

# School Wellness Policies Quality among Low-Income California Districts after the 2016 USDA Final Rule

10<sup>th</sup> Annual School Wellness Summit  
Wednesday, October 4, 2023  
Solvang, CA

Speaker: Lynnea LoPresto, PhD, MS, RDN  
Asst. Clinical Professor, School of Health Sciences  
University of the Pacific



# School Wellness Policies Quality among Low-Income California Districts after the 2016 USDA Final Rule

## Authors

**Lynnea M. LoPresto\*, PhD, MS, RDN, Diana L. Cassady, DrPH, Melanie S. Dove, M.P.H, Sc.D.**

For this work all authors were affiliated with the Department of Public Health Sciences, School of Medicine, University of California, Davis.

Lynnea LoPresto and Diana Cassady were supported in part by Interagency Agreement 16-11097 from the Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch, California Department of Public Health.

Melanie Dove was supported by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, National Institutes of Health, through grant number UL1 TR001860 and linked award KL2 TR001859.





SRHS AVID Food Pantry



Gleaning for NUSD

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## SCHOOL WELLNESS PROMOTION

### Our Mission

*The Marin County Office of Education shall promote awareness and interest in wellness education, assist students and families in adopting nutrition and physical activities that support life-long healthy behaviors of individual wellness, and engage in a process with community partners that builds sustainable wellness practices and programs.*

This School Wellness Promotion section of the website provides important information and updates about federal and state school wellness policy requirements as well as evidence-based strategies and resources for teachers, staff, and administrators to engage with community partners in order to implement policies and programs that support sustainable healthy eating and activity environments in schools.

*This project was supported by the **Marin Countywide Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Initiative**. Material review was coordinated by School Wellness Policy Consultant: Lynne Marie LoPresto, MS, RD Update: 6/30/13*

## Pre-PhD Experience

**Overview**

- Marin County Schools Updated Measles Information
- School Health Manual
- School Wellness Promotion**
- Policy Requirements
- Implementation & Assessment
- Public and Community Involvement
- Nutrition Education
- Physical Activity
- Nutrition Guidelines



Bahia Garden Tasting



Physical Activity & Heart Health



Gleaning for NUSD

# Background – Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP)

- Districts with federal nutrition programs must have an updated LSWP to promote nutrition, physical activity, & student wellness.
- Strong and comprehensive policy language shows commitment and improves implementation.



## CA LSWP Evaluation - UC Davis Department of Public Health Sciences

- Collected a sample of 200 LSWPs from websites of low-income-serving California public districts in 2018 (*randomly selected, county-stratified*).
- Evaluated comprehensiveness & strength scores using the WellSAT 3.0
- Assessed district-level factors associated with policy quality using multivariable linear regression.
  - demographic factors, model LSWP adoption, and date of policy adoption

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



# District Sample Characteristics

## Mean district enrollment = 10,500 students

- Similar proportion of small, medium, & large
- ~7% high schools only (grades 9-12) / 93% K-12 or elementary only (grades K-8)
- Nearly 2/3 of students were FRPM-eligible
- 75% had a Non-White majority
- ~70% from urban areas

## ➤ 50% of policies were adopted after the 2016 USDA final rule mandate (only ½ updated)

- Mean policy comprehensiveness score = 65.0/100 \*(range 8 – 94)
- Mean policy strength score = 37.3/100 \*(range 0 - 84)

## ~ 80% adopted a model LSWP (mostly verbatim)

- Most (68.5%) adopted the state model (CSBA)
- 13% adopted a national template (AHG or NANA)
- 18.5% created their own policy without use of a template

# Summary of Key Findings

- No difference in LSWP quality in districts adopting CSBA model vs. an original LSWP
- Adopting a National Model LSWP associated with significantly mean quality scores (13% of districts)
- Update-compliant LSWP significantly stronger (no difference in comprehensiveness)
  - Mean comprehensiveness scores (National Policy):
    - 17.7 points > than original LSWP ( $p < 0.0001$ )
    - 15.3 points > than adopting the CSBA model LSWP ( $p < 0.0001$ )
  - Mean strength scores (National Policy) for “Update Compliant” LSWP :
    - 27.0 points > than original LSWP ( $p < 0.001$ )
    - 22.8 points > than adopting the CSBA model LSWP ( $P < 0.001$ )
  - Mean strength scores (National Policy) for “Update Non-Compliant LSWP
    - 11.7 points > than original LSWP ( $p = 0.24$ )
    - 11.3 points > than adopting the CSBA model LSWP ( $P = 0.21$ )
- District size (> 1,000 students) associated with higher scores
  - Mean comprehensiveness in larger districts was 5 points higher ( $p = 0.024$ )
  - Mean strength in larger districts was 7.2 points higher [but only in update compliant policies ( $p = 0.031$ )]

