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Local Education Agency Wellness Policy Annual Evaluation

Introduction

Mea Union School District, containing a single school, Mesa Union School, has enjoyed a long tradition of excellence where children thrive in a community-focused, small school environment. Currently, 620 students in grades Transitional Kindergarten through 8th grade participate in a rigorous and rewarding academic setting enriched by student opportunities to participate in Science, Technology, Engineering, Visual and Performing Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) activities, as well as a variety of athletic and other extracurricular activities. Mesa Union being a “District of Choice” is actively sought after by parents seeking a challenging and enriching education.

The District is committed to being responsive to community input, which begins with the awareness of the wellness policy. The District regularly communicates with representatives of Wellness Committee and other stakeholders to provide opportunities for participation in the development, implementation and periodic review and update of the wellness policy through a variety of means. The District often informs parents of improvements made to school meals and efforts to meet compliance with school meal standards, availability of child nutrition programs and how to apply, and a description of and compliance with Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards. The District uses electronic mechanisms, such as email or displaying notices on the School’s website, as well as non-electronic mechanisms, such as newsletters, presentations to parents, or sending information home to parents, to ensure that all families are actively notified of the content of, implementation of, and updates to the wellness policy, in addition to how to get involved and support the policy.

Evaluation Process

Mesa Union School District’s Wellness Committee, comprised of stakeholders to include district and site administrators, certificated and classified staff, parents, and community members, support the development of wellness goals and corresponding action steps and activities that promote the health and wellness of all students throughout the District.

The District’s Wellness Committee annually reviews requirements outlined by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Act of 2010 and Mesa Union School District Wellness Policy Goals and Action Steps.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed with stakeholder input and guidance from the Mesa Union School District Wellness Committee and include:

- 1. Implement strategies to reduce potentially harmful food additives and process, and to increase the amount of fresh, local produce offered through the School Meal program.**

- a. At the beginning of the 2018 school year, the cafeteria expanded its salad bar service to include all TK-8th grade students. In addition to creating salad bar access, the cafeteria increased the availability of vegetable and fruit options.
- b. The District created a 3-hour food service worker position to provide additional preparation time to prepare fresh foods.

2. Implement the Harvest of the Month Program

In the fall of the 2018-2019, the District implemented the Harvest of the Month Program. The program provides materials for students, families, and the community to engage in hands-on opportunities to explore, taste, and learn about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables and being active every day.

3. Increase participation in the Farm to School Program

- a. In the fall of 2018-2019 the District increased its participation in the Farm to School Program by strengthening its connection to local farmers through the purchase of local fruits and vegetables that are incorporated in our daily menu.
- b. The School Farm, which is part of the Mesa Union 6th grade elective course, also partners with local farmers, which not only enriches the curriculum, but also supports school farm improvements, such as the installation of raise garden beds, weather station, livestock pens, etc. Vegetables grown on the school farm, when available, are incorporated into the school meal service.

4. Reduce waste

- a. The District has partnered with Ventura County Waste Management to implement a District-wide recycle and composting program, which has reduced waste significantly.
- b. The District has also installed a dishwasher and is transitioning from the use of styrofoam trays to reusable trays.
- c. Food staff consistently solicit student input and incorporate their food preferences in the meal service whenever possible.

Goal Implementation Progress

Nutrition Education and Promotion

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are consistently met:

- a. The District's meal program is economically sustainable and provides student access to a healthy and nutritious breakfast, lunch, and after-school program snack that enables students to reach their fullest learning potential;
- b. Middle school students have an opportunity to participate in the school's Introduction to Agriculture elective, while all staff integrate hands-on garden experiences and/or farm field studies, field trips, etc. with core curriculum so that students begin to develop an understanding of where and how the food they eat daily is grown and prepared;
- c. Monthly sampling and tastings are incorporated as part of the school's nutrition education program;
- d. The school promotes food-centered activities that are healthful, enjoyable, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant and participatory;
- e. School eating areas contain free, safe, drinking water sources and facilities for washing their hands;
- f. The District maintains an offer versus serve program, which promotes student choice during meal service;

- g. Meal service includes attractively presented meals served in a pleasant environment with sufficient time for eating, while fostering good eating habits, enjoyment of meals, appropriate manners, and respect for others;
- h. The addition of a second salad bar has increased access to fresh fruit and vegetables to all students;
- i. Students participate in school-wide recycling activities, which begin with the purchase of recycled and reusable products and maximizes the reduction of waste through composting, recycling, and reuse;
- j. The sale of candy, soda, cookies, sweets, etc. during school-sponsored events is prohibited.
- k. Nutrition is promoted through the use of healthy food posters, distribution of the Wellness Policy, Harvest of the Month, and other newsletters shared with the school educational community.

