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Triennial Assessment

Rockingham County Schools Wellness Policy Evaluation of Progress Revised 6/ 2020

Rockingham County Public Schools has a Student Wellness Policy (JZP) that can be found on the division web site and on the Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) home page. This policy is intended to encourage students and staff to participate in healthy activities and lifestyles in order to maintain healthy bodies. The policy has four primary sections and the intent of this tri-annual summary is to describe the success and compliance of these respective sections of the policy and to compare the Rockingham County Public School's (RCPS) policy with a model policy developed by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (HG). Any person with knowledge or opinion regarding the division's success or failure to comply with the various aspects of the RCPS policy is encouraged to provide feedback. In order to engage stake-holders, a survey was instituted in December, 2019. The 36 completed survey respondents were comprised of: 22 principals, 8 parents, and 6 community (school health advisory board) members.

Nutrition Promotion and Education

Students are exposed to consistent nutrition messages in the schools through: posters, bulletin boards, menus, web site, and one-on-one contact with FNS personnel. Elementary parents receive recommended snack and packed lunch suggestions while all parents have access to the division FNS home page that contains multiple positive nutrition messages. The division encourages students and parents to utilize the mobile phone app to access information about menus including nutrient content and other pertinent information. At the beginning of each school year, each teacher is provided with a reminder memo regarding FNS procedures and suggestions to incorporate positive nutrition messages to their students. In January, 2020 each teacher was also sent a summary document highlighting some of the important aspects of the Wellness Policy. Many of the HG recommendations in the Nutrition Promotion area have been incorporated into the RCPS policy.

In answering the survey question – “Do you observe components of the NUTRITION PROMOTION AND EDUCATION section of the Wellness Policy being conducted in your school?”, 74% of the 36 respondents indicated that they observed “multiple things observed”. An additional 20% indicated “one or two things observed”, and none of the respondents indicated that these components were not observed. Two of the 36 respondents “didn't know”. Many teachers try to incorporate sound nutritional practices into classroom instruction. The district FNS director confirms that each school plans and implements at least one “nutrition education activity per year” and that schools promote positive messages in the cafeteria areas and involve students in the program. Three secondary schools have digital menu TV screen displays that catch the attention of students. The district director is a registered dietitian and is involved in the posting of nutrient and allergy information for the monthly menu.

Nutrition Standards

A. Food & Nutrition Service Provision of Food

The standards outlined in the FNS section of the nutrition policy are a combination of local policy and regulations from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This first set of criteria describe the food items available to students from the FNS department. The breakfast and lunch meal patterns as dictated by USDA require that each student select a fruit serving at breakfast and either a vegetable or fruit at lunch. Additionally, the meal pattern contains limitations on fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium; while also being whole grain rich. Local policy prescribes that elementary children either receive a school lunch or bring a packed lunch. Special dietary modifications are made available to students with proper physician prescription. The a la carte food offerings from the FNS department are in compliance with federal “smart snack” requirements and are available to students with cash or a positive meal account balance. All foods provided by the FNS department meet federal criteria, and this also aligns with the model policy from HG.

In answering the survey question – “For food items served to children during meal periods, do you observe the school cafeteria adhering to the NUTRITION STANDARDS section of the Wellness Policy?”, 86% of the survey respondents indicated that “yes, multiple things were observed”. An additional 8% indicated that “yes, one or two things were observed”, with only 2 of the 36 indicating that they “didn’t know”. The district FNS director confirms that USDA guidelines in this area are met and local policies are followed.

B. Other Food/Beverage Promotion and Access During School Day

It is recognized that the FNS department is not the only source for student’s food and beverage access during the school day. While the FNS department is hereby reporting on the evaluation of the progress of compliance with the Wellness Policy, it should be clear that complete control and adherence among all administrators and teachers does not exist. Further complicating the enforcement aspect of the policy, phrases such as “when possible”, and “should be infrequent” leave room for interpretation latitude. Also, while the Wellness Policy discourages students from “regularly consuming restaurant foods-to-go (fast foods) while in the cafeteria area”, it becomes very difficult to enforce this. The school health advisory board and administration believe that the policy contains a desired amount of specificity without requiring the building principal or FNS director to be the daily ‘food police’.

