



# Merit Academy Wellness Policy

## **Rationale and Justification**

Good health habits in childhood lay the foundation for a lifetime of good health and disease prevention. In order to maximize potential for learning, growth, and well-being, children need access to healthy foods and beverages, opportunities for physical activity, adequate rest, and a supportive environment. Good health promotes student attendance and education. In addition to good nutrition and physical activity, adequate rest and fluids are important for overall health. Adequate sleep helps maximize a child's cognitive functioning. For any school-based wellness program to be successful, parents must become educated and willing partners since they have the most influence on their child's environment.

Merit Academy is committed to creating an environment that maximizes a student's ability to grow, develop, and perform both physically and academically. Scientific research is clear that proper nutrition, physical activity, hydration, and adequate rest are each integral to accomplishing both fitness and academic goals.

## **Federal Wellness Policy Requirements**

As required by the WIC Authorization Act of 2004 (Federal Public Law PL 108.265 Section 204), the Merit Academy Wellness Policy includes the following:

1. Goals for nutrition education
2. Goals for physical education and physical activity
3. Goals for other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness
4. Cafeteria guidelines for reimbursable school meals which are no less restrictive than regulations and guidelines issued by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to subsections (a) and (b) of section 10 of the Child Nutrition Act (42 U.S.C. 1779) and section 9(f) (1), 17 (a) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(a)) as those regulations and guidance apply to schools
5. Goals for measuring evaluating and maintaining the wellness policy

### **1. Nutrition Educational Goals**

A. The nutrition education program will focus on all students in all grades' eating behaviors and attitudes, be age appropriate, interactive, and will focus on wellness and a healthy body image.

1. Nutrition education will be age-appropriate and designed to help all students learn nutritional principles, which emphasize the current USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) and the My Plate initiative.
  - a. Nutrition education instructional activities will stress the appealing aspects of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles
  - b. USDA National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program standards can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals> .
2. Merit will celebrate National School Lunch Week, National Nutrition Week, and National School Breakfast Week
3. Merit Academy will encourage participation in school breakfast and school lunch so all students will have access to meals that meet dietary standards.
4. All families will receive an application for free/reduced breakfast and lunch with their enrollment packets or families may obtain the information on the school's website at <http://meritacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Free-and-Reduced-Lunch.pdf> before school begins each year or anytime during the year.
5. We encourage our staff to consume healthy food options while in front of students.

B. Nutritional Education will:

1. Be offered appropriately in the school cafeteria through signage.
2. Be integrated within the comprehensive health education curriculum.
3. When selecting educational materials (especially in PE and Health classes), review of advertising content (i.e., brands free of names and logos illustrating unhealthy foods) will be considered.
4. Teach skills that are behavior-focused on all grade levels.
5. Include lessons that cover topics like reading Nutrition Fact Labels and Daily Dietary Needs.
6. Posters and/or bulletin boards will be displayed in the cafeteria area to promote healthy lifestyles and healthy body image. They will also be displayed in the locker rooms.
7. Child Nutrition and Food Services will send via email to Merit families (parents) nutrition information at least three times a year. Topics may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Physical and mental benefits of healthy eating, exercise, fluid intake, and adequate rest.
  - b. Assessing personal behaviors based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
  - c. Components of a healthy lifestyle and confidence in body image.
  - d. Understanding My Plate.
  - e. Meal and snack planning.
  - f. Understanding and using food labels.
  - g. Nutrient density.
  - h. Essential nutrients and nutrient deficiencies.
  - i. Proper hand-washing methods
  - j. Trends or popular eating patterns.

## **Physical Activity Goals**

A. All grades will be offered quality Physical Education (PE) classes in connection with a written Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) that adheres to state requirements and the school's improvement plan. We will also emphasize the enjoyment of physical activity not only for students, but also for staff and the school community. Merit Academy is dedicated to promoting quality PE curriculum which is both developmentally and instructionally relevant for all students being served. Fitness is presented as a positive experience in which students feel socially and emotionally comfortable and learn to overcome challenges on a personal level. Our goal is to instill joy of participation in health-enhancing activity, leading to lifetime fitness. PE classes shall include but not be limited to educating students in movement, personal fitness, a positive self-image, and personal and social responsibilities.

1. The Utah State Office of Physical Education Curriculum will be implemented.
2. Merit supports local government and community-based agencies that support active transport to school (i.e., Safe Routes to School Program) to encourage biking and walking to school.
3. We strive to offer a minimum of 160-205 min/week of PE in both middle and high school (grades 7-12).
4. The student-teacher ratio for Physical Education classes is similar to those in other classes.
5. Physical Education for grades 7-12 is taught by certified/licensed teachers with endorsements in Physical Education or teacher seeking appropriate endorsement.
6. All students in grades 7-12 are required to take physical education classes. Students are not able to be exempted from required physical education nor are they able to substitute other school or community activities for required physical activity class time or credit.
7. Students should be able to demonstrate improvement in physical activity through application of knowledge, skills, and practice.

B. Students shall be encouraged to develop physically active lifestyles.

1. They are offered after-school competitive and challenging athletic and fitness/leisure programs in order to foster healthy lifestyles such as volleyball, baseball, basketball, soccer, and cheerleading.
2. Teachers are encouraged to integrate physical activity into the academic curriculum where appropriate and offer physical activity breaks as needed.
3. Staff are recommended to use physical activity as a reward rather than food and as a reward rather than as a punishment / consequence for poor behavior. Physical activity will also not be withheld from students as a negative consequence.

4. Elective courses, after school clubs, and sports programs will be offered so students shall have opportunities for additional physical activities.
5. Merit Academy Physical Education Department will seek opportunities to encourage students, their families, and school staff to participate in local activities.

### **III. Other School-Based Activities**

A. Non-food items or foods of high nutritional density will always be considered the best choice to give students for rewards and celebrations

1. Non-food items are considered the best choice to give as rewards to students. Foods of high nutritional density may be used as a reward. If foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) are used as a reward, either a food of high nutritional density will be offered also, or a non-food item will be offered also.
2. The parent committees, school personnel, and parents/guardians will encourage healthy lifestyle choices in the classroom even during room parties and celebrations.
3. Utah State Department of Health Regulations (R392-100-2) prohibits the serving of homemade treats and food to children at school. Food items brought to school must be store bought. Remember to check with your child's teacher for dietary allergies of students in the class and his/her policies on birthday celebrations.

B. The staff will work with the Wellness Committee to determine what items are sold during the school day, before/extended school day, and in the vending machines and make certain that they are in line with the wellness goals of Merit Academy and the USDA nutrition standards for all FOODS (Smart Snacks).

1. Such foods and snacks will contain fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy or proteins that are low in calories, sugar, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium.
2. No soda will be sold in the vending machines nor will beverages containing caffeine ever be sold on campus. All beverages sold during the above times will meet the USDA Smart Snack nutrition standards.
3. To qualify as a Smart Snack, a snack or entrée must first meet the general nutrition standards:
  - Be a grain product that contains 50% or more whole grains by weight (have a whole grain as the first ingredient); or
  - Have as the first ingredient a fruit, a vegetable, a dairy food, or a protein food; or
  - Be a combination food that contains at least ¼ cup of fruit and/or vegetable (for example, ¼ cup of raisins with enriched pretzels); and
  - The food must meet the nutrient standards for calories, sodium, fats, and total sugars.
4. Smart Snacks nutrition standards are followed and can be found at

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/tools-schools-focusing-smart-snacks>

C. Staff members who provide nutrition education and physical education will have appropriate training.

1. The Child Nutrition Director will attend training from the State Office of Education Child Nutrition Program at least twice a year. They will receive and implement policies regarding the National School Meals Program. They will comply with federal, state, and local laws.
2. Child Nutrition and Food Services employees will be certified food handlers. Child Nutrition and Food Services Manager or Director will be ServSafe certified.

D. Foods sold inside the school day to raise funds will strive to meet the Smart Snack Nutritional standards.

E. Merit Academy will follow the guidance of the State of Utah in regard to the amount of time for students to eat and using mealtime as punishment.

1. The guidance states students should be allowed an 'adequate' time to eat (7 CFR 210.10(f) 1-3. "FNS encourages schools to provide sufficient lunch periods that are long enough to give all students enough time to be served and to eat their lunches." Students will get 30-40 min for lunch.
2. Schools are prohibited against denying meals to children as a disciplinary action in FNS

Instruction 791-1, Rev. 1. "Disciplinary action which indirectly results in the loss of meals/milk is allowable (i.e., a student is suspended from school). However, when the withholding of meals/milk is the disciplinary action OR if the disciplinary action directly results in the loss of meals/milk, it is inconsistent with the law and is not allowable."

F. Wellness promotion and marketing

1. Advertising of any food or beverage that may not be sold on campus during the school day, of any brand on containers used to serve food, or in areas where food is purchased is prohibited.
2. Merit will limit the advertising of unhealthy food and beverage products in school publications, especially those that do not meet the Smart Snack nutrition standards. All advertising in school publications and school media outlets must be approved by the Director.

#### **IV. The Cafeteria**

A. School meals will meet or exceed the criteria for reimbursable school meals, as set for by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to Subsections (a) and (b) Section 10 of the Child Nutrition Act (42 U.S.C. 1779) and Section (f)(1) and 17(a) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758 (f)10, 1766 (a)0, as those regulation and guidance apply to schools, specifically, program requirements and nutrition standards set forth under 7 CFR Parts 210 and 220.

B. Specifics:

1. Merit Academy shall provide a clean and safe environment for all students.

2. There shall be enough space and serving areas to ensure all students have access to school meals with minimum wait time.
3. Students are made aware that drinking fountains and water bottle stations are available at the school so they can have water throughout the day, including during breakfast and lunch meals.
4. All students will be encouraged to participate in the school meals program. The identity of students who eat free and reduced priced meals shall be protected.
5. Students will have 35 minutes to eat lunch.
6. Lunchtime shall be scheduled as near the middle of the school day as possible.
7. Grades 7-9 follow the district's closed campus lunch policy. Grades 10-12 have an open Campus lunch policy and can leave campus during lunch time.
8. Because we are a junior and high school, we do not offer recess, however, students are able to move around campus including having use of the soccer field and occasionally the gym.

C. Child Nutrition and Food Services shall offer an alternative entrée daily to accommodate children with allergies and medical conditions. Parents/guardians should notify the school in writing concerning allergies, special dietary needs, and limitations and have a doctor's note detailing accommodations (form available online, in the office, or in the kitchen).

D. Reasonable accommodations for religious groups will be offered as appropriate.

## **V. Assessing Compliance of Merit's Wellness Policy**

A. The Merit Academy Wellness Committee will be receptive to suggestions for implementation and evaluation of the wellness policy at any time. Any complaints alleging civil rights discrimination within our school's Food Nutrition Services (FNS) School Meal Program will be directed to the Food Nutrition Director and School Director for further review and resolution.

B. The Merit Academy Wellness Committee will assess the wellness policy and encourage its implementation. The committee is composed of the Nutrition Director, School Administrator, Teacher, Representative from the Physical Education Department, students, and interested parents.

C. The Wellness Policy Coordinator shall be the Nutrition Director. The coordinator will schedule meetings, set agendas, and supervise follow-up action items from the meetings. The School Administrator (Director) will ensure the policy is implemented throughout the school.

D. The school's Wellness Committee will meet in the Fall each year (and reconvene as needed) to evaluate, maintain, and revise the Wellness Policy. Via email, the School Newsletter will invite members to join the Wellness Committee. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, board members, and health professionals are encouraged to attend. After which, an annual assessment report will be sent to the school community through the School Newsletter.

E. A progress report is made available to the public in all or some of the following ways: through the School Newsletter at least once throughout the year, on the School's Wellness Policy page

at <http://www.meritacademy.org/about-us/policies>, direct mailings to families, presentations to the Parent Volunteer Organization (PVO), and local press/media releases. The report will include an update of wellness activities and progress of wellness goals, contact information for Wellness Committee Members, and an invitation to join the committee.

F. Nutrition education (nutrition, healthy lifestyles, etc.) will be provided to parents and families in the form of handouts, on the school website, the school's Facebook page, the School Newsletter, student Showcase nights, and/or a school Wellness Fair.

G. The Wellness Policy will be reviewed every 3-5 years by the Utah State Child and Nutrition Department and will provide assistance with changes as needed. The Food Service Director will report to the School Director regarding the Wellness Policy and Committee on any changes needed to be in compliance until those goals are reached. A specified period of time will be given and followed up on by the Food Service Director to make such changes.

H. The school's Health teacher will work with the Wellness Committee ensuring compliance with the FNS Meal Program and Food Nutrition when needed.

I. The school's website links shall be checked and updated as needed by a member of the Wellness Committee.

***Board Approved 9/19/2022***

***Board Revised 11/15/22***

**Wellness Committee Members 22-23:**

Ruth Campbell – Wellness Policy Coordinator / Nutrition Director

Amanda Kuhnz – School Administrator / Director

Trinity Norman – Health Teacher / Physical Education Teacher

Kayson Parker – Health Teacher / Physical Education Teacher

Audrey Merighe – Kitchen Manager

Dustin Powell -- Kitchen Assistant

Olivia Jay – Student

Will Beckland– Student

Gillian Glidewell – Student

Meta Glidewell – Parent

Patrick Herlehy – Parent

Deb Moosman – Parent