



# SCHOOL WELLNESS GUIDE

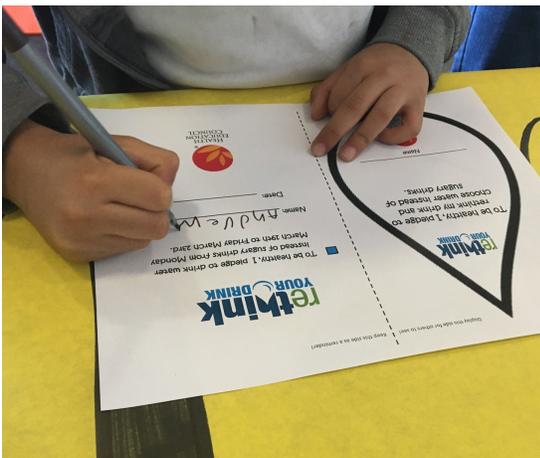
*Provided by the Health Education Council*



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This Wellness Guide provides K-12th grade teachers and staff with information, tips, lessons, activities, and resources to incorporate health practices and education into the classroom. This wellness guide covers student nutrition, physical activity, and mental health and aims to assist teachers in supporting and improving students' overall well-being. Utilizing the information and resources provided in the guide will help bring student wellness to the forefront of the classroom after an especially challenging school year and during the transition back to in-person learning because of the COVID-19.

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# SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY

## What is a Wellness Policy?

A Wellness Policy is a set of guidelines and requirements to support student health and well-being.

Wellness Policies are federally mandated for all school districts participating in national school meal programs. They include:

- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the day
- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based student wellness activities
- A plan for measuring implementation of the policy

Every three years, schools must assess compliance and progress made in attaining goals of the policy and make the assessment available to the public.<sup>1</sup>

## What is the purpose of a Wellness Policy?

A Wellness Policy serves several different purposes including:

- To promote and prioritize student wellness.
- To provide a learning environment that supports student health and well being at all schools in the district.
- To prevent and reduce childhood obesity.
- To ensure school meal nutrition guidelines meet federal standards.



A Wellness Policy is an important tool in promoting student wellness, preventing and reducing childhood obesity, and assuring that school meal nutrition guidelines meet federal standards.<sup>2</sup>

## How can you support the Wellness Policy?

- Learn about your school district's Wellness Policy; find and read your district's policy online by searching your district name + "Wellness Policy".
- Join your district's Wellness Committee to learn more about local efforts to promote student wellness.
- Promote the Wellness Policy and your school's wellness practices.
- Use the policy as a platform to promote student wellness projects you want to implement.<sup>3</sup>
- Celebrate birthdays and holidays with healthy foods or with non-food related activities.
- Read this guide to find tips, strategies, and tools to support your students' health and well-being.<sup>3</sup>

# MENTAL HEALTH

This section of the guide shares the importance of including mental health education in schools and also provides strategies to support student resilience. Taking time to support student mental health and well-being is an important part of the wellness policy and can help cultivate a safe, supportive, and connected learning environment.

## Why is mental health important?

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have widespread repercussions on the mental health and livelihood of students, staff, teachers, and families.
- Children and youth have been faced with managing more stress at home, fewer social connections to rely on, and navigating new ways of learning; all of this takes a big toll on mental health.
- Transitioning back to in-person schooling presents a new set of challenges, fears, and anxieties for students & teachers; social-emotional learning is a key to managing these emotions.



# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

## What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)?

- SEL is the process through which young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:
  - develop healthy identities
  - manage emotions
  - achieve personal and collective goals
  - feel and show empathy for others
  - establish and maintain supportive relationships
  - make responsible and caring decisions.
- SEL can help address different forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.