# Conclusions

- Low district-level engagement in LSWP development
    - High template use and “low/average” quality scores
  - Most districts adopted a model policy (primarily CSBA)
    - At LEAST make sure it’s the latest version!
    - Few used the higher quality national policies
  - Small districts may need more support
- 
- Research needed specifically about districts with strong nutrition wellness program & LSWP
  - Commonly Recommended Strategies to ↑ engagement
    - Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC)
    - Incorporation LSWP into Local Control Funding Formula
      - Example: San Diego Unified School District



# Ideas to ↑ Engagement in LSWP Development







## Identify Local Pressing Problems that Relate to LSWP

### All of the following can be linked back to LSWP

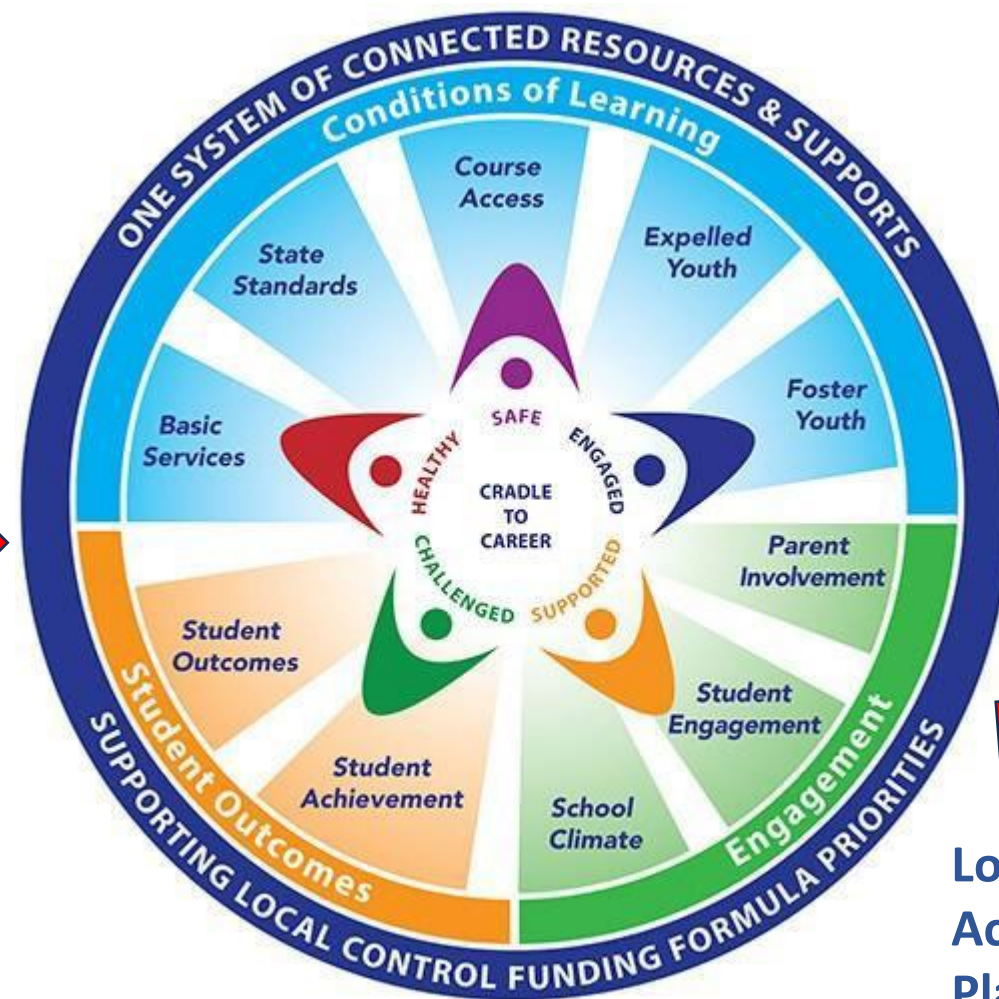
- **Learning**
  - ✓ links with eating breakfast, food quality and physical activity...
- **Absenteeism**
  - ✓ school breakfast increases attendance...
- **Physical Health**
  - ✓ diet quality/allergies/special needs and physical activity...
- **Climate Emergencies**
  - ✓ heat emergencies/hydration & water access, school closures...
- **Sustainability**
  - ✓ local food/farm to school, composting/waste management...

# Align LSWP with Other School-based Frameworks to ↑ Engagement

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model

Local Control Funding Formula

Local Priorities



Local Control  
Accountability  
Plan (LCAP)

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/lcff1sys-resources.asp>



# Are LSWPs limited to mandates adequate to change health behavior?

Would you drink out of this fountain?