In answering the survey question – “For food items possibly available to children during the school day (not from the cafeteria), do you observe the school adhering to the policy?”, 47% of the respondents indicated that they saw “junk food items available to students”, while another 45% indicated that the policy was generally observed, but occasionally junk food was seen. When combined, this represents 92% general compliance, while only 8% didn’t know. Of particular note, none of the respondents selected the multiple choice answer worded “frequent junk food observed”.

Because this area has the greatest opportunity for enforcement difficulty, a 2nd survey question was asked. In answering the survey question – “Is the school successful at enforcing the marketing, advertising, and sale of restricted food items during the school day?”, 58% of the respondents indicated that the school was “very successful” while another 34% felt that the school was “moderately successful”. Only one respondent felt that the school was not successful and two respondents “didn’t know”. Again, of particular note, 92% of respondents felt that their school was very successful or moderately successful. The district FNS director

concur that the school division has room to improve in this area, but is about as “successful” and compliant as can be expected given the variables and the interpretation latitude. The HG model policy contains language that is more restrictive than the RCPS policy in the area of foods possibly available from sources other than the FNS department (teachers).

Related School-Based Activities That Promote Wellness

This ‘catch all’ area of the Wellness Policy does not specifically address food or activity, but includes important components for student health. Students are encouraged to wash their hands, drink plenty of water, and have an adequate amount of time to eat. Additionally, the school should provide a safe environment and have a school nurse available on each campus. The existing policy addressed the “character counts” program generally, but the School Health Advisory Board recently recommended that the following statements be included in this section of the policy: ‘RCPS provides a tiered system of support model for social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health wellness. This model includes counseling services, behavioral support staff and school based community counseling services’. This holistic language in the RCPS policy is not found in the model HG policy.

In answering the survey question – “Do you observe other RELATED SCHOOL BASED ACTIVITIES that promote wellness?”, 75% of respondents indicated that “yes, several areas observed”, while an additional 17% indicated that “yes, one or two areas were observed”. Only 8% (3 people) indicated that “no, they have not observed” this.

Physical Activity

Students are given opportunities for physical activity during the school day. While this is different for various grade levels, there has been an effort to encourage teachers to incorporate physical activity into the academic curriculum. Teachers and other school personnel are discouraged from withholding Physical Education or recess as a disciplinary measure. Before and after school programs are present in many schools and these programs often have a physical activity component. Many of the recommendations in the HG policy regarding physical activity are also found in the RCPS policy.

In answering the survey question – “Do you observe the PHYSICAL ACTIVITY component of the Wellness Policy being implemented?”, 89% of the respondents indicated that “yes, they have observed several areas of the policy being encouraged”. An additional respondent indicated that some of the areas were observed, while 8% (3 respondents) indicated that they “didn’t know”. It was encouraging to the FNS director that the school principal respondents to the survey were clear that they would not be in favor of withholding physical activity as a disciplinary measure.

Communication, Implementation, & Evaluation

While the FNS director predominantly assures the development, compliance, and evaluation of this policy, school principals are involved in communicating and monitoring within his/her building. The policy itself dictates the level of communication and evaluation. The policy is highlighted on the FNS homepage of the division web site and parents are encouraged to solicit feedback. Despite the positive nature and the desire of the school division to encourage implementation, communication, and evaluation of the RCPS policy, it does

not contain the level of involvement that is described in the model HG policy. However, the RCPs policy is open for community involvement and does meet the requirements as set forth in this area.

In answering the survey question – “Do you observe the COMMUNICATION, IMPLEMENTATION, & EVALUATION section being conducted?”, 61% of the respondents indicated that “yes, they have observed several areas being conducted”, while another 28% indicated that they were aware that “a few of the items were conducted”. Only four respondents indicated they “didn’t know” and no respondents indicated that these components of the policy were not being completed.

Any/all suggestions and recommendations are welcome. Please submit to: Glehman@rockingham.k12.va.us