Physical Activity

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are consistently met:

- a. Physical education teachers shall implement a curriculum that connects and demonstrates the interrelationship between physical activity, good nutrition, and health;
- b. Staff will participate in regularly scheduled professional development;
- c. An appropriate alternative activity shall be provided for students with a physical disability that may restrict excessive physical exertion;
- d. Physical education staff shall appropriately limit the amount or type of physical exercise required of students during air pollution episodes, excessively hot weather, or other inclement conditions.
- e. Mesa Union school has established and maintained a school farm, orchard, and instructional gardens to provide students with experiences in planting, harvesting, preparation, serving, and tasting foods, including ceremonies and celebrations that observe food traditions, integrated with nutrition education with the core curriculum and articulated through the California state standards.

School-Based Learning Experiences

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are consistently met:

- a. Staff is encouraged to integrate garden, nutrition education, cooking and eating experiences, and energy and renewable energy experiences into the curriculum for math, science, social studies and language arts at all grade levels;
- b. Students are encouraged to recycle, conserve materials, water, and energy, use biodegradable materials when possible, and dispose of waste in an environmentally sound way at school, in the eating area, in the school garden, and in all classroom-based activities;
- c. Students shall be offered the opportunity to participate in outdoor education programs that make connections between diet, health and the environment, and the interdependence of living things.
- d. Food service and teaching staff shall work cooperatively to integrate experiences in eating areas, instructional gardens, and farm field trips with the formal learning experience of all students.
- e. School food service will work with community partners to facilitate student understanding and appreciation of fresh, local, sustainably grown food.

Professional Development

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are being met:

- a. Regular professional development will be provided, at least annually, to teachers and the Food Service staff on basic nutrition, nutrition education, and benefits of sustainable agriculture.
- b. The school provides professional development through nutrition materials and the healthy food policy.

Waste Reduction

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are being met:

- a. Meals prepared at school utilize fresh, whole, unpackaged, unprocessed or minimally processed ingredients, to the maximum extent possible, in order to preserve nutritional content and reduce packaging waste.
- b. The school is serving its lunch meal with a “home style” meal presentation resulting in the reduction of plastic packaging needed for individual meals.
- c. The school implemented the District-wide recycle and composting program, which promotes the recycling, composting, and re-use of waste materials;
- d. The school cafeteria has installed a dishwasher and is transitioning from the use of styrofoam trays to reusable trays;
- e. Food staff consistently solicit student input and incorporate their food preferences in the meal service whenever possible;

Nutrition Guidelines

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are being met:

- a. Maximum participation in the school meal program will be achieved by developing a coordinated, comprehensive outreach and promotion plan, and by putting systems in place that ensure the elimination of the stigma of accepting “free” lunch;
- b. A shift from food-based planning to nutrient-based planning (as set forth in USDA guidelines) will be considered when it allows for more flexible food selection;
- c. The nutritional value of the food served will significantly improve upon USDA Dietary Guidelines through provision of nutritious, fresh, tasty, locally grown food that reflects community and cultural diversity;
- d. Mesa Union School will provide students with at least 20 minutes to eat during meal services
- e. Mesa Union will maintain a “Healthy Snacks” and “Healthy Parties” policy, and provide parents and teachers with a list of healthy, affordable food choices for snacks and parties;
- f. Foods offered to students and employees during the day as a snack, an incentive, or in school offices, whether provided by parents or staff, shall be consistent with the goals of the policy;

- g. Mesa Union shall promote celebrations that involve food during the school day to shared monthly birthday celebrations, and should discourage serving foods and beverages that do not meet nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold individually;
- h. The foods used during classes as part of the learning process, for fundraisers that take place at school, for at-school parties, or school-sponsored events, should follow the nutrition guidelines for snacks at school, and should be healthy, safe, and delicious;
- i. Parents and staff are encouraged to provide party snacks that are consistent with the goals of the policy, and to see to it that such items are served after the lunch hour whenever possible;
- j. Foods exposed to potentially harmful food additives and processes, such as bovine growth hormone, irradiation, high fructose corn syrup, excessive salt, artificial flavors and colors, hydrogenated oils (transfats), preservatives, and genetic modification, shall be reduced and/or eliminated;
- k. Mesa Union shall offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, at least two non-fried vegetables and fruit each day;
- l. Unhealthy food or beverage items will not be advertised on school grounds, and fast food and “branded” food items shall not be offered for sale as part of any school meal program or as à la carte items;
- m. Mesa Union will not provide food in vending machines and/or school stores accessible by students.

Tobacco-Free Workplace

A review of the implementation of the wellness policy shows that the following policy goals are being met:

- a. Mesa Union School provides a smoke-free workplace within all buildings owned or leased by the District and follows all requirements, including postings, in accordance with law.

Closing

Mesa Union continues to not only meet the requirements outlined its wellness policy, but continues to identify and implement action steps that improve the overall program to include increase awareness of nutrition education and guidelines, importance of physical activity, and healthy habits, as well as create opportunities for students to experience the benefits of growing and producing fresh vegetables and fruit in one of the many outdoor learning environments on campus.