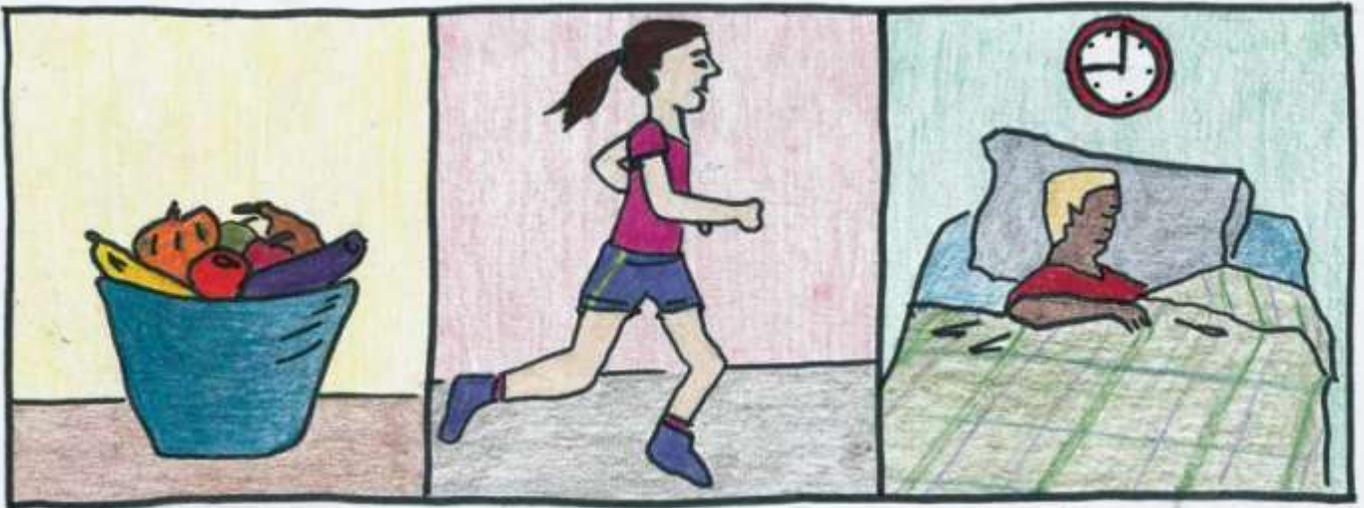


The NYCDOE School Wellness Council Grant: Year One  
Office of School Wellness Programs • Office of School Health • Summer 2011

**NUTRITION. EXERCISE. SLEEP.**



**IT'S UP TO YOU!**

City of New York  
Department of Education

Acknowledgements

The first year of any grant, especially one funded by public monies, requires an accounting of the plans and processes required to administer it effectively, as well as its outcomes. Reflections on the first year of the grant provide opportunities to refine how it is administered, and how, in future iterations, it can better meet the needs of the students and schools it sets out to serve.

Information in this report has been provided by School Wellness Council champions and staff who participated in the first year of the grant (see school list on p.4), as well as Office of School Wellness Programs (OSWP) staff who developed and administered the grant. OSWP is indebted to staff in SchoolFood, School Health, and other offices in the Division of Operations for their cooperation and cross-functional support, as well as strong partners in moving the **Wellness agenda in New York City, including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Physical Activity and Nutrition Group**, staff in the District Public Health Offices, the Strategic Alliance for Health, Bronx Health REACH, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and the many other community groups that provided free and low-cost wellness resources to our schools. Cover art is by 2011 School Wellness Poster Contest winner Ceily Dominguez, Grade 8.

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## Introduction

Almost half of elementary school children in New York City public schools are overweight or obese. To urgently address the long-term implications of childhood obesity—mainly the likelihood that it will continue into adulthood, increasing the risk of many serious health conditions and diseases—local, state and federal governments have joined in comprehensive efforts to improve the nutrition, fitness, and health of our children. In New York City, public concern has translated into specific Department of Education wellness policies, updated in 2010 to set higher standards for healthier foods, more activity, and coordinated school health that can lead to smarter choices for a lifetime (see sidebar).

The first recommendation in this set of policies is for each school to develop a School Wellness Council (SWC), mainly to create an environment in which schools can holistically and systematically consider how to improve nutrition, health, and physical activity opportunities across the entire school community. As advisory bodies to school principals, SWCs may include parents, students, administrators, SchoolFood representatives, teachers, health professionals, and members of the public (including community-based organizations). While SWCs are not new, they are getting renewed attention as an effective tool schools can use to address the health and fitness needs of students within a school community in a comprehensive and sustainable way.

