not that the policy is simply meeting a federal requirement
2. Attendees also agreed that much of the behavior that currently exists – on the part of students, families, and school staff – is cultural. Making a change will need to be transitional and will need to be well communicated and effectively administered on a consistent basis. It was also considered that for many of us, food is a part of celebrations and we need to be mindful of this and have some flexibility in what food items could be enjoyed on a special occasion basis.
3. It was brought up that district staff - especially instructional staff – will need additional training and inservice on a number of aspects of the policy; including information on alternatives to rewarding or incentivizing with food; how classroom activities involving food can be adjusted to meet the policy guidelines, i.e. everything from holiday celebrations to food prepared as part of curriculum (such as foods class or special activities as part of a world language class); ways to model positive wellness behavior; and a basic understanding of the policy guidelines and reasons behind them.
4. Consistency regarding the implementation and administration of the policy is key. Suggestions were made that students, teachers and families will need guidance and the ‘tools’ they need to support the policy. This includes lists of appropriate foods/alternatives; the more specific definition of “special occasions”; making sure there is time to communicate changes prior to the next school year; etc.
5. Comments were shared about the importance of establishing healthy habits and choices early on with students – that students who begin making good choices in pre-school or kindergarten are much more likely to continue such choices – and that involving kids directly in the decision-making and/or preparation aspects of health and wellness activities, is key to long term success.
6. Another issue that came up in conjunction with the previous point was the desire for high school students to be more involved and more informed about not just this wellness policy, but other key decisions being made by the Board. It was commented that informed students are more likely to make better decisions. More importantly, high school students in particular want to assert more independence and maintain more choice. Board members in attendance echoed that getting input from students was critical to them on many issues that come before the Board. They did share that student Board members are involved and do frequently act as spokespersons for other students. But they also said there are

challenges regarding keeping students engaged in the process. Students in attendance were challenged to come back to the Board or to district leadership with suggestions on how information can be disseminated more effectively to students in our four high schools.

7. A very significant issue for some in the group was concern about the possible loss of revenue for some school-based fundraising activities because of the policy. There is speculation that changes to a number of these activities could take dollars away from programming and curriculum in classrooms. Although the county-wide committee and the district both acknowledge this is a possibility and understand the concern, there is nothing in the policy or the administrative guidelines that is specifically meant to address this issue. It is hoped with enough time to plan, such classroom-based fundraisers can look for alternative products. In general, the district is actively engaged in many strategic efforts designed to provide appropriate funding for our schools – including lobbying at the state level, grant writing, revising the district budget process, and more. Also, there are some current contracts which may remain in place until the contract period expires before they can be revised.

To clarify, a number of district fundraisers will NOT be affected by the policy because sales (and consumption) of products takes place outside the classroom. At issue will be in-classroom sales of food products which do not meet the policy guidelines (like candy bar sales, candy/beverage cart sales in some high school classrooms, sales of before school snacks, etc.).

8. The group recognized that finding alternative items may sometimes be challenging. Students in general are looking for items that are affordable, portable, quick/easy to purchase and consume, appealing in terms of taste, and offer a variety of flavors and options. As the culture is realigned, we can expect to see some temporary shifts in the popularity and sales of some items. Experience in our Food Service Department and across the industry, however, has shown that there is often a rebound with new items and that consumers eventually adapt to the change fairly quickly. Comments were also shared that a number of the larger vendors – most notably Coke, Pepsi, and Frito Lay – are well aware of this national school wellness trend and are aggressively looking to change their products to meet the new policy guidelines including both nutritional value and portion sizes.
9. A question was raised about the appropriateness of certain commercial advertisements that appear in some of our school venues – scoreboard sponsorship signs and so on – and how those might play into the philosophy behind the proposed new policy. This will continue to be discussed
10. Some concern was raised regarding the parameters for physical movement and physical education minutes. Because of the schedules and facilities at many of our buildings, there were questions about whether there is enough time in the day

to meet the number of minutes put forth in the draft recommendations on an on-going basis or if the minimum of 50 minutes required in the recommendations is currently being met at this time. Although students are receiving the appropriate number of minutes in Physical Education – as is stated in the recommendations - , it is on an average over the course of an instructional year – not necessarily something that happens each week. Given many constraints, however, the district is somewhat limited in what it can offer at this time. Physical activity can certainly be encouraged during out of school time – whether that be walking to school or supporting involvement in other fitness-related activities. It was brought up that perhaps elementary students should then be expected to participate in recess – and not be held in from recess as part of a disciplinary practice. Another concern was ‘bad weather’ days when students do not go out for recess but instead play board games – is there maybe a way to accommodate more physical activity on those days?

As a clarification – the policy recommendations do measure the amount of in-class physical education – they do not specifically measure the amount of minutes in terms of physical movement either in or out of class. The policy does state, however, that students in grades K-5 be provided with opportunities for physical movement in and out of classrooms during the school day.

11. Some discussion was had regarding the possible use of the BMI or Body Mass Index as a component of the fitness assessment. The general consensus was that using BMI should just be one part of the fitness assessment, that it should be conducted in a private and confidential manner; and that students (and parents) be informed about what the index entails and what it reflects – and how to use the information appropriately.
12. A question was asked about the possible increased use of artificial sweeteners in products should the recommendations be approved. At this time, very few products used in the district’s Food Service Department use artificial sweeteners. A comment from the district’s Director of Food Service did advise that her research has shown that one of the sweeteners, Splenda, is actually made from sugar so would not be of the same concern as products with aspartame, etc. where studies showing long range affects on health have not really been conclusive. This is something that would need to be further explored as the transition is made.
13. There was also some discussion regarding portion size – and portion control. While much easier to manage and maintain at the elementary and intermediate level where school cafeterias typically feature full meal service and very limited ala carte choices, this is more difficult to monitor at the high school level where students have many more options. It would be possible for a student to simply buy two or three additional portions/servings of an item – although it may be cost-prohibitive to do this frequently given the pricing structure.

14. All in the group agreed that timing is important – giving people enough time to plan for changes and adapt to the new recommendations. It is understood that the policy is an initial step and that the proposed guidelines will be monitored and changed as needed. An oversight committee made up of district staff, parents and students will be established to continue to look at implementation and outcomes of the recommendations – including any new trends or health/wellness issues that could come to light. The group also discussed the possibility of schools using their existing site councils – or setting up other small groups – to assist in making building based decisions regarding the administration of the policy.