

Port Angeles School District
Nutrition & Physical Activity Advisory Committee Report
August 8, 2011

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 2010-11 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 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. 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 continued 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 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 will teach the curriculum 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. Currently, a sixth grade science kit is devoted to the topic and study of nutrition. This kit is being updated to reflect the new science expectations.

At the high school level, there was some discussion regarding the nutrition topics being covered during the advisory time in the high school schedule. It is currently being taught as part of the ninth grade Fitness for Life course.

Another elementary curriculum asset currently being used in at least our elementary school sites 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 and is at least initially favorably impressed. Professional development on the effective use of these materials is viewed as continuing to be necessary for their effective use.

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. Meetings with local farmers and produce folks were held. 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. Individual menu items have also been 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 scratch cooking commitment Sodexo has made, using commodities that are less processed to make healthier meals. For example, rather than serving commodity chicken nuggets, regular chicken is purchased and made into a meal from scratch at the school sites. This has been well received by students and parents.

Another significant aspect of this years' work has been the visit from the OSPI Coordinating School Health Program office. This was an excellent meeting and resulted in spirited conversation and a renewed sense of purpose amongst committee members to further the agenda of the goals of the committee. The objective of developing a coordinated school health program seems consistent with the focus and work of this committee. Some of this work has already begun with the school health index modules already receiving attention and review.

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. Also, the publication of ingredients in the meals served has been a step in the transparency move. 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, particularly with the continued meetings with local farmers.

A continued collaborative community partner supported the work of the Advisory Committee this year. Members of the Clallam County Public Health Advisory Committee joined us in our deliberations throughout the year. The groups collaborated together on the grant writing to elicit funding for a community health mobilizer. Both the County Advisory Committee and the District Advisory Committee shared a mutual interest in promoting community health and wellness initiatives. It seems this committee continues to add community partners.

Another project supported and guided by the District Advisory Committee is the community rowing initiative. John Halberg 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.

A grant that the committee supported this year is the OSPI Safe Routes to School Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education Program Grant. This grant provide monies to purchase bicycles, helmets, and safety gear so that our physical education staff will be able to address this timely topic in our physical education classes from grades 5-8. Staff will be attending professional development in the fall of the coming academic year.

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 a fall activity to be held focusing on healthy choices, nutrition options, and wellness topics.

Finally, the work of the committee two years ago 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. Given the current economic times, not as much has been accomplished as might otherwise be in this regard. The expectation is that next year more will be done in the local farm to school realm and thus improving the access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

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 implemented in the fall.

The Advisory Committee is looking forward to the healthier choice breakfast program implementation and evaluation. The middle school menu program and planning will also be a focus for the coming year. 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.

With the visit from the OSPI Coordinating School Health Program staff, the committee is discussing the role it may take in the work that is more global in nature than its current work has been. Much work was already done this year in looking at how our schools rate on the healthy school index. These modules will continue to require our attention. Developing a coordinated school health program is a daunting task requiring many more community contacts and coordination. This will surely be work the committee addresses in the coming year.

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. The acquisition of the OSPI Safe Routes to School Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education Program Grant will also be implemented this year. The committee will oversee this work and support staff in its implementation.

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, especially at the middle school in the coming year. All elementary schools now serve a much more nutritious menu than previously. The roll-out of elementary menus has been very successful. The new food service RFP recently negotiated has supported healthier choices for children and staff in our community. Further, the publishing of ingredients has supported parents and families in making healthy choices about their child(s) food at school.

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 2011-12 academic year.

