

Port Angeles School District
Nutrition & Physical Activity Advisory Committee Report
June 9, 2008

BACKGROUND

In response to the growing national and statewide concerns surrounding obesity and general poor overall fitness levels, the Washington State Legislature passed a new law requiring every school district in the state to adopt a policy governing nutrition and physical fitness in the schools. School districts across the state must adopt a Nutrition and Physical Fitness policy by August 1, 2005. Further, in October, the federal government reauthorized the National School Lunch Program (the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004). This law required all school districts participating in federally subsidized child nutrition programs to establish a local school wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. Our district did adopt such a policy in keeping with prescribed timelines.

The Legislature discovered that overweight and obese children encounter more health risks than their more fit peers. Perhaps even more importantly, studies seem to suggest that insufficient physical activity and poor eating habits may be obstacles to a child's ability to perform in the classroom.

The legislature determined schools are the "logical place to address the issue of obesity in children and adolescents." This decision was likely reached due to the fact that children spend a large amount of their time in school. It is clear that educating children about healthy eating habits and appropriate levels of fitness activity is viewed as a way to enhance their ability to perform academically as well as increase their opportunity for living a long productive and healthy life. It is, however, understood that schools by themselves cannot solve the problem. It will clearly take the collective efforts of the entire community to reverse the current trends in childhood obesity.

Consistent with Procedure 6700P, the district convened the Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee whose role it was to assist in development and implementation of the district wide nutrition and physical fitness policy. This report then is the substantive record of the activity of this group for the 2007-08 academic year.

PARAMETERS

With the reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program (the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004), school districts were required to establish a local school wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. This school district policy must be developed with the involvement from the school board, school administrators, school food service representatives, students, parents, and the public.

At a minimum, the local school wellness policy was determined to need to have:

1. Include goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the local school district determines is appropriate;
2. Include nutrition guidelines selected by the school district for all foods available on each school campus in the district during the school day with the objective of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity;
3. Provide an assurance that guidelines for reimbursable school meals shall not be less restrictive than regulations and guidance issued by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, as applicable to schools; and
4. Establish a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including designation of one or more persons within the district or at each school, as appropriate, charged with operational responsibility for ensuring that the school and district meet the local wellness policy.

A further parameter involved a timeline for the Nutrition & Physical Fitness Task Force. The Task Force was requested to develop and present by the June 27, 2005 board meeting policy, procedure, and program recommendations for board of directors' consideration. Further, the Task Force was to provide the board projected revenue and expense impacts arising from the recommendations. As defined by statute, the district needed to adopt a Nutrition and Physical Fitness policy by August 1, 2005. This did occur and both the policy and procedure have been in place since August of 2005.

This year, in keeping with Procedure 6700P, the Nutrition & Physical Activity Advisory Committee was charged with the continued implementation of the new policy and procedures. This committee was to present a biennial report to the board of directors. This report was to include implementation notes and some form of evaluation.

PROCESS

In addressing the need to implement and evaluate the Nutrition and Physical Fitness Policy, the Advisory Committee decided first on a meeting schedule. Given this task had a finite timeline for study and recommendations, the group agreed to meet on six Monday afternoons from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. The committee met throughout the year at the Central Services Building.

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee spent a significant amount of time outside the regularly scheduled committee meetings with sub-group assignments. Committee members chose to work in smaller research groups which then reported to the whole group.

The small group researching various nutrition curricula met on several occasions and has determined that they will need to continue their work next year. A possible link to this group will be the collaborative work with the WSU extension office. The committee will likely extend an invitation to collaborate with them to staff involved with that project. OSPI has also just this spring released the nutrition grade level expectations for the state. The newly released grade

level expectations will assist us in the nutrition curriculum work as they provide clear targets for instruction. A continuing challenge is who and when the nutrition instruction will be accomplished. As the core academic requirements have continued to rise, the instructional time allocated to subjects such as nutrition is becoming more and more limited. Our elementary science kits are also being studied to provide integration with the nutrition and fitness topics.

At the high school level, there was some discussion regarding the nutrition topics being covered during the advisory time in the high school schedule.

Another small study group that met worked on the expansion of locally grown produce in the school lunch program. This group, including our Sodexo program lead, met several times and discussed the challenges of this expansion. These discussions will continue next year. This group reviewed what we were currently serving and what was possible to serve. The group also discussed the role of commodities in the menu and did numerous site visits to observe the lunch hour at individual schools. Commodities continue to be a dilemma as they are seemingly the least nutritionally strong; yet, are economically desirable.

A tangible result of this work this year has been the addition of salads to be on the daily lunch menu at all schools, whole grains being implemented across all the elementary schools as a forced choice and the secondary schools as an optional choice. More discussion on this topic will come next year. A focus for next year will be encouraging the use of locally grown foods in our lunch menus.

The third small group that met reviewed outreach to schools options. A concern had been raised that perhaps now that the policy has been in place for several years, the original guidelines were not being as strictly adhered to. A recommendation has been made to review these with new staff and building principals again each fall in order for the policy and procedures to remain intact. The committee feels that comments made at Open House gatherings at each school next year will also be advisable. The committee is working on some brief talking points for these activities. Another topic is the possible publishing of a newsletter.

Finally, the work of the committee also resulted in the passage of legislation (SB 6483) which recognizes the benefits of local food production and the adequate nutrition necessary for students to develop and perform well in school. The legislation sets into place a farm-to-school program within the state bureaucracy. Further, there are multiple roles this program will undertake, many of which intersect with the goals of this committee.

SUMMARY

The Nutrition & Physical Activity Advisory Committee believes the changes in nutritional and fitness standards proposed, implemented, evaluated and monitored will continue to positively impact student achievement in the Port Angeles School District as well as meeting the statutory requirements the district must address. Clearly, the health and well being of our students, the children of this community remain our paramount concern.

As current research shows, this is the first generation projected to live less long than the generation preceding it. The Advisory Committee found this particular data point particularly troubling. The attempts this district is making, in concert with state and federal mandates, toward ensuring a better health for all students is extremely important. A healthy community is a thriving community.

This topic of nutrition and physical fitness is a crucial one for us to stay on top of. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee plans to continue its work into the coming year and making a board report at the end of the 2009-10 academic year.