Starting in the 2010-11 school year, and against the backdrop of schools increasingly being asked to do more with less, the Office of School Wellness Programs (formerly Fitness & Health Education) created a \$2,500 grant for 50 schools to form or expand a School Wellness Council. This funding commitment was seen as a way to deepen the work of existing School Wellness Councils—often started under previous grants or technical assistance programs from other agencies and partners—while broadening the base of schools that are interested in prioritizing wellness in new ways.

As part of the grant, SWCs were charged with assessing the current school physical activity and nutrition policies, practices, and programming; creating an action plan and budget for addressing identified areas of concern; and developing and **implementing policies and programs to improve the school's overall physical activity, health, and nutrition choices.** Knowing that each school would be different, the grant encouraged schools to be imaginative and flexible in developing programs that addressed their unique challenges. Grant recipients received technical assistance and support; connections to community partners, information, and resources; and \$2,500 for centrally purchased materials and services. Recipients also presented what they were able to accomplish through the grant, with an eye towards effective processes as well as programs, at a culminating event in June.

This report shares details about how the grant was developed and administered. Highlights of what some SWC schools were able to accomplish this year are also included alongside some of the challenges and unexpected benefits grantees experienced. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations gleaned from school wellness champions and staff on how to improve grant administration moving forward. Schools interested in a fresh approach to school wellness through an SWC, as well as schools looking for ideas to strengthen an existing council, are encouraged to use this report as guidance for improving the health and wellness of their students.

The New York City  
Department of Education  
Wellness Policies on  
Physical Activity and  
Nutrition, 2010

The NYC DOE originally adopted a set of Wellness Policies in 2006 as required by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 for school districts that participate in federally funded school meal program(s). In 2010, these policies were revised to raise the bar for **New York City public schools' commitment to the health and fitness of our students, meeting the public's concern about the impact of childhood obesity, and federal goals of ending the epidemic within a generation.** Among other things, wellness policies were aligned **with the updated Chancellor's Regulation A-812 (Competitive Foods), but also set out to promote and protects students' health, well-being, and ability to learn.** To review these policies, visit the Office of School Wellness Programs website at [schools.nyc.gov/Wellness](http://schools.nyc.gov/Wellness).

## Matching Grants to Schools with a Commitment to Wellness

In mid-September of 2010, all 1,700 schools were invited to apply online for grants to either establish a School Wellness Council (SWC) or strengthen an existing council.

**The online application was designed to collect information on each school's health and wellness challenges and policies, as well as to gauge the level of applicants' commitment to and capacity for creating or deepening the work of an SWC.** Applicants were required to check several assurances confirming their familiarity with the 2010 Wellness Policies, and their commitment to grant requirements (including regular SWC meetings, and kickoff, assessment, and culminating event participation). The web page hosting the application links also included a fact sheet describing the parameters of the grant as well as the scoring rubrics for start-up and continuation grant applications.

By the application deadline October 15th, 85 schools had fully completed applications, a majority (64%) to establish SWCs for the first time. Applications were judged against their respective scoring rubrics, with continuation grants held to a higher standard in terms of having existing mechanisms in place to meet the wellness needs of the school community. By the end of October, 51 schools, serving more than 30,000 students combined, were awarded grants: two-thirds to establish new councils and one-third to strengthen existing SWCs. Slightly more than half of awardees were elementary schools (as reflected in the applicant pool), with middle and high schools sharing equal representation. About one-third of recipients were affiliated with a partner-SWC organization (e.g., NYC DOHMH, The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and/or the Strategic Alliance for Health). Also, an additional grant was awarded jointly to several Brooklyn Alternate Learning Center sites—suspension sites which serve a revolving student register—to fund an experimental SWC to serve the four sites simultaneously.

Grant recipients attended an orientation and training on November 2, 2010 (**Chancellor's Conference Day**) to learn about the supports available, and review a timeline with grant requirements (see opposite page sidebar). As schools began their work of establishing or reconvening SWCs in November, they recruited SWC members to help complete various portions of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's School Health Index (SHI). This self-assessment and planning tool, which requires schools to collect and share information from various school sectors (administrators, health and physical education teachers, school nurses, food services staff), helps schools target improvements to health, nutrition, and safety policies and programs. Also, it is often used as a qualifying assessment for other funding opportunities. Using the SHI, schools developed a wellness action plan with an accompanying budget that specified items and services to improve health and wellness for the school community.

