

CHAWANAKEE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A WELLNESS POLICY JOURNEY

Background

Chawanakee Unified School District (CUSD) is a school district in the Sierra Nevada mountain range in Madera County, California serving over 1,400 students in grades K-12. 49% of the student body participate in the national school lunch program and receive free or reduced-priced meals.

Aiming to prioritize student and staff health and wellness, CUSD is committed to strengthening their Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP). The requirement for LSWPs was established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, and further expanded in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The requirement directs each local education agency (LEA) participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program to develop a wellness policy that promotes the health of students and the school environment. The responsibility of developing a wellness policy is placed at the local level so the unique needs of each school under the jurisdiction of the LEA may be addressed.

To support school districts with updating, strengthening, and developing a more comprehensive LSWP, aligned with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model, Valley Children's Healthcare (VCH) in partnership with the Public Health Institute's Center for Wellness and Nutrition (CWN) created the Schools for a Healthy and Thriving Students: A Wellness Policy Consortium (Consortium). The Consortium was intended to engage school district leaders within Fresno and Madera counties in the Central Valley of California. The Consortium was focused on the initial engagement and commitment of district leaders, particularly superintendents, as they are known to play a critical role in the successful implementation of LSWPs (Asada, Y et al, 2015). CWN strategically designed the initiative to first engage the county superintendents as partners of the work in an effort to gain local superintendents' buy-in.

CUSD, an active participating Consortium district, embraced this opportunity that resulted in a more comprehensive policy. This is their story.

Table 1. Chawanakee USD Student Enrollment by Ethnicity 2019-20

Chawanakee Unified - Census Day Enrollment by Ethnicity(%)	2019-20
American Indian or Alaska Native	7.4 %
Asian	0.7 %
Black or African American	1.0 %
Filipino	0.0 %
Hispanic or Latino	19.6 %
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1 %
None Reported	1.3 %
Two or More Races	5.1 %
White	64.9 %
Total number Censes day enrollment by Ethnicity	1423

Objective

CUSD's objective was to form a Wellness Committee with diverse voices across the district, to revise and strengthen their LSWP, and develop a plan for implementation and monitoring.

Steps

Initial steps began with the superintendent responding to the invitation and agreeing to CUSD's active participation in the Consortium, with the commitment to applying the concepts and skills gained from their participation to strengthen their LSWP.

With a directive from the superintendent and spearheaded by Dr. Margaret Ameel, Director of Human Resources and Special Projects, the Wellness Committee was formed after attending the first two Consortium convenings. The CUSD Wellness Committee had the goal to not only update but strengthen the district LSWP following the WSCC model.

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Dr. Ameel recruited and convened a Wellness Committee, which is comprised of a diverse set of district members, including teachers, parents, administrative leadership, nurses, food service leaders, student service specialists, and most impressively high school students from the district.

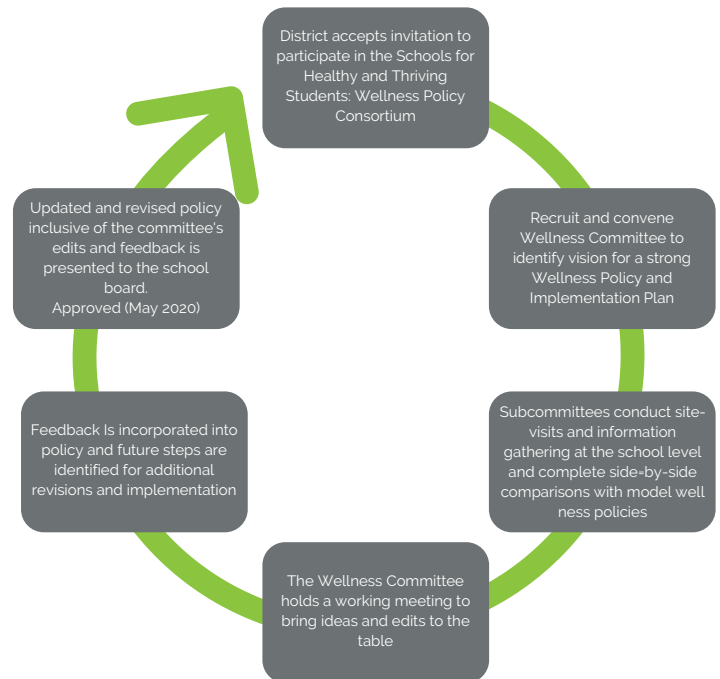
The newly formed, seven-person committee met in January of 2020 for a visioning session after reading through the current policy. They discussed what they wanted to include in their wellness policy and what they hoped it would do for their school district. They used the WSCC model as their roadmap—a strategy that not many districts incorporate, yet one that demonstrates a more comprehensive approach to addressing student, employee, and community health.

The committee divided into subcommittees and tackled site visits and information gathering, which allowed them to see the school environment firsthand and interview key school personnel, such as principals. The committee was able to meet in person only twice before California's statewide stay-at-home order was announced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1. Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model



Figure 2. Wellness Committee's Policy Update and Revision Process



The Wellness Committee continued to meet virtually following the initial shock of school closures. The COVID-19 pandemic put into sharp focus the importance of health and wellness across the WSCC components.