HHFKA (2012)

“Schools shall provide access to free, potable water in the food service area during meal times in accordance with Education Code 38086 and 42 USC 1758, *and shall encourage students' consumption of water by educating them about the health benefits of water and by serving water in an appealing manner.* “



# 2019 School Meal Survey Results (2014-15 data)

49% offered drinking fountains within cafeteria (36% within 20 ft. of cafeteria)

1/4 offered water dispensers or coolers within cafeteria

2% offered bottled water at no charge

3% offered bottle refilling stations






School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study | Food and Nutrition Service (usda.gov)

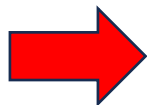
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>







This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

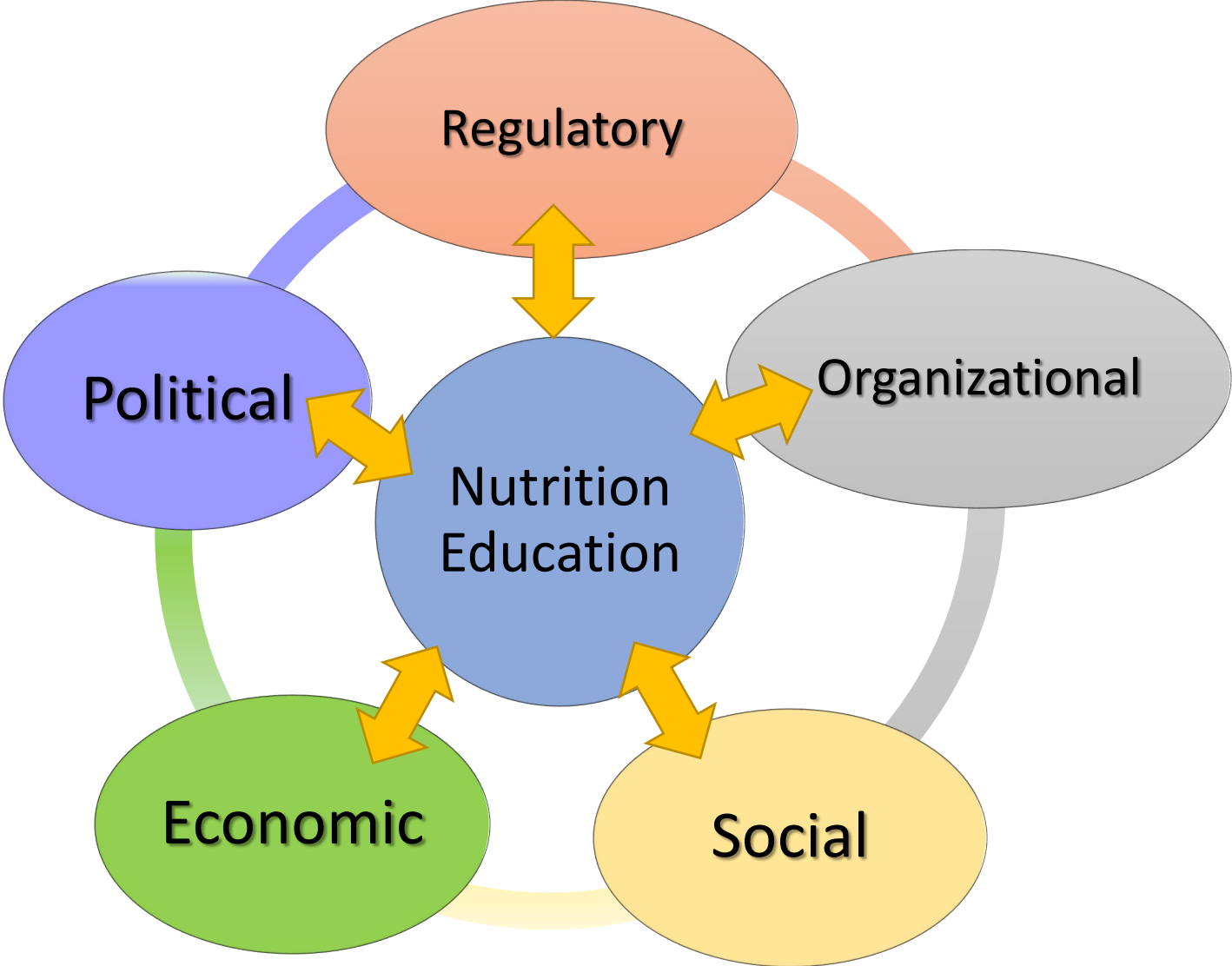
# Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals - WellSat 3.0