To ensure schools maximized their funding, significant direct support went to SWCs so that they could secure free goods and services, and participate in other funding and recognition opportunities, to make action plans a robust blend of free programs and services, budgeted items, and staff initiatives. Schools were strongly encouraged to select contracted goods and services whenever possible, which were purchased cen-

## 2010-11 Grant Recipients

Alternate Learning Centers (K138, K332, K33 and John Jay HS)  
Bayard Taylor School (02M158)  
Benjamin Franklin (14K157)  
Brooklyn Brownstone School (16K628)  
Brooklyn Community Arts & Media (13K412)  
Brooklyn University High School for Law (16K498)  
Carter G. Woodson (14K023)  
Caton School (17K249)  
Central Park East II (04M964)  
Dr. Marjorie H. Dunbar Elementary School (09X126)  
E.R. Murrow High School (21K525)  
East Bronx Academy for the Future (12X271)  
Edward Bleeker JHS 185 (25Q185)  
Edwin Markham (31R051)  
Food and Finance High School (02M288)  
Gautier Institute High School (08X519)  
General D. Chappie James Middle School of Science (23K634)  
High School for Public Service (17K546)  
Horace E. Greene Elementary (32K045)  
IS 52 (06M052)  
Jaques Cartier School (04M102)  
Middle School 113 (13K11)  
Middle School 584 (16K584)  
Nathaniel Hawthorne Middle School (26Q074)  
P.S.182/BBMS (04M182)  
PROGRESS High School (14K474)  
PS 119X (08X119)  
PS 160 Walt Disney School (11X160)  
PS 20 Queens (25Q020)  
PS 306 (10X306)  
PS 80 (28Q080)  
PS/MS 218 (09X218)  
Public School 309 (16K309)  
Red Hook Neighborhood School (15K676)  
Renaissance Leadership Academy (05M286)  
Roberto Clemente (01M015)  
Ruby S. Couche School (28Q030)  
Samuel C. Barnes (13K054)  
School of Integrated Learning (17K354)  
Sheridan Academy for Young Leaders (09X457)  
Stanley Eugene Clark (17K399)  
The Active Learning Elementary School (25Q244)  
The Dag Hammarskjold School (22K254)  
The Harriet Tubman Learning Center (05M154)  
The Rosedale School (29Q038)  
The West Farms Public School (12X006)  
Unionport School (08X036)  
Validus Prep (09X263)  
World Academy for Total Community Health (19K510)

## Grant Timeline

### November

Meet your SWC Liaison

Invite or confirm SWC members

Begin to review SHI



### December

(Re) Convene SWC

Establish regular monthly meetings and subcommittees

Review and assess school's needs using the SHI



### January

Complete necessary SHI modules

Continue to review and assess school's needs using the SHI

Begin action plan

Work with liaison to connect actions to resources (funded, discounted, and free)



### February-March

Complete and begin to implement action plan

Complete purchase of all materials and services



### April-May

Continue to implement action plan

Document successes and challenges

Prepare for culminating event in June to share work



### June

Share successes at culminating event

Prepare for 2011-12 school year

trally on behalf of schools rather than allocating funds to individual school budgets. SWCs received technical assistance through dedicated OSWP liaisons who met with schools periodically, but who were also tasked with ensuring schools were building capacity within each SWC. In January, OSWP launched the *Wellness Weekly*, an e-newsletter highlighting grant reminders, wellness activities in grant-funded schools, resources, funding opportunities, wellness news, and other items of interest.

By February 15th, schools began to submit action plans and budgets for review and revision, with final approved plans and budgets in place by March 30th. A total of 48 schools and the Brooklyn ALC submitted approved action plans and budgets. A majority of funds (60%) went to non technology equipment or materials (e.g., fitness equipment, instructional materials); 17% on services (e.g., yoga, dance programs); 12% on per session (to pay staff for administering before or after school programming); and 11% on technology equipment (e.g., Wii Fit Classroom Bundles, Smart Boards). Because money was managed centrally, a portion of the unused grants were reallocated to support grant-related support (e.g., culminating event, support materials) as well as other wellness-related initiatives.

SWCs continued to meet throughout the rest of the school year to review and implement their action plans, many documenting their progress (and noting their challenges) for the year-end culminating event. On June 9th, more than 75 school champions and school representatives gathered at the St. Francis Genovesi Center in Downtown Brooklyn to share how their SWCs developed various components of coordinated school health to raise the nutrition, physical activity, health and wellness levels of their students and school community. Equipped with visual and video displays, school art and student films, handouts, and pictures, schools proudly exchanged information and resources on how they implemented action plans and budgets in holistic and targeted ways.

In the presentations and spirited discussions on lessons learned this year, participants shared an enthusiasm, camaraderie, and dedication to prioritizing effective **school wellness programs and policies for real change in students' learning environments**, ultimately striving to improve student academic performance and health.

## Outcomes: Components of Effective SWCs

As schools have shared their plans and stories, through culminating event presentations, discussions, visits, and through other grant documents, certain common characteristics arise that may provide guidance for other schools interested in pursuing a wellness agenda. Schools that have experienced some level of success with their SWC, as determined by having a well-functioning council and/or developing and implementing successful activities and programs, share the typical components of any successful school effort: an administrator committed to a specific vision; motivated and talented staff dedicated to carrying out the vision; unified school programs and messages that engage parents and students in new ways; and, the ability to pull in additional resources through collaborations to create improvements and programming beyond what is purchased with SWC funding.

While these things may be formulaic to having any successful committee or program, contextualizing it within an approach to health and wellness to curb obesity and create healthier lifestyles is salient enough to all stakeholders to potentially produce dramatic results. To unlock this potential, here are some key commonalities that grant recipients shared from their first year: 1) newly established pipelines of communication from the SWC translated into new **opportunities for the school’s overall communications, 2) the SWC empowered staff and students to explore and share their personal interests and talents, and 3) SWC collaborations allowed schools to tap into a variety of resources beyond their grant funding.**

*Communication:* While many schools noted how challenging it can be to schedule regular, frequent school meetings among council members from across school sectors, they also described the benefits of communicating and coordinating among people who otherwise may not have had an opportunity to discuss or exert their position to influence school wellness. Reviewing the results of the School Health Index assessments in order to make action plan and budget decisions requires a high level of communication, creating new pipelines of information across the school.

For instance, while principals know about citywide wellness policies, staff, parents, and students may not, or not know how it directly affects the school. Reviewing these policies (as a first order of council business) to learn about changes already made to dining and vending rules allowed SWC teachers, parents and students to consider other ways to limit junk food in buildings, especially through healthy school fundraising and student-run food campaigns, newscasts, films, and contests. Including school dining staff in SWCs resulted in learning about and adopting school food programs (e.g., grab and go, breakfast in the classroom, salad bars) and water jets in cafeterias (to increase water consumption in school dining rooms). Students surveyed each other and developed reports on student preferences for fresh fruits and vegetables. Similar communications pipelines among PE, adaptive PE, health education, and classroom teachers resulted in some schools using grant funds to purchase materials for student reading clubs on health topics or for health education libraries, or having students write about physical education experiences and/or health education lessons.

Also, SWC-sponsored wellness events and activities provided opportunities for parent coordinators, guidance counselors, school health staff, and teachers to communicate with parents in new ways, through Family Fitness Nights, weekend walks, morning or afternoon fitness clubs or classes, or through wellness newsletters for the entire school community. Communicating about wellness became a tool for coalescing school communities around a cause, but in relaxing, fun, flexible, and inclusive ways.

*“Ultimately, it’s going to take all of us – businesses and non-profits; community centers and health centers; teachers and faith leaders; coaches and parents– all working together to help families make commonsense changes so our kids can get, and stay, healthy. In the end, I know that achieving all this won’t be easy – and it won’t be quick. But make no mistake about it, this problem can be solved.*”

*“We don’t need to wait for some new invention or discovery to make this happen. This doesn’t require fancy tools or technologies. We have everything thing we need right now – we have the information; we have the ideas; and we have the desire to start solving America’s childhood obesity problem. The only question is whether we have the will.”*

*— First Lady Michelle Obama*

*“I am proud of how each school is able to pull together the different areas of coordinated school health and articulate how the various strands are woven together to serve entire school communities.”*

*—Lori Rose Benson,  
Executive Director, Office of  
School Wellness Programs,  
New York City Department  
of Education, on reviewing  
presentations from 48 SWC  
grant recipients June 9*

*Empowerment:* Many schools shared the experience that the SWC, charged with an agenda to promote healthier food and more frequent, quality activity, empowered enthusiasts to share and pursue their interests with the school community. Whether it be the Assistant Principal who is an avid athlete, a teacher who has a personal weight loss and fitness story to share, a parent with a green thumb or training as a chef, or a guidance counselor adept at creating excitement around positive behavioral changes, each council member brought their own story and commitment to wellness. Effective SWCs that demonstrated a high level of commitment always had one or two enthusiasts in their midst, and were empowered by the work of the council.

