

Wellness Team FAQs

1. What is a School Wellness Team?

A School Wellness Team, sometimes called a School Wellness Council, School Wellness Committee, or other name, is a group tasked with creating an environment that promotes healthy behaviors at an individual school. Their work should be guided by the school district's Local Wellness Policy.

2. What is a Local School Health Council (LSHC)

Established in Maryland regulation (COMAR 13A.05.05.13), the LSHC serves to guide comprehensive school health programs for students and staff, and to oversee implementation of health and wellness initiatives and policies. LSHC may include school district personnel, teachers, students, parents, Department of Health representatives, or other partners. LSHC members should also include school nutrition teams with responsibility for meeting the federal requirements (7 CFR 210.31) for the local wellness policy.

3. What is a Local Wellness Policy?

A local school wellness policy (LWP) is a written document that guides a school district in establishing a healthy school environment. LWPs must include guidelines for the nutrition and physical activity environment (e.g., foods sold and served in school, recess, physical activity breaks), but may address other areas of wellness, such as mental health or school health services.

Every school district that participates in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) is required by the USDA to establish a LWP. The LWP applies to all schools in the district. School districts have the flexibility to customize their LWP based on their own specific circumstances to best improve the health of their students and staff.

4. Who is responsible for the Local Wellness Policy?

The LWP is drafted and updated by a local school board and/or a district-level coalition (e.g., Local School Health Council). The district level food and nutrition services team is responsible for monitoring and reporting on wellness policy implementation.

In addition to annual updates to the school community, federal regulations require an assessment of the wellness policy every three years. This report, called the Triennial Assessment, includes data on school-level adherence to the policy. Based on the LWP, the data gathered through the Triennial Assessment, and other district priorities, the Local School Health Council can provide support and guidance to schools for improving the wellness environment.

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At the school level, a Wellness Team is the best mechanism for ensuring awareness and compliance with the LWP[1]. Many LWPs require that each school has a Wellness Team. School Wellness Teams can use their knowledge of their individual school's culture, students, and operations to identify best methods for supporting teachers and staff in aligning their practices with the LWP.

5. Who should be on the School Wellness Team?

The Wellness Team is often led by a teacher or other full-time staff member appointed by the principal. However, the most effective teams will include representatives from the full school community: teachers, administrators, staff, parents, community partners, and even students. These groups bring diverse perspectives that can ensure that efforts to improve LWP compliance will be embraced by the full school community.

6. Can the School Wellness Team be part of another committee?

Yes! Many schools undertake the work of the Wellness Team as a subcommittee of other groups that oversee school operations, such as the School Improvement Teams.

7. How does a School Wellness Team decide what to work on?

First and foremost, a Wellness Team should be familiar with the school district's LWP. In reviewing the LWP, the team may discover areas where the school is not adhering to the guidelines. The Local School Health Council may also provide priority areas to address policy compliance based on data collected through the Triennial Assessment.

If your school is already doing a stellar job implementing the LWP, including in the priority areas identified by the Local School Health Council, you can do a broader assessment of how well your school is following school wellness best practices, using tools such as the Maryland School Wellness Scorecard, the Action for Healthy Kids School Health Index, or the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment to identify areas for action.

8. How often do School Wellness Teams meet?

Wellness Teams can determine the best schedule and way of meeting. Meeting times should take into consideration the schedules of the committee members. Meeting at least four times a year is recommended[2] in order to assess priorities, set goals, and take action. More frequent meetings (e.g., monthly) may be beneficial.

9. Where can I get more support?

Your Local School Health Council is ready to support your school's Wellness Team - your school's success in creating a healthy environment contributes to the school district's wellness priorities. For more information on the LWP, current priorities, or resources available to schools, contact:

[insert contact information for Local School Health Council representative]

Works Cited

1. Maryland State Department of Education. *Making Wellness Work: One School at a Time – A Guide for School-Level Implementation of Wellness Policies and Strategies*. Baltimore, MD: Maryland State Department of Education; May 2014. Available at: https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/SchoolWellnessPolicy/MWW.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com
2. School Wellness Working Group. Wellness Teams Work! A Guide for Putting Wellness Policies into Practice in Schools. San Francisco, CA: Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN) and Physical Activity Policy Research Network Plus (PAPRN+); August 2018. Available at: https://nopren.org/