## What are the benefits of teaching SEL?

- Research shows that SEL competencies can be taught, modeled, and practiced in the classroom, with the following benefits:
  - Improvement in students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, relationships, academic performance, and perceptions of classroom and school climate
  - Decline in students' anxiety, behavior problems, and substance use
  - Long-term improvements in students' skills, attitudes, prosocial behavior, and academic performance.
- Classroom-based approaches to SEL include:
  - Explicit instruction where social and emotional skills and attitudes are taught and practiced in developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate ways
  - Teaching practices such as cooperative learning and project-based learning
  - Integration of SEL and academic curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

## The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) 5 core competencies

As illustrated in the picture, CASEL has identified five areas of social and emotional competence:

1. **Self Awareness:** the abilities to understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
2. **Self Management:** the abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations and to achieve personal and collective goals.
3. **Social Awareness:** the abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
4. **Relationship Skills:** the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
5. **Responsible Decision-Making:** the abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.<sup>2</sup>

# MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE

Students and teachers alike are faced with a variety of mental health issues or conditions, which can be complicated and multi-faceted. Poor mental health conditions can share common symptoms of impaired learning ability.

Problems often experienced include:

- Decreased concentration & difficulty focusing on tasks
- Shortened attention span & losing track of time
- Difficulty in making new memories or storing new info
- Inability to recall information previously learned

## What is the role of educators?

- Teachers are often the first to notice mental health concerns and can play an important role in identifying students who may need extra support from mental health professionals.
  - For symptoms of mental health conditions, visit: [MentalHealth.gov - "What to Look For"](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for)
- Teachers should not informally take on the role of counselor or mental health expert based on personal experiences. Contact the school nurse, family/student support center or the school psychologist for more support.
- Educators can link students and families with mental health resources, which can prevent teachers from experiencing increased emotional stress.<sup>1</sup>

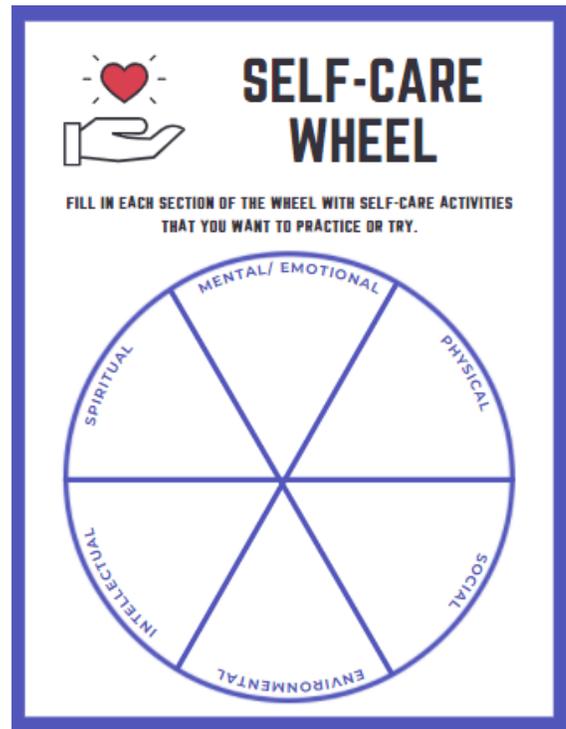


# QUICK TIPS

## How can mental health & SEL be integrated into the classroom?

Making time to support mental health in the classroom enables students to learn better and connect more deeply with each other.

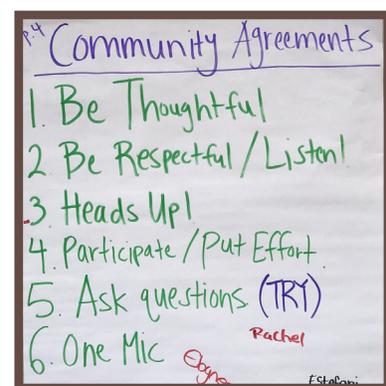
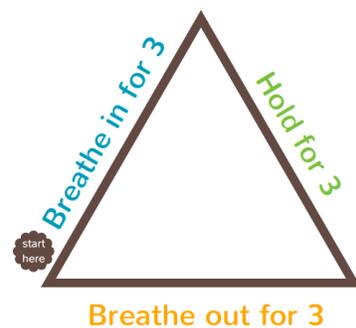
- **Focus on your strengths:** focus on enhancing activities you are already doing instead of starting from scratch.
- **"Pleasant Activity" scheduling:** think of activities you enjoy doing with your class and intentionally schedule time for those things.
  - Fill out the "Self-Care Wheel" with self-care activities that you can do with the class.
- **Check in with yourself:** know your own limits and reach out for additional support when needed.
- **Create a routine:** having a consistent schedule will offer students an expectation for each day in your classroom
  - Add check-ins to your mornings, classroom energizers after lunch, and breathing exercises to the end of the day.