A demonstration of empowerment at its best is when SWCs have student representation and feedback. In one school, top cabinet members of the student government (president, vice president) held slots on the SWC as part of their duties. At another, the student council submitted questions to the SWC on why there were changes in the school cafeteria menu and were provided an official, clear, and well-written Q&A on the changes and how they related to wellness, to share with the student body.

*Collaboration:* Some of the most promising and evident stories of success among SWCs included learning about and taking advantage of multiple collaborations for programming, technical assistance, and/or more funding. Because the goals of the 2010 wellness policies and the SWC grant are aligned with wider city, state, and federal efforts, there is a strong network of government and nonprofit resources available to all schools—the challenge is connecting schools with resources. With the directive to leverage funding by incorporating as many free resources as possible, SWC grant recipients were able to connect with DOE sponsored professional development and support (health education curricula, middle school CHAMPS program); DOE affiliated programs like New York Road Runners, Tai Chi for Kids, Play Rugby and Bent on Learning; city agency programs like Move-to-Improve, Swim for Life, Eat Well-Play Hard, and Healthy Schools; grant funding from GrowNYC garden grants, Healthy High Schools mini-grants, and the Jordan Fundamentals grant; and, recognition opportunities through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and Strategic Alliance for Health, to complement their work. Also, SWCs expanded existing relationships or developed new ones with health organizations, local New York City Parks recreation centers, and community-based organizations, to create or enhance programs.

When coupled with thoughtful grant expenditures—e.g., playground or fitness equipment, teacher funding for an after school fitness or nutrition program, in-school yoga residency—the resources provided through collaborations helped schools create and implement action plans far more comprehensive than with just grant funding alone, signaling a true commitment to being able to sustain a wellness agenda beyond the current school year.

## Recommendations

As part of the June 9 culminating event, schools reflected on their experiences in applying for the grant, developing an SWC, and creating and implementing an action plan and budget. Based on their candid feedback, a set of recommendations emerged that will help the Office of School Wellness Programs refine the grant and how it is administered in the upcoming school year, as well as provide additional guidance and resources for grant recipients, and all schools interested in SWC development.

**Adjusted Timeline:** A common challenge for schools in the first year of the grant, especially those creating an SWC for the first time, was meeting deadlines for recruiting the SWC, completing modules of the SHI, and submitting an action and budget plan. Some schools thought an earlier application deadline might provide additional time for start-up schools to recruit council members and complete the SHI, allowing for more time to consider action and budget items. However, several continuation grant schools with existing SWCs, and that had completed SHIs in previous years, suggested an earlier action plan and budget deadline to allow for a longer implementation period. This suggests that start-ups with more recruitment and assessment work should be on a different timeline than continuation schools that may already have action plan and budgetary priorities in place early in the school year.

**Comprehensive Resource Database:** When it comes to creating an action plan with both free and purchased materials from contracted vendors, schools want a comprehensive repository of resources that support wellness, categorized in meaningful ways. One of the challenges of meeting budget deadlines was directly related to being able to efficiently find and secure contracted items and services that supported wellness, and in enough time for those items and services to be delivered before the end of the year. Also, as schools find new resources, items, and services, having a place to share them as they are compiled would be beneficial to the work of all SWCs. Finally, schools want an expanded list of approved vendors for different types of physical activity instruction (e.g., martial arts, aerobics, dance instructors).

**Networking and Professional Development:** To enhance the work, especially to share information, ideas, and solutions with one another, SWC champions requested more frequent opportunities to meet and hear about how they can better serve the needs of their schools. Networking ideas include brainstorming workshops, mid-year check-ins, wellness vendor expos, and additional School Health Index training specific to NYC.

Schools were also encouraged to share unexpected benefits from their first SWC grant, and yet **another commonality emerged among grant recipients. In schools' efforts to approach wellness in a coordinated way, many were overwhelmed at the positive response and level of participation from most students, especially those typically hard to engage.** Many times students tried a fitness, gardening, or cooking activity for the first time, visited a new part of the neighborhood, even used new equipment or a new part of the school repurposed for fitness. If this novelty can create short-term momentum for longer-term health benefits, imagine the societal benefits coordinated school health approaches among schools across neighborhoods, boroughs, and cities could create. We thank these schools for their bold commitment to prioritizing wellness, and look forward to broadening and deepening the work in New York City schools for healthier, happier students.