

# Wellness Advisory Committee

Recommendations  
and

Report to the Community and Student Affairs committee of the School Board

April 8, 2010

*The Portland Public Schools Board of Education adopted Board Policy 3.60.060-P (Student Wellness through Nutrition and Physical Activity) on June 12, 2006. The District is committed to promoting life-long wellness by supporting school environments with excellent and consistent nutrition, nutrition education, physical education, and physical activity. The District is committed to providing curricula and school environments that promote the consumption of foods of maximum nutritional density and student participation in healthful, regularly scheduled physical activity.*

## **Introduction**

Wellness is integral to every department in Portland Public Schools (“District”). Wellness supports healthy and equitable communities and creates a foundation for academic achievement. The Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC) was created by Board Policy 3.60.060-P. The Superintendent has appointed members that represent teachers, District staff, parents, Portland-area businesses, health care organizations, and community partners. While “wellness” is unarguably an important matter for the District, the process and methods of forwarding wellness initiatives and messaging are not so clear. The committee has been meeting throughout the 2009-2010 school year and has focused its work in three specific areas related to forwarding wellness initiatives:

- A. **Wellness Communications** – Review and make recommendations to improve wellness related communications throughout the District including policy awareness and compliance.
- B. **School-based Wellness Committees** – Evaluate the current state of wellness committees throughout the District and provide recommendations based on this information.
- C. **Wellness Survey Review** – Assess the results of the initial survey conducted in 2008 and refine the required second survey to be distributed in 2010.

To accomplish these tasks, the WAC divided into three sub-committees, one for each area of focus. Although the committee was broken into smaller groups, it worked collectively as one cohesive group with individual areas of focus based on sub-committee membership. One common theme that underlies any effort to forward wellness initiatives within the District is effective communications.

## Wellness Communications

The Wellness Communications sub-committee recognizes that an agile and on-point communications strategy is vital for implementing and advancing the Portland Public Schools Wellness Policy. Inconsistent and incomplete messaging across various stakeholders significantly impacts the forwarding of wellness initiatives. The insular thinking that relegated wellness topics to a “Nutrition Services Department” matter have stifled broader recognition and compliance of the Wellness Policy. Today it is becoming more readily accepted that wellness matters are no longer an issue for one department, but rather a systemic issue that impacts virtually every department and stakeholder in the District. A clear, consistent, and easily understandable message that can cross departmental lines is much needed.

The Wellness Advisory Committee recommends that the District:

1. Develop and direct wellness messaging to
  - a. The Board of Education
  - b. Senior leadership
  - c. Schools: Via principals, health nurses, school wellness committees, cafeteria leads, PTAs, PE and health teachers, site councils, etc.
  - d. Community partners of PPS with a vested interest in promoting the Wellness Policy
  - e. Inter-school: Via cluster meetings, principal leadership development, teacher professional development
  - f. The community at-large: Via civic engagement, by partnering with organizations committed to health and health equity in the District
  - g. Employees: At the BESC, in all departments, and throughout the District
  - h. Families and Communities:
  
2. Communicate Wellness Policy directives through:
  - a. Social networking web sites
  - b. PPS web site
  - c. Eat. Think. Grow. web site
  - d. Email, PULSE, Administrators Connection, email blasts, etc.
  - e. School websites, newsletters, and newspapers (including neighborhood/community newspapers)
  - f. The biennial School Wellness Survey
  - g. Meetings with community, PTAs, principals, District employees, etc.
  
3. Educate its community on:
  - a. Wellness Policy and Administrative Directive and resources for their implementation
  - b. Best practices for wellness at the school level
  - c. Resources for information and funding (grants and other free money)
  - d. School menus and Nutrition Services initiatives
  - e. Wellness-related Board of Education actions
  - f. Wellness successes in the District and at schools
  - g. Departmental resources: FAM (Health & Safety), Nutrition Services, and others

## **School-based Wellness Committees**

The sub-committee's primary focus was to evaluate the current state of wellness committees throughout the District and provide recommendations based on this information. The sub-committee hopes to determine the percentage of schools that have wellness committees and provide recommendations to foster their growth and sustainability.