# SHORT ACTIVITIES

Try these activities as they fit into your lesson plans.

- [Action for Healthy Kids - Movement in the Classroom](#): quick activity breaks throughout the day can help students calm down and refocus.
- [Action for Healthy Kids - Breathing Exercises](#): doing a few deep breaths can help calm the nervous system and "reset" a negative mood.
- [National Equity Project - Community Agreements](#): fostering a sense of community in the classroom creates a safer space for all students.
- [Action for Healthy Kids - Journaling and Reflective Writing](#): provide quiet self-reflection to help students gain a deeper understanding of their feelings and explore their thoughts and emotions. Choose age appropriate writing prompts.
- [Edutopia Video - Morning Meetings](#): take a few minutes at the start of each day and allow students time to greet each other and share how they feel that day. Create your own check-in questions as a class. Adapt to any grade level.



# NUTRITION

This section of the guide shares the importance of nutrition education in schools and strategies to incorporate nutrition education in your classroom. Taking time for nutrition education with students is an important part of the wellness policy which can be addressed by teachers in the classroom in simple yet effective ways.

## Why is nutrition education important?

- Many children and families do not have access to fresh and healthy food. For many students, school is the one place where they are guaranteed 1-2 healthy meals per school day.
- At home, students' exposure to healthy foods and nutrition education may vary. Incorporating nutrition education can provide children or youth with tools to build healthy habits for a lifetime.
- With the transition back to in-person learning, students may face challenges adjusting back to structured snack and mealtimes, which could impact student behavior.



# NUTRITION GUIDE

## Proper nutrition can increase brain function.

- Essential nutrients can directly affect the mental capacity of school-aged children.<sup>1</sup>
- Improving nutrient intake can positively influence cognitive abilities and concentration.<sup>2</sup>

## Balanced eating habits can be encouraged to support better behaviors.<sup>3,4</sup>

- Children who are malnourished and over-consume sugar or empty calories are more prone to behavior issues and poor focus.

## Healthy eating habits can be promoted for positive school outcomes.<sup>3,4</sup>

- Improving the quality of the food that students eat leads to better attendance and overall academic performance.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Nutrition education can be applied to SEL and reinforce the CASEL core competencies.

- Nutrition education can help children become self-aware in regards to food choices and their relationship with food and identify the social/relational purpose food can serve.

## What is the role of educators?

Teachers can play an important role in supporting nutrition in the classroom by:

- Modeling healthy behaviors for their students.
- Fostering a culture of health and well-being in their classrooms.
- Participating in nutrition education programs offered by their district
  - Talk to your district's nutrition services to see what opportunities exist at your school!



## How can educators link nutrition with SEL?

### SEL Nutrition Activities

- **Self-Awareness & Self-Management**
  - Encourage students to reflect on how they feel physically and mentally after eating different foods. Encourage students to write down nutrition goals that they can practice at school and at home and talk about their progress every week.
- **Social Awareness**
  - Nutrition education serves as an opportunity to teach children about food and its relation to culture and family heritage. Culinary variances across different cultures can be discussed to introduce students to different foods and traditional practices.
- **Relationship Skills**
  - Provide a question of the day for students to discuss over lunch together.
  - Encourage students to sit with different peers each day, and share what they learn.
- **Responsible Decision-Making**
  - Over time, nutrition lessons can teach children the importance of taking ownership of their own health.

## QUICK TIPS

### How can nutrition be integrated into the classroom?

- Offer nutrition education in a systematic way (i.e. weekly, monthly, or as a unit) to help kids internalize the information.<sup>7</sup>
- “Nutrition nuggets” are simple and short nutrition information or healthy eating tips that can be incorporated on a consistent basis without a full nutrition lesson.<sup>7</sup>
  - Students can help identify topics within food/nutrition they would like to learn more about and be responsible for finding and sharing a "nutrition nugget".
- Integrate nutrition education into literacy and math by selecting books with a nutrition focus or asking students to graph the number of fruits they ate the previous days.<sup>7</sup> Nutrition is an overarching subject that can be integrated into multiple subjects.
- Connect nutrition lessons and messages to what is being served in the cafeteria to encourage students to try new foods. Encourage participation in school meal and breakfast programs.
- Promote healthy foods at celebrations in and out of the classroom. Engage students' families with nutrition education integrated into homework assignments that they can do together.<sup>7</sup>

## SHORT ACTIVITIES

Try these activities as they fit into your lesson plans.

