

Triennial Assessment Report: CTECS Triennial Assessment 2025 (5/2025)

District: CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND CAREER SYSTEM

Introduction

As part of our commitment to fostering healthy learning environments, the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) recently completed its Triennial Assessment of the district's Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP). This review evaluates how well our policies and practices support student wellness in alignment with federal requirements and national best practices.

We are proud to report that CTECS has made significant progress since our last assessment in 2022, with improvements across most categories. In particular, we saw a measurable increase in policy strength and implementation in the areas of Federal Requirements, Nutrition Education, and Nutrition Services, with the average policy score in the Federal Requirements category rising from 0.5 to 1.39 (on a 0–2 scale). These gains reflect our continued efforts to align with USDA guidelines and enhance the health and well-being of our students.

However, our review also identified opportunities for growth, especially in areas such as Physical Education and Physical Activity and Employee Wellness, where both policy development and implementation need strengthening. By comparing written policies to actual practices, we were able to highlight areas where updates or training may be needed to ensure consistency across our 17 schools and expanded communities.

To complete this assessment, the CTECS Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC) led a collaborative process that involved a wide range of stakeholders, including district and school-level administrators, food service staff, health and PE educators, and general education teachers. Data collection occurred through policy reviews, staff surveys, and interviews across various roles in the district. The assessment was conducted throughout the 2024–2025 school year and finalized in June 2025.

We are committed to using these results to improve policy language, enhance staff training, and ensure our wellness practices are consistent and effective throughout the district. Thank you for partnering with us to support the health and success of our students.

Strong Policies and Aligned Practices

CTECS Wellness Policy: Areas of Strength and Aligned Practice

CTECS is proud to highlight key areas in which our district has demonstrated both strong wellness policies and consistent implementation, reflecting our dedication to creating supportive, health-focused learning environments.

Within the Federal Requirements (FR) section of our district's Wellness Policy Scorecard, several areas stood out for having fully aligned policy language and districtwide practices. These include:

Nutrition education goals that promote student wellness and are embedded into broader health and academic instruction;

Professional development for School Nutrition staff, ensuring compliance with USDA's annual training requirements;

Compliance with USDA Smart Snacks standards for both a la carte items and competitive foods/beverages sold during the school day;

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Public accessibility of the LSWP, available through the CTECS School Nutrition website;

The establishment of a diverse district-level Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC) to guide, review, and support implementation efforts.

These successes are the result of targeted improvements made since the 2022 triennial assessment, where many of these same items were identified as needing development. For instance, CTECS previously held a much lower average policy score in the FR category—0.5 in 2022 compared to 1.39 in 2025. This growth was driven by leadership within the Nutrition and School Meals (NSM) office, who spearheaded policy revisions, clarified federal language, and built capacity through training and communication efforts.

In addition to Federal Requirements, Nutrition Education (NE) also reflects alignment between what is written and what is practiced. All students across CTECS receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education, and integration with other academic content areas is steadily increasing. Staff have also partnered with School Nutrition professionals to reinforce classroom learning through visual tools like “My Plate” posters and showcasing locally sourced produce.

These accomplishments demonstrate not only compliance with federal standards but a districtwide commitment to supporting student well-being through clearly communicated, consistently applied policies and practices.

As we continue to move forward, the foundation built in these areas serves as a model for how CTECS can align policy and practice across all domains of the wellness policy framework.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR2	Do your National School Lunch Program meals (and, if applicable, School Breakfast Program meals) meet all federal standards for meal patterns, nutrient levels, and calorie requirements for the grade levels served?	2	2	☆
FR3	Does your school take steps to protect the privacy of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals?	2	2	☆
FR4	Is free (i.e., no cost to students) drinking water available to students during meals?	2	2	☆
FR5	Do all school nutrition program directors, managers, and staff meet or exceed the annual continuing education/training hours required by the USDA's Professional Standards requirements?	2	2	☆