The School Wellness sub-committee has initiated a process to collect information from schools about their wellness committees. We recently requested information about school wellness committees via the weekly Admin Connection. Our following recommendations are based on the little response we have received from administration.

Our committee recommends that the School Board implement a strategic plan in order to increase the number of wellness committees within PPS. The committee would recommend schools appoint a key staff member to lead wellness committees at schools. In addition, the committee has found a lack of guidance for existing school wellness committees. The committee recommends the creation of a support/communication system for volunteers working on these issues. The committee suggests providing examples of activities or campaigns that school wellness committees could take action on such as:

- Trauma Nurses Talk Tough
- Poster Competition
- Health and Wellness Contests
- District Challenges

## **Wellness Survey Review**

In 2006 the Wellness Advisory Committee completed the review of the PPS Wellness Policy and the Administrative Directives (AD), which were approved by the District. The AD required that schools be surveyed to determine compliance with the Policy. A subcommittee, consisting of members of WAC and Stand for Children (STAND, a grassroots child advocacy organization focusing on public education), developed a survey based on the CDC model and focused on the PPS Wellness Policy and AD.

After approval by the District, that survey was administered by the PPS Office of Research & Evaluation in 2008. The overall response rate was 70 percent. The results may have been shared with the School Board, and summary data were posted on the web, but specific information was not returned to the schools.

The Policy and AD require that the survey be administered biannually. The sub-committee assessed the results of the initial survey and refined the required second survey. The overarching strategy was to decrease the response burden on individual schools, and focus questions on items that might give direction for additional activities and encourage long term goal setting for schools. We also formatted a proposed cover email that emphasized the goal is to identify how we can help schools meet the goals of the Policy and AD.

The WAC Survey sub-committee considered each item. Several retained items were reworded to simplify the responses, and some follow up items were added that might provide information to guide ways to assist the schools. We spoke with Kristy Obbink to better understand the process of the prior and planned survey. The revised 2010 survey and cover email were reviewed and approved by the entire WAC in February 2010.

In early March, the survey and a draft cover email from the Superintendent were forwarded to Ms. Obbink. Ms. Obbink's plans were to request a cover letter from the Superintendent, and review the survey with the PPS Research & Evaluation staff and work with them to administer it online and collect results.

The results will allow indexing the current status of PPS "wellness" and whether it has changed in the last two years. Results would be shared with the School Board and posted on the new PPS Wellness website (to be developed this spring/summer). The sub-committee believes that each school also should receive a summary of their responses and a de-identified summary data from the schools in their category (K-8, HS, etc.).

### **Summary of Recommendations**

1. Identify the District administrator charged with implementing the District's Wellness Policy and strategy.
2. Support that administrator in creating an internal District Wellness Committee charged with the advancement, implementation, and assessment of the Wellness Policy District-wide. This committee should report to the Superintendent annually and should include representatives from the following departments:
  - a. Athletics
  - b. Communications and Community Engagement
  - c. Curriculum
  - d. Facilities and Asset Management (Health & Safety)
  - e. Nutrition Services
  - f. Office of Family/Community Engagement & Partnerships
  - g. Office of School Modernization
  - h. School Health Services
  - i. Student Services
  - j. Student and Academic Support
  - k. At least one Deputy Superintendent
  - l. One Wellness Advisory Committee member
3. Develop and disseminate clear, consistent, and easily understandable wellness messaging that crosses departmental and stakeholder lines consistent with the Wellness Policy.
4. Implement a strategic plan in order to increase the number of wellness committees within the Portland Public School system.

## **Conclusion**

June 2010 will mark four years since the *Wellness through Nutrition and Physical Activity* policy was adopted by the School Board. Certainly progress has been made during this time, but it is readily apparent that the wellness movement has yet to reach a critical mass within the District. The WAC suggests that now may be the opportune time to take “Wellness” to the next stage. The committee is aware that there are well-intended initiatives ongoing, but a lack of district-wide coordination limits the impact on students and restricts District progress. Wellness, however, transcends boundaries and is of fundamental importance in the health, well-being, and academic achievement of our students. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to connect students, schools, departments, and community stakeholders. The foundation was set with the adoption of the policy and now is the time for the District to fully embrace “Wellness”.

*Respectfully submitted,*

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