

+Montana School Wellness in Action

Healthy School Environments Fuel Better Learners

Issue: April 2018

Research shows healthy students are better learners. While many ingredients go into making healthy kids, two of the most important are access to nutritious food and regular physical activity. Since 2004, school wellness policies have been required for every Montana school participating in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs, like the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The school district's wellness policy is the foundation for creating a healthy, supportive learning environment and sustaining it for the future. It addresses four key components which are 1) gathering stakeholder input, 2) communicating the policy to staff, students, parents and the community, 3) assessing and goal setting, and 4) evaluating progress. Utilize the [Montana School Wellness in Action Policy Implementation Guide](#) for strategies in creating a healthy school campus.

Stakeholder input is best achieved through maintaining an active school wellness/health committee. A School Wellness Committee is a core group working to ensure that the elements of school wellness are implemented, communicated, and evaluated. The committee is made up of a variety of stakeholders including an administrator, health, family and consumer science or classroom teacher, foodservice director, health professional, parent, student council representative, and community member. This committee usually meets a minimum of 3-4 times a year depending on the yearly goal's timeline. It can be a standalone committee or a sub-committee from another larger committee (like a school MBI Team). It is the most important factor to sustaining support for prioritizing student health.

For more information:

<http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/wellness/index.html>

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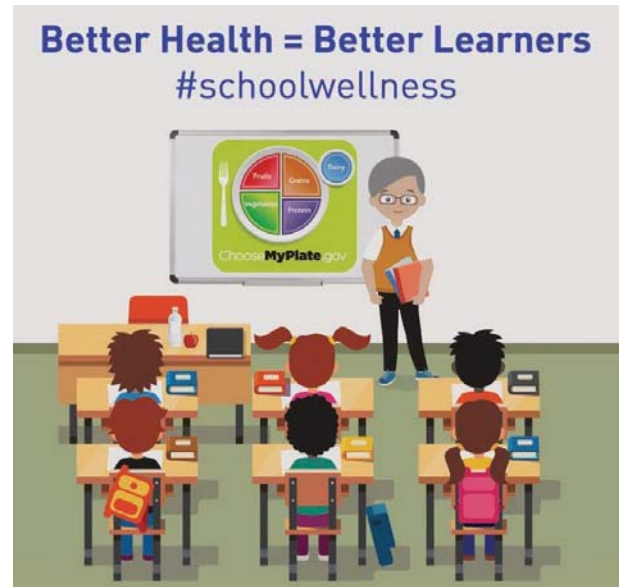


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Montana Schools Step Up to the Plate in Creating Healthy Learning Environments by:

Ensuring multiple stakeholders (administrators, foodservice professionals, teachers, parents, students, etc.) are involved in creating a healthy school environment by maintaining a [school wellness committee](#)

Expanding [school breakfast programs](#) to include grab and go options, second chance breakfasts, and breakfast served in the classroom

Implementing a [Recess before Lunch](#) schedule to allow kids a more relaxed lunch experience

Participating in [Montana Harvest of the Month](#) to introduce kids to new tastes and flavors and learn about Montana agriculture

Creating [Smarter Lunchrooms](#) that increase the convenience and visibility of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and unflavored milk to nudge students to make the healthiest choice

Implementing [classroom physical activity breaks](#) active recess, and [fun fitness fundraisers](#) to ensure kids are given multiple opportunities to be active

+ Montana Team Nutrition Program

More information available at www.montana.edu/teamnutrition

Montana Team Nutrition Program is housed at Montana State University and works in cooperation with the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider.



Have You Heard About Recess Before Lunch?

Recess Before Lunch (RBL) allows students to play (go to recess) first, and then eat (have lunch). It's an effective approach to School Wellness that **helps students eat well and perform well in school**. It's a win-win for students and classroom teachers. Nearly one-third (32%) of Montana schools currently use Recess Before Lunch scheduling for these reasons:

- ✓ Improved student behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom and in afternoon classrooms.
- ✓ Improved lunchroom atmosphere.
- ✓ Students eat better and waste less food.

Learn more about Recess Before Lunch with Montana's [Recess Before Lunch Guide](#) (updated in 2018). In it you will find sample school schedules, planning tips, and ideas to optimize both recess time and lunch time for greater learning.

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Cooking Up Healthy Kids with Harvest of the Month

Beets and kale are not the first foods that come to mind when picturing a school-child's lunch tray, but through the Montana Harvest of the Month program they have become regulars on menus across Montana.

"My biggest surprise: I made beets, baked like potatoes and the kiddos absolutely went wild about them and I have to make it constantly now," said Renata Nichols, Head Cook at Alder school in Montana.

Montana Harvest of the Month, funded through a Team Nutrition Training Grant, introduces a new, locally-grown food to students in participating schools each month through an educational activity, taste test and school meal or snack. In February, the food was beets and despite staff hesitancy, the brightly colored vegetable has become a lunch time favorite.

"People who we talk to have indicated that it does make a difference in terms of students being willing to try new foods," said Aubree Roth, Montana Farm to School Coordinator at Montana Team Nutrition. "That's a first step because that's a big barrier, they are just afraid to try new things."

In the 2016-17 school-year, 130 schools participated in the program statewide, with 10 participating in an evaluation component for Team Nutrition. This year that number has grown to 137 schools including the largest district in the state, with 12 performing evaluations.

During the pilot study, 242 students from 10 schools completed pre and post food preference surveys that showed a significant difference in their preference to eat four of the Harvest of the Month foods: whole grains, beets, winter squash, and lentils.

"The #1 success for the kitchen is being introduced to new menu ideas and trying new things. Many of our Harvest of the Month experimental recipes have stayed on the menu even when they aren't that month's feature," said Jay Stagg, Food Service Director from Whitefish Public Schools. "The #1 success for the students has to be all the cooking classes. Many students have commented that it was one of their favorite activities all year."

But the program doesn't only benefit students. "There are changes both on the staff and student side," Roth said. "It is so exciting to see the foodservice staff stretching and reaching for this thing that is an extra task. It brings the positive feedback and life back into the cafeteria."

Montana's Team Nutrition plans to continue to expand the program and by 2019 incorporate all five food groups and offer events at summer feeding programs. Contact: Aubree Roth, Montana Team Nutrition, aubree.roth@montana.edu, (406) 994-5996.

More information and registration at: www.montana.edu/mtharvestofthemoth