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FR6	Do all competitive foods and beverages sold to students during the school day meet or exceed the USDA's nutrition standards, commonly called Smart Snacks?	2	2	☆
FR7	Do all a la carte foods and beverages sold in the cafeteria meet Smart Snacks standards?	2	2	☆
FR13	Which groups are represented on the district-level wellness committee?	2	2	☆
FR15	How is the wellness policy made available to the public?	2	2	☆
FR16	Is wellness policy implementation evaluated every three years?	2	2	☆
FR18	Has the wellness policy been revised based on the previous triennial assessment?	2	2	☆
NES1	Does the district offer breakfast every day to all students?	2	2	☆
NES2	Does your school take steps to address feeding students with unpaid meal balances without stigmatizing them?	2	2	☆
NES4	Does your school use strategies to maximize participation in the school breakfast program and/or school lunch program?	2	2	☆
NES10	Are foods or beverages containing caffeine sold at the high school level?	2	2	☆
PEPA3	How does your physical education program promote a physically active lifestyle?	2	2	☆
PEPA7	Are all physical education classes taught by state certified/licensed teachers who are endorsed to teach physical education?	2	2	☆

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PEPA8	Is ongoing professional development offered every year for PE teachers that is relevant and specific to physical education?	2	2	☆
PEPA10	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to substitutions?	2	2	☆
IC1	Is there an active district-level wellness committee?	2	2	☆

Create Practice Implementation Plan

CTECS Wellness Policy: Areas with Gaps Between Policy and Practice

While CTECS has made measurable progress in aligning written policies with best practices, the Triennial Assessment also identified several areas where there are disconnects between policy strength and real-world implementation. These gaps offer important opportunities for professional development, clearer communication, and greater accountability to fully realize our wellness goals.

In the Federal Requirements (FR) category, several items demonstrate this mismatch. For example:

FR9 and FR10, which address Smart Snack standards and fundraising exemptions, are well-represented in policy language but inconsistently practiced at the building level. Despite clear wording that prohibits competitive foods and fundraiser exemptions during the school day, staff across schools reported varied awareness and enforcement.

FR12, regarding marketing on campus, includes strong language about aligning school-based marketing with Smart Snack standards, but practice falls short due to a lack of awareness among staff and limited oversight at the building level.

FR15, which requires staff to know where to find the wellness policy, is fully met in writing, yet several staff surveyed indicated they were unaware of the policy's location or contents.

Similarly, in the Nutrition Environment and Services (NES) section, policies like NES5 and NES6, which promote healthy food marketing and specify meal time requirements, are present in the policy but not widely implemented or understood at the school level. While marketing materials and proper meal durations may exist in some buildings, this practice is not yet consistent across all sites.

Compared to the 2022 Triennial Assessment, many of these items were previously flagged as emerging issues or inconsistently addressed. CTECS has since strengthened its written policy language, especially with support from district-level leadership in the Nutrition and School Meals (NSM) division. However, practice implementation has not kept pace, likely due to turnover, lack of training, and varying degrees of familiarity at the school level.












These findings highlight that even a strong policy framework requires ongoing communication, training, and monitoring to ensure that written goals translate into meaningful action. To address these gaps, the district

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Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC) will develop and distribute clear implementation strategies and increase mid-year check-ins to ensure school-level accountability.

By identifying and addressing these disconnects, CTECS can build stronger bridges between intent and impact, ensuring every policy leads to healthier outcomes for our students and school communities.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR17	What is included in the triennial assessment report to the public?	2	1	
NES7	 In your district, is it a priority to procure locally produced foods for school meals?	2	1	
NES11	Do all foods or beverages SERVED (not sold) to students after the school day on school grounds (including aftercare, clubs, and afterschool programming) meet federal nutrition standards (e.g., CACFP or Smart Snacks)?	2	1	
NES13	Do teachers or school staff give students food as a reward?	2	1	
NE1	Are skills-based, behavior-focused, and interactive/participatory methods used in nutrition education to develop student skills?	2	1	
NE4	Do all high school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	1	
NE5	Is nutrition education integrated into other subjects beyond health education?	2	1	
PEPA2	Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is aligned with national and/or state standards?	2	1	
PEPA14	 Do teachers provide regular physical activity breaks for students in the classroom?	2	1	

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PEPA15	Does the district have "joint-use" or "shared-use" agreements?	2	1	
PEPA17	 Are teachers encouraged to use physical activity as a reward for students?	2	1	
EW2	Are school staff encouraged to model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors in front of students?	2	1	
IC2	Is there an active school-level wellness committee?	2	1	

Update Policies

The 2025 Triennial Assessment of CTECS' Wellness Policy revealed several areas where our district is actively implementing health-promoting practices, yet the written policy lacks clear or sufficient language to support and sustain those efforts. These gaps present a critical opportunity to ensure that our Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) both reflects current practice and provides a foundation for consistent, districtwide application in the future.