 SM1	Assures compliance with USDA nutrition standards for reimbursable school meals.	
SM2	Addresses access to the USDA School Breakfast Program.	
 SM3	District takes steps to protect the privacy of students who qualify for free or reduced priced meals.	
SM4	Addresses how to handle feeding children with unpaid meal balances without stigmatizing them.	
SM5	Specifies how families are provided information about determining eligibility for free/reduced priced meals.	
SM6	Specifies strategies to increase participation in school meal programs.	
SM7	Addresses the amount of "seat time" students have to eat school meals.	
 SM8	Free drinking water is available during meals.	
 SM9	Ensures annual training for food and nutrition services staff in accordance with USDA Professional Standards.	
 SM10	Addresses purchasing local foods for the school meals program.	
<i>Subtotal for Section 2: NS and SM</i>	<b>Comprehensiveness Score:</b> Count the number of items rated as "1" or "2." Divide this number by the total number of items, excluding those that are not applicable (N/A). Multiply by 100.	
	<b>Strength Score:</b> Count the number of items rated as "2." Divide this number by the total number of items, excluding those that are not applicable (N/A). Multiply by 100.	



 Federal Requirement	 Farm to School	 CSPAP	 WellSAT 3.0 Item
---	---	---	--

# Higher Quality Policies include Evidence-Based Implementation Strategies as “Policy”





## Effective Drinking Water Access means:

- Access to safe drinking water in close proximity to use
- Maintenance condition, appearance and accessibility of the water source (All day – not just at lunch)
- Adequate water flow
- Access to cups or refillable water bottles for students
- Ensure water education/promotion material near water source
- See WaterWorks Guide to best practices for schools

- <http://www.waterinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WaterWorksGuide20141.pdf>
- [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/features/water\\_access.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/features/water_access.htm)



<https://ucanr.edu/sites/NewNutritionPolicyInstitute/files/348566.pdf>

# Improving LSWP Language Supports Commitment & On-the-ground Implementation

Comprehensiveness score captures the extent to which recommended content areas are covered in the policy.

Strength score describes how strongly the content is stated.

Supplemental WellSAT 3.0 – Policy Scoring Tool  
<https://www.wellsat.org/>

## 0 - Not Mentioned

The item is not included in the text of the policy.

---

## 1 - Weak Statement

Assign a rating of "1" when the item is mentioned, but

- The policy will be hard to enforce because the statement is vague, unclear, or confusing.
- Statements are listed as goals, aspirations, suggestions, or recommendations.
- There are loopholes in the policy that weaken enforcement of the item.
- The policy mentions a future plan to act without specifying when the plan will be established.

**Words often used in statements rated as a "1" are: may, can, could, should, might, encourage, suggest, urge, some, partial, make an effort, and try.**

---

## 2 - Meets or Exceeds Expectations

Assign a rating of "2" when the item is mentioned and it is clear that the policy makers are committed to making the item happen because:

- Strong language is used to indicate that action or regulation is required
- The item is described with concrete plans or strategies for implementation






**Words often used in statements rated as a "2" are: shall, will, must, have to, insist, require, all, total, comply and enforce.**

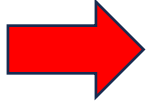
# Begin by Comparing your LSWP with WellSat 3.0 Components (Example School Meals Section)





Universal School Meals

Common FSD Concern

Relates to Farm to School

 SM1	Assures compliance with USDA nutrition standards for reimbursable school meals.	
SM2	Addresses access to the USDA School Breakfast Program.	
 SM3	District takes steps to protect the privacy of students who qualify for free or reduced priced meals.	
SM4	Addresses how to handle feeding children with unpaid meal balances without stigmatizing them.	
SM5	Specifies how families are provided information about determining eligibility for free/reduced priced meals.	
SM6	Specifies strategies to increase participation in school meal programs.	
SM7	Addresses the amount of "seat time" students have to eat school meals.	
 SM8	Free drinking water is available during meals.	
 SM9	Ensures annual training for food and nutrition services staff in accordance with USDA Professional Standards.	
 SM10	Addresses purchasing local foods for the school meals program.	
<i>Subtotal for Section 2: NS and SM</i>	<b>Comprehensiveness Score:</b> Count the number of items rated as "1" or "2." Divide this number by the total number of items, excluding those that are not applicable (N/A). Multiply by 100.	
	<b>Strength Score:</b> Count the number of items rated as "2." Divide this number by the total number of items, excluding those that are not applicable (N/A). Multiply by 100.	



 Federal Requirement	 Farm to School	 CSPAP	 WellSAT 3.0 Item
---	--	---	--



# Review all 6 LSWP Required Sections as Relevant

1. Nutrition Education
2. Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals
3. Nutrition Standards for Competitive and Other Foods and Beverages
4. Physical Education and Activity
5. Wellness Promotion and Marketing
6. Implementation, Evaluation and Communication



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

**“An effective school health program can be one of the single most cost-effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health.”**

-World Health Organization

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-promoting-schools#tab=tab\\_2](https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-promoting-schools#tab=tab_2)



Questions?