

Let's Go Local: Recommendations for Linking Locally Grown Food, School Gardens, and Joint-Use Agreements to School Wellness Policies

The Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition programs in 2004 included a provision that requires each educational agency participating in a federal school meal program to establish a local school wellness policy. Districts have begun to examine the impact of these policies in improving the health and wellness of students. The law requires that these policies must, at a minimum:

- I. Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.
- II. Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the school day.
- III. Ensure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the Secretary of Agriculture.
- IV. Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.
- V. Involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.

Every five years, the USDA School Meals Initiative (SMI), in partnership with the California Department of Education, is required to conduct a formal review to monitor each district's compliance with the established nutrition and physical activity wellness policy.

Using These Policy Recommendations

This resource was developed to help districts more readily integrate wellness into core activities for a more holistic and sustainable approach to school wellness. These recommendations specifically promote policy language that supports local purchasing, farm-to-school activities, school gardens, and joint use agreements.

Gardens serve broad and multifaceted roles in the school environment, and when made accessible to the surrounding neighborhood, they serve the community as well. Gardens offer experiential learning opportunities and a place for students to learn about the food system, cultivate food, engage in physical activity, and taste the most local food possible. They also offer an interactive learning lab for math, science, literature arts, and other core curricula. Fostering the involvement of after-school programs, clubs, and community partners in the care of school gardens expands the nutrition and physical activity benefits and can greatly enhance garden sustainability.



Wellness Policy Highlight:

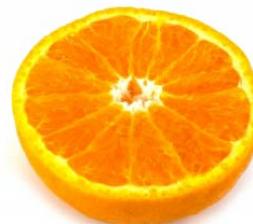
Albert Einstein Elementary School



Albert Einstein Elementary School has taken care to incorporate language specific to gardening into its policy's Nutrition Education guidelines. Instituting standards similar to those listed below is an integral way to teach students about how food affects their health and future.

The following garden language was adopted by San Diego Unified School District's Albert Einstein Academy (AEA):

- AEA should maintain an instructional garden (tilled ground, raised bed, container, nearby park, community garden, farm, or lot), of sufficient size 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 and core curriculum, and articulated with state standards.
- AEA encourages staff to integrate hands-on experiences in gardens and kitchen classrooms, and enrichment activities such as farm field studies, farmers' markets tours, and visits to community gardens, with core curriculum so that students begin to understand how food reaches the table and the implications that has for their health and future.



Using These Policy Recommendations *(continued)*

The term *joint-use agreement* refers to two or more entities, such as a school and a city or nonprofit organization, formally or informally agreeing to share indoor and outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields, and gardens. These partnerships help schools and communities collaborate in maintaining facilities, building investment in programs that support nutrition and physical activity, and sustaining resources that serve both the neighborhood and the school.

Farm-to-school activities promote the inclusion of locally produced (or school garden-grown) products into school meals or other food sales. Farm-to-school activities are gaining popularity across the county as a means of enhancing food quality, conducting nutrition education, raising school funds, and teaching students about the food system. Incorporating strategies for using local or garden-grown produce into a school's meal program can help pique the interest of students in nutrition, teach life skills, and improve the physical and fiscal health of the local community.

The following policy recommendations provide a menu of options; pick those that make the most sense for your district. The policies can be used individually or all together to help create a healthy school environment. Please refer to the resources section for more information and additional tools on developing a comprehensive wellness policy.

Model Language for School Wellness Policy

Joint-Use Policy Highlight:

Denver Public Schools



For over a decade, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG), Slow Food Denver, and Learning Landscapes have been collaborating with Denver Public Schools (DPS) to establish innovative joint-use agreements that give community members a way to contribute to the sustainability of school gardens and associated education programs. The collaboration has manifested itself at dozens of elementary schools. These agreements have many mutual benefits, including the following:

- Since school sites often have excess land, DUG is using it to increase the number of community gardens in Denver; this in turn increases access to fresh, locally-grown produce, both for schools and the community.
- The practice of having community members gardening onsite offers school staff support in managing and sustaining the gardens. Further, community gardeners often offer their expertise to assist in gardening and nutrition education for DPS students.
- Sometimes, DUG and DPS collaborate to attract funders to invest in the school and community. Fundraisers in Denver have yielded awards from businesses such as Whole Foods Market and Chipotle.

Wellness Policy Requirement I: *Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.*

The following model language strengthens support for school gardens, joint-use, and farm-to-school through nutrition education.

Nutrition Education

- Each school shall establish a school garden to be used as an outdoor classroom for nutrition, science, history, culture, and other lessons.
- Staff shall integrate experiential education activities—such as planting, harvesting, cooking demonstrations, farm and farmers' market tours—into existing curricula at all grade levels as a means to enhance student investment and understanding of health, environment, and the food system.
- Nutrition education messages from the classroom will be modeled in the cafeteria and across campus by offering garden- and local farm-grown food whenever possible within the reimbursable federal meal program, a la carte sales, vending machines, student-run vending programs, and after-school/extracurricular programs.
- School food service, in partnership with other school departments and community organizations, will creatively market and promote locally-produced food to students, through such activities as:
 - sampling of locally grown items, including school garden grown-produce, in the school cafeteria through the USDA meal program
 - developing cafeteria themes relating to local farms, farmers, and products grown seasonally in the region
 - developing creative campus fundraisers based on healthy food items like cooking competitions, farm stands, or take-home family produce boxes that integrate produce grown on local farms or from the school garden where appropriate.