- [Action for Healthy Kids - SMART Goals](#): Encourage students to dream big while practicing goal setting through small, attainable stepping stones to reach a larger focus. Use the SMART goal template (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely*) to encourage students to try one new fruit or vegetable.
- [Action for Healthy Kids - Mindful Eating](#): This is a mindfulness practice that encourages children to focus on the present and to deepen their connection with food. Encourage children to use the 5 senses and practice small “mindful bites”.
- [Action for Healthy Kids - Rethink Your Drink](#): Encouraging kids to rethink their beverage choices challenges them to make healthier choices and consume more water. Host a taste test with varieties of infused waters.



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

This section of the guide shares the importance of physical activity in schools and strategies to incorporate physical activity in the classroom. Implementing physical activity with students is an important part of the wellness policy and can help address multiple elements of students' health and well-being.

## Why is physical activity important?

- Distance learning has limited opportunities for some students to socialize, interact, and be physically active. It is especially important to help students reintegrate physical activity and socialization in school as they return to the classroom.
- Physical activity is an important part of whole student health. Physical activity can uplift students, improve their self-esteem and overall mental and emotional health, and increase academic achievement.
- Integrating physical activity in the classroom can support learning and academic performance.<sup>1</sup>
- Physical activity helps youth to grow healthy and strong. Any physical activity from aerobic activities to muscle/bone-strengthening activities will be beneficial for students as they grow.<sup>1</sup>



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDE

## What are the benefits of physical activity?

- Physical activity can improve brain function, memory, and problem-solving skills, which correlate with improved performance in math, reading, and writing.<sup>1</sup>
- Consistent physical activity can reduce anxiety and improve mood in children.<sup>1</sup>
- Physical activity can help students develop a positive body image and high self-esteem, especially when students are encouraged to participate in activities they enjoy.
- Adolescents who play sports are more likely to stay active as they age, thus setting a foundation for a healthy lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>
- High school students who play sports or exercise regularly are less likely to engage in frequent high-risk behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, antisocial behaviors, and teen pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

## It is important to note the difference between Physical Education (PE) and Physical Activity (PA)

- PE is instruction that provides students with essential, age-appropriate skills and knowledge through a standards-based curriculum that links learning experiences in a sequential and articulated manner.<sup>3</sup>
- PA is any bodily movement that increases energy expenditure, such as dance, sport, walking, exercise and other movement forms.<sup>3</sup> This guide is focused on physical activity.

## What is the role of educators?

- Teachers can incorporate and encourage positive physical activity practices among their students before, during, and after school.
- Throughout the day, teachers can provide opportunities for their students to be physically active through brief exercises to help refocus students and teach about other topics, such as SEL.
- Some teachers may be required to help their students reach the state-mandated PE minutes.



## California PE mandate

Inquire with the school PE teacher or principal to determine how many PE minutes classroom teachers are responsible for providing for students and work with the PE teacher or principal to develop a plan.<sup>5</sup>

- **Elementary:** 200 minutes of PE\*
- **Middle:** 400 minutes of PE\*
- **High School:** 400 minutes of PE\*  
\*every 10-day cycle

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & SEL



Physical activity can be used as a tool to implement and teach students about SEL. Physical activities that require teamwork or pairs can build trust with students and provide for greater student connections. Integrating physical activity with SEL can help students recognize the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.

## How can educators link physical activity with SEL?

Choose a CASEL core competency (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making) to focus on and explain this with your students before starting the physical activity.