Several key areas of revision were identified by the committee to better support student and employee health:

- nutrition and food services
- physical wellness
- mental health

Each subcommittee reviewed and edited their section. All committee members were encouraged to bring suggestions for other sections to the committee meetings, as well. Once all voices were heard the committee identified common elements to prioritize and other elements to hold onto for future steps. A focus of the committee was to ensure that members were setting ambitious, yet realistic goals for the district.

Once edits were incorporated, the draft was sent out to the committee for final review before sharing with the School Board.

Results

The Wellness Committee's work resulted in a well-rounded policy focused not only on nutrition and physical activity—the minimum requirement for LSWPs but goes into detail of the “other activities that support student wellness,” a requirement rarely addressed comprehensively in districts' LSWPs. CUSDs LSWP incorporates other health and wellness-related components outlined in the WSCC model, such as Social and Emotional Health, Employee Wellness, Health Education, and Community Health Promotion and Family Engagement. Some examples of goals outlined in the policy are included below. The revised policy was approved by the School Board In May 2020.

Figure 3. Example language included in the Chawanakee Unified School District Health and Wellness Policy



Student Social and Emotional Health

Student Goals:

1. Students feeling that school is an emotionally and physically safe environment will increase 10%
2. Students feeling they have a trusted adult to confide in at school will increase 10% (Relationship skills)
3. Fight and physical altercations decrease 10% (Self-management)



Staff Social and Emotional Health

Staff Goals:

1. Multiple measures will demonstrate at least 80% of staff feel valued and connected to the District.
2. Staff daily attendance will be at least 95%
3. The District will retain 85% of staff requested to return



Health Education

Health Education Goals:

1. To fully implement the 2019 Health Education Curriculum Framework for California Public Schools
2. All K-8 Teachers will include a minimum of one lesson a month on Health Education

Key areas of focus for policy changes included using the food services to provide food & beverages program instead of outsourcing for all on-site school events. This allows for more oversight of the nutritional contents of food being served throughout the day across sites. In addition, this generates revenue for the food service department and allows them to build stronger nutrition-focused programs.

The policy changes also included tools for teachers to support healthy alternatives for student rewards, consequences, and celebrations.

Wellness Committee lead, Dr. Ameel shared that resources received through the Consortium were used to update the CUSD policy, including communication templates, sample policies and language, and triennial assessment tools.



"Resources that I get at the consortium meeting are tremendously valuable. I think we would have been lost had we not had access to those resources and even just some of the questions that I was able to reach out and ask people just really made it so much easier to implement. I was able to take the teacher [on the committee] with me to several of the consortium meetings, so he was also hearing firsthand what was being talked about, what was going on and so that was really beneficial." – **Dr. Ameel, Director of Human Resources and Special Projects**



Challenges and Solutions

The CUSD Wellness Committee was convened just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. An initial challenge was scheduling a highly diverse set of district members. One approach to ensuring that all members could equitably participate in meetings was to convene the in-person meetings at the school where the student and teacher committee members were located, as opposed to at the district office. Once schools were closed, attention shifted to respond to COVID-19 response and remote learning; however, the committee remained committed and focused on specific, purposeful tasks.

Future Plans

The CUSD Wellness Committee identified several future steps to maintain momentum of this work.

Communication Strategy

The committee plans to introduce a new communication and dissemination strategy in the coming year. Students and site representatives will present in staff and site council meetings to explain the LSWP process and to obtain feedback. The committee felt that these efforts are strongest coming from schools not the district office.

Continuous LSWP Updates

The committee identified areas on which to focus their LSWP updates in the future. This included additional strengthening of social and emotional learning and mental health support for teachers and students. The committee hopes to continue adding resources for teachers into the policy, to reduce burden and offer tangible solutions. The committee also wants to address community connections in future policy updates.

Expand Wellness Committee Efforts

Finally, the committee plans to expand beyond the core team. The goal is to recruit more students and teacher representatives at the high school level. High school representatives will go out into the middle schools to present the policy efforts and eventually expand to the elementary school-level. The goal is to have the entire district represented in the policy. The CUSD LSWP states that "starting in 2020-21 school year, the District will begin the process of site-based Health and Wellness councils with the goal of developing site specific strategies, activities to foster wellness, and provide ongoing peer support."

Summary

The Schools for Healthy and Thriving Students: Wellness Policy Consortium (Consortium) inspired and provided the resources to support a local district committed to student and employee health. Chawanakee Unified School District offers an example of resiliency in the face of challenges during an unprecedented pandemic year. Despite being met with challenges, the CUSD leadership and Wellness Committee persisted and developed a LSWP process to reach their goal of developing a comprehensive and realistic wellness policy centered on the Whole School, Whole Community, and Whole Child approach.



Photo: Chawanakee Unified School District Wellness Committee, 2020

References

Asada Y, Ziemann M, Chriqui J. Food Service Director Experiences Implementing Revised School Meal Standards: Summary of Qualitative Findings. Chicago, IL: National Wellness Policy Study, Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015, www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts.

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, March 23, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/wsc/WSCC-Model-508.pdf>

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