Model Language for School Wellness Policy *(continued)*



Physical Activity

- The district recognizes that school gardens and farm visits offer opportunities for physical activity and agricultural education by engaging students in such activities as planting, harvesting, and weeding. Teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of these physical activity opportunities during the school day and through after-school activities.
- In many communities, schools provide the only open space for recreation, physical activity, and gardening. Schools are encouraged to adopt policies, practices, and joint-use agreements that support community use of outdoor facilities before, during, and after the school day as a means of improving community health and public safety.

Other School-Based Activities

Promote community involvement and support through joint-use agreements that allow community members to help maintain, sustain, and support school resources, including joint use gardens (i.e., community gardens on school property).

Wellness Policy Requirement II: *Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during school day.*

- Meals served within the federally reimbursable meal program will be designed to feature fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods from local sources to the greatest extent possible.
- Schools are encouraged to offer locally-grown food, including items from a school garden, at every location on the school site where food is sold and in all school-sponsored events and activities.

Wellness Policy Requirement III: *Ensure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the Secretary of Agriculture.*

- The School Food Services Director will review this policy and ensure that the policies are not less restrictive than those set by the Secretary of Agriculture or state law.

Wellness Policy Requirement IV: *Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.*

Evaluation of farm-to-school programs should include the effects of including locally sourced farm products in the school meal programs as well as the effects of any in-class or experiential education programs.

The nutrition and financial aspects should be evaluated, as well as the knowledge gained as a result of the overall farm-to-school program. Some possible indicators/methods include:

- the percentage of food purchased from local sources (including the school garden)
- the budgetary impact of increasing local purchases
- the impact of local purchasing on participation in the school meal program
- qualitative pre- and post-studies on what students have learned about healthy eating and local, seasonal eating
- persistence of school gardens as an outdoor classroom and afterschool activity, and the impact of joint-use gardens on school enrollment, garden persistence, and community volunteerism at schools

Farm to School Highlight:

Crawford High School



San Diego Unified School District in partnership with the International Rescue Committee has fostered activities that have led to the development of a Garden-to-Cafeteria program at Crawford High School.

Here are some of this program's successes:

- Students grow crops in the school garden for the cafeteria's salad bar. Radishes, featured in Fall 2010, were grown organically and nourished by compost made from leftover fresh vegetables from Crawford's salad bar. The yield was enough to use in 3 school salad bars.
- The Garden-to-Cafeteria program is supported by a number of other school programs, such as media and marketing clubs, math, science, computer technology, journalism, video arts and more. A student in the Multimedia and Visual Arts School designed the sign above to advertise the radishes cultivated in the school garden and used in the cafeteria salad bar.
- The Food Services Department hopes to pay full market price for the garden-grown food as the program expands. Rewarding land stewardship and healthy eating with cash will encourage business acumen, entrepreneurship, garden maintenance and further, will instill Farm-to-School values into SDUSD children and schools.



Model Language for School Wellness Policy *(continued)*

Wellness Policy Requirement V: *Involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.*

The wellness policy committee should involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy. Representatives from the local agricultural community and food and nutrition professionals could be key members of the committee; they may be farmers, representatives from organizations that represent farmers, farmers market representatives, agricultural industry representatives, representatives from community organizations that work to promote local foods, public health professionals, chefs, nutritionists, and health educators.

Resources

Local Resources

- San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative: www.OurCommunityOurKids.org
- Tierra Miguel Foundation: www.TierraMiguelFarm.org
- California Project LEAN: www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org

Farm-to-School

- National Farm-to-School Network: www.farmtoschool.org
- Community Food Security Coalition Farm-to-School Program: www.foodsecurity.org/farm_to_school.html
- "Linking Farms with Schools: A Guide to Understanding Farm-to-School Programs for Schools, Farmers, and Organizers," available at www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html
- "Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids: Evaluating the Barriers and Opportunities for Farm-to-School," available at www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html
- "Rethinking School Lunch Guide," available at www.ecoliteracy.org/rethinking/rsi.html
- "Feeding Young Minds: Hands-on Farm-to-School Education Programs," www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html

School Garden

- San Diego Master Gardeners School Garden Program: <http://www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/schools.php>
- California School Garden Network: <http://www.csgn.org/>
- California Foundation for Ag in the Classroom: <http://www.cfaitc.org/>
- National Gardening Association: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>

Joint Use

- Joint Use: <http://www.jointuse.org/home/>
- Center for Cities and Schools: <http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/joint-use.html>
- Public Health Law and Policy, NPLAN "Model Joint Use Agreement Resources": <http://www.phlplnet.org/childhood-obesity/products/nplan-joint-use-agreements>



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