Conduct the activity with your students. Afterwards, provide time for students to reflect and discuss questions related to the CASEL core competency.<sup>3</sup>

- **Self-Awareness**
  - What was it like doing this activity? How did your body feel? Was it easier to stretch on one side than the other?
- **Self-Management**
  - How did you adjust your approach as the activity became more difficult? How did you manage frustration?
- **Social Awareness**
  - What did you learn about others through this activity? Did other students take an approach different than you, and why?
- **Relationship Skills**
  - How was the experience working together with your peers versus by yourself?
- **Responsible Decision Making**
  - How did your actions in the activity affect your classmates or the outcome of the activity?



# QUICK TIPS

## Tips and ideas to help educators incorporate physical activity throughout the school day:

- **Use brief circuits or brain breaks** between lessons or during transitions. Try 30 seconds to 1 minute of jumping jacks, toe touches, dance, "hot potato" or catch. Stretching breaks, chair yoga, or running in place can be fun and effective classroom energizers too.
- **Physical activity can be a great way to share different cultures.**
  - Sports and dance can highlight the uniqueness and beauty of different cultures.
  - Find a video that showcases or teaches a cultural dance or sport and have students follow along and practice together.
- **Get outside!** Learning outside improves attention, promotes retention of information, improves mental health, and connects students to their environment. Incorporate small amounts of outside time and add more when ready.
- **Take your class on a walk around campus.**
  - Ask them to look for specific items while they walk, making it into a scavenger hunt.
  - Even better if the items can tie back to themes they are learning in the classroom!
- **Pick a time each day to do a physical activity** and rotate which student picks the activity for the day.
- **Incorporate movement into activities you are already doing.** For example, when surveying students, ask them to stand up instead of raise their hands as a response. Or, instruct them to walk to a different part of the room to represent a different response.
- **Work with your principal to utilize outside organizations** to provide physical activity opportunities for kids at school when safe.



## MENTAL HEALTH

### Elementary School

**Pear Deck - Self-Care Recipe Slide Deck**: helps students develop self-care strategies (gr. K-6)

**Alliance for a Healthier Generation - Guide for Creating a Caring School Community** (gr. K-2)\*

**Alliance for a Healthier Generation - Guide for Creating a Caring School Community** (gr. 3-5)\*

**Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction - Emotional Regulation Action Plans** (gr. K-2)

**Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction - Emotional Regulation Action Plans** (gr. 3-5)

### Middle & High School

**Alliance for a Healthier Generation - Guide for Creating a Caring School Community** (gr. 6-8)\*

**Alliance for a Healthier Generation - Guide for Creating a Caring School Community** (gr. 9-12)\*

**Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction - Emotional Regulation Action Plans** (gr. 6-12)

**SCUSD GRACE App** (all grades)

**START 2 Heal Tools** (grades 6-12)

**Greater Good in Education - SEL Kernels**: SEL activities for all grade levels

**The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL Essentials**: printable mini book of essential tools for teachers

*\*Sign up for a free account to access*

## NUTRITION

**Let's Eat Healthy - K-12 Curriculum Series by Dairy Council of California** (all grades)

**Let's Eat Healthy - Single Lessons for Upper Elementary**

**Let's Eat Healthy - Nutrition Resources & Videos for All Ages**

**Let's Eat Healthy - Spotlight on Food Access**

**Action for Healthy Kids - Activity Resources**

**FoodPlay** (all grades)

**Nourish Interactive Elementary Resources**

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### **PA/PE Implementation Resources**

**CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health)**: behavior change through healthy eating and moderate-vigorous physical activity

**"EduMotion- SEL Journeys"**: combines social and emotion awareness and wellness with physical activity to cultivate well-rounded children

**OPEN - Online Physical Education Network**: physical education modules for elementary, middle, and high school students

**Sami's Circuit**: social and emotional learning integrated into 20-minute physical activity videos to be watched in the classroom or at home

**School Springboard**: integrate classroom physical activity in schools

### **PA/PE Technical Assistance Resources**

**PE Central**: best practices and physical education technical assistance

**CDC Classroom Physical Activity**: extra guidelines, framework, and resources for physical activity implementation in classrooms

**The PE Specialist**: technical assistance for PE teachers

**SHAPE America (Society of Health and Physical Educators America)**: organization of PE professionals dedicated to improving health education and physical education standards



**Health Education Council - Healthy Schools Program: Full Resource List**

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