

Port Angeles School District
Nutrition & Physical Activity Advisory Committee Report
August 9, 2010

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. This policy continues to guide the work of the committee.

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 2009-10 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 & 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 an annual report to the board of directors. This report was to include implementation notes and progress planning summaries.

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 Monday afternoons from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. The committee met at the Central Services Building in the board room.

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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

During the current academic year, the WSU extension office contracted with the school district to provide nutrition education with each elementary school in the district. This work filled a void in the nutrition instruction practice in the district. All students then received a coherent curricular experience in this important content area. As the core academic requirements have continued to rise, the instructional time allocated to subjects such as nutrition has become more and more limited. Even though the sixth grade science kit on nutrition has been implemented, the WSU extension work is a substantive complement to this work.

Another elementary curriculum asset currently being implemented in our elementary schools is the Five for Life curriculum which is a wellness, nutrition and fitness connected curriculum support for classroom instruction. The Advisory Committee reviewed these materials a year ago and both recommended and supported the purchase and implementation of the program. Collaborative time was allocated to the elementary physical education staff to work on the effective use of these materials in the classroom. This curriculum will be reviewed in the coming year and revised where necessary.

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 continued to do numerous site visits to observe the lunch hour at individual schools. Individual menu items have also continued to be reviewed for their nutritional content.

Commodities continue to be a dilemma as they are seemingly the least nutritionally strong; yet, are economically desirable. A positive step in this work has been the decision to order fresher and less processed commodities; e.g., 'real chicken' versus chicken nuggets. This decision as well as the commitment to have at least one entrée each day at every grade level being prepared from scratch has been a major step forward as well.

During the prior year, the committee completed grant work for a fresh fruit and vegetable pilot program grant at Dry Creek Elementary School. This grant was planned as a collaborative project for the school district with OSPI, the USDA, SODEXO, the Lower Elwha Tribe, local area dietitians, local farms, and nursing professionals. This grant enabled us to provide fresh fruit and vegetables in a more substantive fashion for students in the school. The goals of the grant were consistent with the goals for the Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee. The evaluation of the project showed strong gains in the awareness and consumption of and by students of a variety of types of particularly locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. The committee put forward new applications for this grant for all elementary schools this past spring. These grants were not funded for our school district. It is interesting to note that many more schools across the state applied for these grants, thus creating a much more competitive process.

Another significant aspect of this year's work has been the planning of a major Farm to Cafeteria Conference held in the fall of 2009. This conference was a tremendous community event focusing on the connection of locally grown healthier food making its way from local farms to school cafeterias. Members of the committee attended this community event as did school

district staff. The event received wide publicity and was well attended and has significantly sparked authentic interest in the concept of healthier local foods in our schools.

A tangible result of this work this year has been the continuation 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 continuing collaborative community partner, who joined the work of the Advisory Committee a year ago, maintains a critical connection between the committee and the rest of the county committees that support these topics. Members of the Clallam County Public Health Advisory Committee continued to participate in our deliberations throughout the winter and spring. They also supported the fall conference that took place last year. Both the County Advisory Committee and the District Advisory Committee share a mutual interest in promoting community health and wellness initiatives.

Another project that continues to be supported and guided by the District Advisory Committee is the community rowing initiative. John Hallberg and other committee and community members have been instrumental in grant writing for rowing machines in the schools and YMCA. These rowing machines are popular with the teachers and students within the school district and a great way to maintain fitness standards for students in our schools. During the current year, the rotation for each school having rowing machines for at least a part of the year was made possible. The community rowing program has been steadily growing and continues to a positive resource for exercise in the community.

Concerns continue to be raised that perhaps now that the policy has been in place for several years, the original guidelines were not being as strictly adhered to as they were originally. 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 planning of the elementary lunch menu changes roll-out.

One of the most thrilling work outcomes for the past year has been the results gleaned from the Jefferson Elementary School Pilot Project. A sub-group of the committee worked with staff, parents and students of the Jefferson School community to review the lunch menu options at the school. Variety of menu ideas and options were discussed over the course of the fall and winter. In the spring, a new pilot menu was proposed and reviewed by the committee. Taste and food sample testing was initiated at the school with a variety of new healthier choice foods being taste tested. An informational time period about the purpose of the project and how it would be conducted was implemented. Parent communications were also initiated so that parents were made aware of the time frame and purpose of the pilot project. As the project rolled out, it exceeded the expectations of the committee. A concern had been raised that fewer lunches would be sold and that many of these menu adjustments would not be economically possible. In point of fact, no fewer lunches were sold and excitement has grown over the newer healthier choices. Students were surveyed and parent volunteers took anecdotal data interview notes. The

evaluations were extremely positive. Further, waste measurement data confirmed less waste that was being thrown out.

After significant review and discussion, the committee recommends that the pilot project menu be extended to each of the remaining elementary schools in the district. The process for each of these roll-outs will mirror the pilot project preparation done at Jefferson. In other words, we will roll out one elementary school menu change a month. This enables the food services staff to make sure that the fidelity of implementation is tended to.

Finally, a significant piece of work the committee undertook in the spring was the review and revisions to the proposed food services RFP. The committee deliberated over several semantic drafts and recommended inclusion of language that supported healthier food options for students in the district. The RFP resulted in a contract that purports to be much more progressive in its approach to serving healthier food to our children. The committee will remain involved in the implementation of the contract.

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 Public Schools 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. Strategies for communicating expectations along these lines will be continued to be implemented in the fall.

The Advisory Committee is also excited about the planning of the fall Department of Agriculture Day highlighting nutrition and fitness topics of import to our community and district. This collaborative project is a tenable and visible focusing activity for the groups working on these topics in the community.

The Advisory Committee is looking forward to the expansion of the pilot lunch project menus at the elementary schools including their implementation and evaluation. The collaborative efforts with the Clallam County Public Health Advisory Committee work will also continue into the coming year. Having a broader audience for these integral topics will support the planned healthy initiatives. Interestingly enough, the committee has been visited by community members from both Sequim and Port Townsend who are interested in improving their school lunch programs and food choices provided in their schools and wanted some feedback on starting committees similar to ours in their communities.

With regard to fitness topics, the continuation of and expansion of the rowing program both in the schools and community will be a continued priority. The location and rotation of the rowing machines will continue to be overseen by this group.

As current research shows, this is the first generation projected to live less long than the generation preceding it. The Advisory Committee continues to find this particular data point particularly troubling. Current school lunch menu items continue to be studied and reviewed for

nutritional value. 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. Student achievement will also be both sustainable and more robust with a healthier student body.

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 an annual board report at the end of the 2010-11 academic year.