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School Wellness Policies Key to Ensuring New York Schools Adopt Healthier Nutrition and Exercise Standards

Schools with Wellness Policies More than Four Times As Likely to Implement Physical Education Programs

Hartford, Conn. – In some of New York State’s highest-need schools, strong school district wellness policies significantly increased the likelihood that schools implemented healthy physical activity and nutrition practices, according to new research from the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

New York’s [Creating Healthy Schools and Communities](#) (CHSC) program is an initiative to increase access to healthy, affordable foods, and opportunities for physical activity in some of the state’s high-need school districts. As part of the program, schools worked with district-level officials to assess their written wellness policies using the [WellSAT](#), an online written wellness policy assessment measure. In addition, the team measured whether or not schools were implementing nutrition and physical activity policies.

Study findings indicated that schools within districts with strong policies were nearly twice as likely to implement overall wellness practices compared to schools in districts with weak policies or no policies at all.

Additional key findings of the study include:

- The likelihood of implementing Physical Activity and Physical Education practices overall was 4.4 times higher in schools in districts with strong policy language in those domains compared to schools in districts with weak policy language.
- For Nutrition standards and practices, the likelihood of implementation was 1.6 times higher for schools in districts with strong nutrition policies compared to those in districts with weak ones.
- Elementary schools were significantly more likely than middle and high schools to implement nutrition standards for foods and beverages.
- Elementary schools were more likely than middle and high schools to offer regular physical activity breaks for students.

“It’s good news that district wellness policies are supporting efforts by these New York schools to create healthy environments for children and staff,” said Rebecca Boehm, the study’s lead author, former postdoctoral fellow at the Rudd Center and current economist at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “However, it is striking that elementary schools were more likely than middle and high schools to

implement wellness practices. Future work is needed to ensure that all schools within a district are implementing best practices.”

“Due to COVID-19, students across the country are spending more time than ever in front of screens,” said Marlene Schwartz, co-author and Director of the Rudd Center. “We encourage families to adopt the same best practices of schools: provide frequent physical activity breaks and offer children healthy meals and snacks to support their physical health during these challenging times. Parents may find these resources helpful:

Nutrition Resources

- [Quick, Healthy Lunches](#)
- [Healthy at Home Toolkit](#)
- [Simply, Healthy Recipes](#)

Physical Activity Resources

- [Pro Athlete Fitness Break Videos](#)
- [25 Ways to Get Moving at Home](#)
- [Online PE Guidance](#)

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About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a multidisciplinary center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org, follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter, and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter.