

MINUTES

School District 4J Wellness Advisory Committee
Education Center Auditorium
200 N. Monroe Street — Eugene, Oregon

September 28, 2006
4:00 pm

PRESENT: Bob Coll, Chair; Dennis Biggerstaff, Terry Brooks, Rachel Hecht, Sue Ann Hinman, Nicole Lalor, B. Loftis, Kay Mehas, Althea Seloover-Olds, Kathy Tagwerker, Chad Williams, Beth Gerot, members; Barbara Bellamy, Kay Mehas, Jim Hart, Nancy Johnson, Hillary Kittleson, Chad Williams, Nicole Lalor, 4J staff

ABSENT: Edmund Rivera

I. Agenda Review

Mr. Coll convened the meeting at 4:06 pm and welcomed members and staff. He noted that meetings would, to the degree possible, begin and end on time. Those present introduced themselves.

II. Review of Committee Charge

Ms. Bellamy said that the Board adopted a Wellness Policy in May 2006. The policy calls for the creation of a committee to advise the Superintendent on implementation of the policy, including the development of administrative rules. Temporary rules were put in place before the start of the school year because the schools needed more specific guidelines than the Wellness Policy provided. Ms. Bellamy said that another committee responsibility would be to advise the Superintendent on scientific findings relating to student nutrition and wellness. The committee would not be expected to do research, but would bring any new ideas or community concerns to the Superintendent's attention. Additionally, the Superintendent requested that the committee provide a year-end evaluation of the Wellness Policy and its implementation and progress. Ms. Bellamy noted that the topic of wellness could be huge, and the committee would have to decide what could be accomplished within the time available.

Ms. Kittleson said that the federal government required school districts that have contracted out management services to have a committee to advise vendors on menu planning, and that the Wellness Committee would have that role.

III. Public Comment

Mr. Coll noted that there were five guests present; he thanked them for coming.

Meg Blanchet introduced herself and said that she had been on last year's Wellness Policy committee, that she was interested in health, and that she was a co-founder of the Food On Farm to Cafeteria organization. She said that she was very happy with the Wellness Policy, but still had concerns. Her first concern was that nutritional standards were not set; she felt that a strong nutritional policy statement was needed. In response to a question from Mr. Coll, Ms. Blanchet said that the suggested

guidelines were those of Sodexo; however, she would prefer that the Berkeley standards be the ones adopted. She emphasized the value of healthy local foods, noting that last year's committee had had a presentation on bovine growth hormone. She recommended that the committee bring in someone to speak about genetically modified foods and organics and the importance of food quality. She understood that Sodexo would be willing to do what the School Board asked it to do, and recommended that the committee make it a priority to have the School Board ask Sodexo for what it wants. She noted that poor nutrition affected children's ability to learn, their intelligence, their health and health-care costs, as well as behavioral issues, adding that there was a high cost to low standards.

Mr. Coll suggested that anyone who felt their message could not be conveyed in the time allowed would be welcome to submit written suggestions to the committee, and that those could be added to the official record.

Joy Marshall, who said she worked for Stand For Children and was a 4J parent, seconded much of what Ms. Blanchet said. She praised the work of the Wellness Policy committee, but said that some of the solutions might be difficult due to current facilities and funds available. She said the committee should look beyond the percentages and chemical composition and look for food that was fresher, less processed, and less refined. She advocated sitting in the cafeterias at various schools to see what students are actually eating, then thinking of ways to promote healthy eating. She brought up the issue of students having enough time to eat, acknowledging that there were scheduling and space problems, but that they were not insurmountable. She said she would be attending future meetings to provide the parents' perspective on the issues.

Meredith Whitten from Food On Farm to Cafeteria endorsed the views of the two prior speakers, then talked about taking a farm tour that morning with 60 children, grades two through six. She vividly described the children's activities and their enthusiasm for the farm experience, noting that many children in the district did not have the opportunity for such outings. She favored whole, healthy, balanced meals, and a garden-based nutrition curriculum that recognized that growing, eating and cooking food was part of a healthy future. She said that Food On Farm, a non-profit, had a great deal of information to share regarding garden-based curricula, and urged the members to avail themselves of that resource.

Kelly Hoell, a consultant with Good Company, wanted the members to be aware of a project her company was involved in, under contract with EWEB and in collaboration with Oregon State University. The purpose of the project was to protect drinking water in the McKenzie watershed, but the end goal was to create a Web-based program to match local farmers with local food buyers. She said the project was just starting and was expected to be up and running in the next year or two. She hoped that schools' food directors could use the project as a tool for finding sources of organic or locally-produced food items for their cafeterias. She handed out information sheets and business cards and requested meetings with food buyers.

Mr. Coll thanked the speakers, noting the passion of the speakers and the relevance of the information provided.

Ms. Johnson shared an e-mail from Randy Bernstein, principal of South Eugene High School, in which he asked that the Wellness Committee address the eating disorders bulimia and anorexia nervosa in addition to the attention given to obesity.

IV. Committee Work Plan and Schedule for 2006-2007

Ms. Kittleson directed the members' attention to the handout titled "Draft Work Program for 2006-07," noting that the chart contained the three elements of the committee's charge, with activities related to each charge and some time frames for their accomplishment. She said that the first charge, administrative rules, was expected to take three to five meetings, then at mid-year the group would discuss how to measure success. At the last meeting in May, the group would review progress made over the year. The second area was ad hoc responses to issues that arise, and the third role was as advisor to Sodexo on menu planning. Regarding the latter issue, Ms. Kittleson said that Ms. Lalor and Mr. Williams would bring a program report from Nutrition Services to the October meeting. In January and February, the committee would serve as a focus group for menu ideas.

Ms. Brooks asked if the committee could take a field trip to the school cafeterias to see what was being served. Ms. Kittleson said that perhaps a few different opportunities for school visits could be arranged to suit the convenience of the members, rather than having it as an official meeting.

Ms. Kittleson asked the members to review the meeting dates listed in her memo of September 22. After the October 28 date was changed to October 26, the members had no objections to the schedule.

V. Review of Temporary Administrative Rules

Ms. Kittleson told the members that the temporary administrative rules were put together over the summer to get the most critical information out to the district so that changes could be made in the schools. The rules and an information packet were placed on the district's Web site and in the back-to-school packets, and it was required that principals go over the rules with staff. Ms. Kittleson's office fielded some questions regarding clarification of the rules, and has been negotiating with vending machine providers regarding the new policy. She thought that most vending machines were now in compliance, but this has not been verified.

Ms. Mehas said that the elementary principals have noted a lot of behavior change among teachers and staff, who were modifying their eating behavior and trying to be good role models, even though some parents were still bringing cupcakes to class. A concern was that healthy snacks are more expensive snacks. A positive occurrence was that one school was now serving breakfast to all students, without serving syrup or chocolate milk.

Mr. Biggerstaff said that the effect was being felt in the high schools as well. He recalled the day the vending machine companies took the sodas out of the machines. TV stations were there with cameras, expecting protests, but there were no students present – they were not interested. He noted that most of what was sold in the machines was water, so the change was not that drastic. He said that in general the Wellness Policy implementation was going well, although it was hard to measure differences because so many students go off campus to eat. Mr. Biggerstaff said he had had questions from the band director and other fundraisers about what was acceptable to sell.

Mr. Williams said that at the middle schools, there was less eating a la carte and more from the line, which was the primary goal. He said that at Cal Young, a newer school, the count last year was 160; this year, it was up to 250, and that they have served as many as 300. He said that while overall a la carte service has dropped, the most significant drop was at Cal Young, where the line was set up differently. He said that the September numbers would be reviewed to determine overall counts and the impact on a la carte sales. Mr. Williams said that the breakfast program mentioned by Ms. Mehas had increased from 160 last year to 310 this year, meaning that everyone had the opportunity to eat breakfast. He hoped to expand that to two other elementary schools.

Ms. Mehas said that the teachers love the breakfast program, but have a concern about physical education and wanted that to be addressed by the committee.

In response to a question from Ms. Hecht, Mr. Williams said that all the schools serve the same menu each day.

Ms. Selover-Olds suggested integrating stretching into the physical education curriculum.

Ms. Hinman said that parents had questions about what was okay and what was not okay, and what could be done for celebrations. She suggested that 4J staff have someone to call about such clarification. Ms. Kittleson said she would be the one to call, and that her number was on the pamphlet and on the contact sheet for elementary schools. Ms. Hinman suggested Ms. Kittleson send a short e-mail to 4J staff to say that questions should come to her, via phone or e-mail.

Ms. Tagwerker said that at Harris they had a "Captain's Table," complete with linens and china and table service, where students learned manners and were rewarded with goodies. She said that the IA in charge of the program called Mr. Williams about the nutrition guidelines, and that he was very helpful.

Ms. Mehas said that in her visits to schools, she has noticed a change in refreshments served, e.g., guacamole and chips or cheese and crackers vs. last year's cakes and cookies.

Ms. Brooks said that she was becoming known as the "food police," and that other parents were asking her what they could bring for "socialization time," which differed from "celebration" or "reward" (categories in the policy guidelines). The concept of "minimal nutritional value" and what could be used instead were challenges at the middle school level.

Ms. Kittleson led the members through the Wellness Policy, noting that it was divided into five sections: Statement of Goals, Physical Activity, Nutrition Education, Other Activities, and Nutrition Standards. Regarding Physical Activity, Ms. Kittleson said that an important thing to note was that the Superintendent would establish minimum standards for student participation in physical education and activity, and a time line for implementing those standards. (For this reason, a time line was added to the temporary guidelines.) Physical education had to be consistent with state standards, and the integration of physical activity with the academic curriculum would be encouraged. Teachers were not to withhold recess, and the district would be encouraging before- and after-school activities, as well as parent and community support.

Under Nutrition Education, Ms. Kittleson noted the three main categories: fostering lifelong healthy eating habits, aligning with the state curriculum, and involving the community. She pointed out that "Other Activities That Support Student Wellness" was essentially an expression of support for school-based health clinics.

In discussing Nutrition Standards, Ms. Kittleson asked the members to keep the three parts in mind, as it would prove helpful in handling phone calls. In the first part, National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, statements were: the district will either meet or exceed federal standards; will provide breakfast to the extent possible; will look for opportunities to integrate local and organic food into meals served; and schools will set minimum times to eat. In the second part, "Competitive Foods" was defined as anything sold or distributed that would compete with the breakfast or lunch program. The Superintendent was directed to develop "healthy snacks" and "healthy parties" guidelines as part of the administrative rules and to set nutrition and portion size guidelines.

Ms. Kittleson said that “Competitive Foods” was broken down into two kinds: what was sold, and what was given away. Foods of minimal nutritional value cannot be sold at all and competitive foods cannot be sold during breakfast or lunch times. A la carte, fundraising foodstuffs, and vending machines all must comply with the Healthy Snacks guidelines (with a la carte having up to three years to be fully compliant).

For foods not sold, the only hard restriction was for soda pop, which cannot be distributed. For celebrations, nutritious foods were encouraged but not mandated. For incentives or rewards, the use of foods of minimal nutritional value was strongly discouraged.

Ms. Kittleson said she had received calls about the third category, “After-School Events Sponsored by the District.” She said the policy’s only requirement was that healthy options be available.

Mr. Coll then asked the members to read through the “Physical Activity” portion of the Temporary Administrative Rules and see if there was anything requiring further clarification. Speaking to Mr. Biggerstaff’s question about whether the rule would affect current year staffing, Ms. Kittleson explained that physical education guidelines would be established by February 2007, with a view to implementation in the 2007-2008 school year. After some brief discussion about differing requirements for elementary, middle and high schools, Mr. Hart said that once minimum standards were set, there would need to be rules addressing the program itself. Mr. Coll agreed, saying that the current rule was vague and needed to be more specific. Mr. Hart suggested that the degree of specificity parallel that of the food programs, noting that staff wanted a quality program.

Ms. Brooks asked if there was another group that would be responsible for defining the physical education curriculum. Ms. Kittleson said she believed that it would be a proposal developed through the Superintendent’s staff that would then somehow be processed by February 1st. Ms. Gerot asked if the program would be vetted by the Wellness Committee. Ms. Kittleson said it likely would be, and would be reviewed by the School Board as well.

In response to a query from Ms. Bellamy about his work session with the Board regarding physical education (PE), Mr. Hart said that they currently did not have a particular plan and needed to do a program audit to get a clear picture of the current situation in relation to state standards. He noted that there was a lot of variation in programs within the district due to lack of program staffing and building availability. Ms. Bellamy said that it was possible that the committee would not have an audit report by February.

Ms. Brooks recalled there being a lot of discussion about PE at last year’s final school board meeting and asked if there were plans to address the PE curriculum issue at the district level. Ms. Gerot said there was interest among the School Board members in increasing the quality of PE and other physical activity, and that an audit would be the next step to determine the specifics of the current situation. She noted that funding was a concern of the Board’s, and referenced Mr. Biggerstaff’s remarks about what schools realistically can do to increase the quality of PE programs given Department of Education increased requirements and the resources available.

Mr. Hart said that there had been some discussions with staff about the high school issue, although the Wellness Policy was directing the K-8 program. He said there was interest in defining the high school requirement, noting that a student could graduate by taking a fitness program consisting solely of bowling as opposed to an intense lifetime fitness program. He said that resources from a PEP grant provided the capability of offering an excellent internationally-recognized curriculum to lay the foundation for students doing activity on their own, but would need a district commitment to define what it would take to graduate with the one-credit requirement.

Ms. Kittleson said that the Board had had some discussions about involving the community because of the funding situation.

Mr. Coll then asked the members to read through the “Nutrition Education” section of the Temporary Administrative Rules. Ms. Johnson said the points were a great umbrella, but that more specificity was needed about nutrition education. Ms. Kittleson handed out a memo that followed up her conversation with representatives of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which was interested in the district’s Wellness Policy. She was asked if the district needed help, and if so, what kind of help. She noted that there was no specific mention of a grant, but she put together a memo of ideas to send.

After the members read through the “Nutrition Standards” section, Ms. Kittleson clarified that the standards were not exactly those of the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA), but were very similar. Because NANA standards were becoming the norm, much of the language from those standards was used. Ms. Hecht asked if the members could be given a comparison between NANA standards and Berkeley standards. Ms. Kittleson agreed to arrange that.

After the members reviewed the “Healthy Snacks Guidelines,” Ms. Brooks said that the spirit of the policy was that the guidelines be phased in over three years, and that the intervening time would be used for education. One issue raised last year was how to make it harder for students to make unhealthy choices. Suggestions included having the unhealthy snacks cost more and/or be placed below sight lines in machines or on shelves. She asked if these suggestions were being carried out, and if there were other steps being taken to educate students.

Ms. Kittleson replied that the vending machine operators were told that 50 percent of the space had to be healthy snacks, and that that machines could not have large pictures of Coke or similar beverages on the front. She noted that the percentage would increase to 75 percent healthy snacks next year, and 100 percent the following year. A cost differential was not discussed. Ms. Kittleson said she has not raised the education issue with the high school principals, but that Mr. Williams and Ms. Lalor planned to work with leadership groups at the high schools to determine what kinds of healthy foods students would like to eat.

Mr. Biggerstaff observed that the vending machines could probably go to 100 percent healthy snacks now without drawing any negative response from the students because they could go off campus if they wanted something else. He suggested that it would be better to spend time and resources on education at the middle and high school level, and that vending machines were a minimal part of the package.

Ms. Selover-Olds asked who would deal with promoting the healthy food in the cafeteria. She said her high school was close to a grocery store and that many students went there for fatty, unhealthy lunches, avoiding even going into the cafeteria. She wondered if the menu could be placed in a visible, high-traffic area. Ms. Loftis said that menus were read as part of the morning announcements, but Ms. Selover-Olds said that many students did not listen to the announcements, and perhaps there was another way students could be enticed into the cafeteria.

Ms. Brooks said that nationally, over 90 percent of high schools have closed campuses, and that issue was not being addressed by the committee. She said the only way to increase the revenue of the food department was to have more students buying cafeteria lunches, which would provide more money to spend on fresh produce. This would only happen if students were not allowed to leave campus. She proposed challenging the status quo, addressing the reasons for it, and determining whether there were benefits to change.

Ms. Kittleson said that members might wish to think about any specific changes they would like to see in the Healthy Snacks Guidelines. She said she would bring information to the next meeting regarding how the guidelines differ from NANA standards, noting that one difficulty was finding NANA portion sizes in available products.

Mr. Coll suggested that if the committee had other issues to discuss, the review of the “Healthy Parties Guidelines” could be tabled until the next meeting.

VI. Items from the Committee

Ms. Loftis noted that her school stopped serving Pop-Tarts this year and that the breakfast count went down. There were alternatives available, but the students would not take them and many preferred to go without eating anything. She wondered if it was worse to go without breakfast or to have Pop-Tarts. Other members commented that Pop-Tarts likely had minimal nutritional value. Ms. Lalor said that Pop-Tarts actually met the nutrition requirements, being similar to toast and jelly, but were removed because of the public perception that they had minimal nutritional value. Ms. Hecht commented that she did not allow her children to eat breakfast at school because of the availability of Pop-Tarts and other choices she considered to be nutritionally deficient, regardless of whether they met nutrition requirements or not.

Ms. Brooks said that around the country, when food changes were made there would initially be rebellion, but that students would eventually come around to accepting the healthy choices. She urged Ms. Loftis to “hang in there,” as students would likely eat if they were hungry.

After some other member remarks about breakfast foods, Ms. Kittleson noted that the district had a variety of cultures and food choices, and trying to meet everyone’s needs was a challenge. Ms. Selover-Olds said that, ideally, everything served for breakfast would be healthy; however, it would be better to educate students to choose healthy foods because they are healthy, not because there was nothing else available.

Ms. Hinman said the committee should suggest to the School Board and the Superintendent that health items adopted by the committee be strong in education and consistent with standards. She also said that teachers need to know what they are being held accountable for, and should be given specific goals and objectives and guidelines about what to teach. She noted that the education process would take several years and that the process should start in kindergarten.

Mr. Hart said that, with Health Adoption coming up, there was concern that some buildings would already have money allocated in other areas. He said that the Health Adoption process was good with regard to the materials coming in, but if they did not get to the school, it would be a problem. He said it was a good time to educate and promote to the buildings that the Wellness Policy should be considered now, without waiting until the funds are allocated elsewhere.

Ms. Brooks voiced a concern about nutritional percentages as a guideline, and said the big picture should focus on fresh produce and nutritional ingredients.

Mr. Coll adjourned the meeting at 5:36 pm, reminding the members that the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, October 26.

(Recorded by Bernie Burson)