

Recommended Local Wellness Policy Provisions to Transform the School Nutrition Environment (2026)

What is a local school wellness policy?

A local school wellness policy (“wellness policy” or LWP) is a written document that guides a local educational agency (LEA) or school district’s efforts to establish a school environment that promotes students’ health, well-being, and ability to learn. LWPs are an important and low-cost way for school districts to ensure robust implementation of federal and, if applicable, state nutrition standards for school meals, snacks, and beverages and address additional nutrition and physical activity priorities.

LWPs were established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and were further strengthened by the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. Under 7 C.F.R. § 210.31, each school district participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program must develop and implement a LWP.

A complete model LWP is available from the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#). Below, please find sample language in italics that is not explicitly covered in the Alliance’s model policy but that CSPI recommends including in an LWP.

NUTRITION STANDARDS

For school meals, USDA requires:

- Standards and nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages sold to students on the school campus during the school day that are consistent with federal regulations.

Additionally, CSPI recommends the following language on sodium reduction:

Within one year, in consultation with school cafeteria workers, the District Food Services Director shall develop sodium reduction goals for school meals that allow students to feasibly consume a school breakfast, school lunch, and after school program supper and remain in alignment with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Dietary Reference Intakes for Sodium and Potassium (2019). The Director shall document necessary funding to reach these goals and share them with the state agency overseeing education and the school board within 18 months.

For competitive foods, USDA requires:

- Standards for all foods and beverages provided, but not sold, to students during the school day (e.g., in classroom parties, classroom snacks brought by parents, or other foods given as incentives).

CSPI recommends including the following language:

The District is committed to ensuring that all foods and beverages sold and served outside of the school meal programs (e.g., “competitive” foods and beverages) will meet evidence-based nutrition standards.

If food items are sold during the school day, they must:

- (1) Be widely available for purchase outside of schools; and*
- (2) Not have packaging that is substantially similar to the packaging for food and beverage products that do not meet the federal competitive food standards.*

The District encourages schools to hold fundraisers outside of the school day. School-sponsored fundraisers should consist of primarily non-food items. However, if food items are sold at such fundraisers, they must meet the federal nutrition standards for competitive foods in 7 C.F.R. 210.11.

Additionally, CSPI recommends following language to increase use of fresh and minimally processed foods in both school meals and competitive foods:

Within one year, the District Food Services Director shall develop, in consultation with school cafeteria workers, goals for school meals and competitive foods to include minimum amounts of fresh and minimally processed foods purchased by schools. The Director shall document necessary funding to reach these goals and share them with the state agency overseeing education and the school board within 18 months.

“Fresh” means perishable and unaltered in its natural state when it arrives at a school for preparation.

“Minimally processed” means food that is unaltered or slightly altered from its natural state when it arrives at a school for preparation through such processes as removal of inedible or unwanted parts, drying, powdering, squeezing, crushing, grinding, fractioning, steaming, poaching, boiling, roasting, and pasteurization, chilling, freezing, placing in containers, vacuum packaging, non-alcoholic fermentation and other methods that do not add to the original food salt, sugar, oils, fats, or food-substances (other than additives that

prolong product duration, protect original properties, or prevent proliferation of microorganisms). Preservation methods such as canning and bottling using oils, sugar, and/or salt are not permitted. Examples include, but are not limited to, whole grains, flours, fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, and seafood, whole or in the form of steaks, fillets, and other cuts, fresh or pasteurized milk, eggs, fresh or pasteurized plain yogurt, legumes, and nuts and seeds. Minimally processed foods include foods made of two or more items in this group, such as dried mixed fruits, and foods with vitamins and minerals, added generally to replace nutrients lost during processing, such as flour fortified with iron and folic acid.

MARKETING

USDA requires:

- In-school marketing of foods and beverages during the school day must meet competitive foods standards.

Additionally, CSPI recommends the following language:

To ban in-school marketing of foods and beverages not meeting competitive food standards at all times (i.e. also outside of the school day):

Each school shall prohibit on-campus marketing to student of foods and beverages that do not comply with the federal competitive food standards found in 7 C.F.R. 210.11. This requirement shall apply at all times, including outside of the school day.

To ban digital marketing on school-issued devices, including devices used by teachers, of foods and beverages items not complying with competitive food standards:

The District [or “each school” depending on which entity contracts for digital devices distributed to students] shall include in any contract made for the procurement of digital devices to be issued to students and staff, a provision requiring that such devices shall allow filtering to prohibit the digital marketing on such devices of foods and beverages that do not comply with the federal competitive food standards found in 7 C.F.R. 210.11. The District [or “each school”] shall ensure that devices issued to students and staff, including websites or applications accessed on such devices, are filtered to prohibit such marketing.

Center for Science in the Public Interest is available to develop school-specific guidelines to ensure that students and staff use apps and websites where ads can be filtered, or which do not have ads. Please contact policy@cspi.org.

Additional model language for restricting brand marketing is available from [ChangeLab Solutions](#).

TIME TO EAT

USDA requires:

- Lunch must be served between 10 am and 2 pm.

USDA encourages:

- Schools to provide lunch periods that are long enough to give all students adequate time to be served and to eat their lunches.

Additionally, CSPI recommends including the following language:

Lunch

Each school food authority shall provide lunch periods of at least 30 minutes. No less than 20 minutes of that time shall be dedicated for students to be seated and consume their lunch, and separate from the time required for students to navigate both to and from the classroom to the cafeteria, stand in line to receive lunch, acquire water, and clean up after themselves.

Each school food authority shall provide lunch periods for all students that are scheduled between 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M, and scheduled after recess. Exemptions may apply for shortened school days.

Breakfast

School food authorities shall provide breakfast periods of at least 20 minutes. No less than 10 minutes of that time shall be dedicated for students to be seated and consume their breakfast, and shall be separate from the time required for students to navigate both to and from the classroom to the location where breakfast is served (if different than the classroom), stand in line to receive breakfast, acquire water, and clean up after themselves.

School food authorities shall serve breakfast after the bell that signals the beginning of the school day, and may do so at locations within the school outside of the cafeteria, including classrooms. Breakfast may be served in a grab-and-go format.

Additional Resources:

- CSPI's [Support Strong Local Wellness Policies in Schools](#)

- The Center for EcoLiteracy's [Seven Proven Strategies to Increase Students' Time to Eat](#)
- The Rudd Center's [Model Local School Wellness Policy](#)
- National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine's [Dietary Reference Intakes for Sodium and Potassium \(2019\)](#)

For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspi.org.