Welcome to this overview of the Wellness Policy In Action Tool, or WPAT. In this module we will give background information on local school wellness policies, review the elements of a local wellness policy, including the triennial assessment process, and introduce you to a new tool that can help measure the implementation of a local wellness policy.

Local school wellness policies are written documents that outline school districts’ efforts around nutrition, physical activity and other activities that promote student health and well-being.

They were first established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and then were updated through the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

All school districts that participate in a USDA Child Nutrition Program, including the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program, are required to have a local school wellness policy.

USDA has outlined minimum requirements for the wellness policy, but the intention is that each district will develop a policy that reflects the needs of students and schools in the district.

So one way to think of a local wellness policy is that it is a roadmap for health and wellness efforts for the district.

All local wellness policies must include standards for school meals that meet or exceed the USDA requirements, these include, nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold during the day that meet or exceed the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards, goals for nutrition education and promotion, and also goals for physical activity. Districts get to choose what those specific goals are.

Wellness policies must also describe the nutrition standards for other foods and beverages that are available during the school day, such as foods and beverages used as a reward or offered at school events or classroom parties.

Policies must also include language about food and beverage marketing that allows marketing and advertising of only those foods and beverages that meet the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards.

Districts must also allow the public to be involved in the wellness policy development and update process.

And lastly there is a requirement that at least once every three years, districts complete an assessment of the policy called a triennial assessment.

According to the guidance from USDA, local education agencies must conduct an assessment of the wellness policy every 3 years, at a minimum. This assessment should show:

* Compliance with the wellness policy,
* How the wellness policy compares to model wellness policies, and
* Progress made in attaining the goals of the wellness policy.

School districts should be ready to share this documentation with their state agencies.

So how can school districts measure wellness policy implementation?

Some state agencies and school districts have created templates for school districts to use, but there is no national tool to help districts and schools assess the relationship between district-level policies and school-level practices.

Recognizing this gap, CDC worked with UCONN Rudd Center to create an online assessment to help districts and schools with this process using two existing online assessment tools: the WellSAT 3.0, which assesses the strength of district wellness policies, and CDC’s School Health Index, which helps schools assess their school health practices.

The new tool is called the Wellness Policy in Action Tool or WPAT. This tool can help districts:

* Understand if the wellness policy is consistently implemented in schools across the district.
* Determine if schools are already implementing practices that could be incorporated into the district policy.

Schools can use WPAT to see how their school nutrition and physical activity practices align with their district’s local school wellness policy. This information can help schools:

* Identify where implementation plans are needed to ensure that practices are consistent with current policies.
* Share current practices that can be incorporated into the district policy.
* Identify opportunities for new nutrition and physical activity practices to work toward.

In the next few modules, we will take a closer look at the WPAT, including how to create an account, how to complete the assessment, and how to interpret and use the results.