In the Federal Requirements (FR) section, the following items stood out:

- FR8, FR9, and FR10, which relate to Smart Snack compliance and exempt fundraising, are being implemented to varying degrees, but the existing policy lacks the explicit language required by USDA standards. Although staff are limiting non-compliant food sales during the school day, the absence of firm policy language creates inconsistency and confusion at the building level.
- FR14, which requires naming the district officials responsible for overseeing wellness policy compliance, is incomplete in the policy, even though accountability structures exist in practice. This needs to be clearly outlined to meet federal requirements and support transparency.

Similarly, the Nutrition Environment and Services (NES) section includes several practices being implemented with little or no written policy support:

- NES5 and NES6, involving healthy food marketing strategies and meal time allocations, are commonly practiced in many schools. However, without clearly defined expectations in the policy, implementation varies significantly across sites.
- NES11 and NES12, which address Smart Snack standards for foods sold or served after school, reflect partial implementation. Again, stronger policy language is needed to bring uniformity to practice and ensure full compliance.

To address these gaps, CTECS will take the following steps:

1. Policy Updates

The District Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC), under the leadership of the Nutrition and School Meals consultant and key stakeholders from Health, PE, and district administration, will be responsible for updating policy language. These updates will:








- o Incorporate all federally required elements currently missing or weakly worded.
- o Reflect existing successful practices to ensure alignment and sustainability.
- o Strengthen language around marketing, Smart Snacks, seat times, and accountability roles.

2. Timeline for Revisions

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- o A draft revision of the Wellness Policy will be completed by October 31, 2025.
 - o The revised policy will be reviewed and finalized by the WAC and key stakeholders by November 28, 2025.
 - o Full dissemination to schools and staff will occur by December 2026, including training for building-level wellness administrators during the NAC meetings at the school building level.
3. Improving Partial Implementation
- For practices that received a score of '1'—indicating partial implementation, such as FR12 and NES13—CTECS will:
- o Provide building-specific guidance and technical assistance to standardize implementation.
 - o Develop professional development modules and visual resources to raise awareness and clarify expectations.
 - o Conduct a mid-year check-in with school wellness leads to assess implementation and troubleshoot barriers.
- By aligning our policy language with actual practice, and strengthening implementation where needed, CTECS is committed to upholding the USDA's wellness policy requirements while fostering a culture of health that reaches all students, staff, and school communities.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR9	Do all foods and beverages sold in school stores during the school day meet Smart Snack standards?	1	2	
FR14	Is there an official who is responsible for the implementation and compliance with the wellness policy at the building level for each school?	1	2	
NES5	Are marketing strategies used to promote healthy food and beverage choices in school?	0	2	
NES6	Do students have at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and at least 20 minutes to eat lunch, counting from the time they are seated?	0	2	
NES14	Do students have consistent and easy access to free drinking water throughout the school day?	1	2	
PEPA9	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to exemptions?	0	2	
PEPA18	Do teachers ever use physical activity as a punishment?	0	2	

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Opportunities for Growth

CTECS Wellness Policy: Addressing Unmet and Underdeveloped Wellness Priorities

The 2025 Triennial Assessment revealed that while CTECS has made considerable progress in many wellness domains, there remain critical areas where the district has either not addressed the topic in policy or practice, or has done so in only a very limited capacity. These gaps highlight the need for deliberate action to ensure compliance with federal wellness policy requirements and to promote a more comprehensive and equitable wellness culture districtwide.

Areas of Limited or No Policy and Practice

The most significant gaps appear in the Employee Wellness (EW) section of the assessment. CTECS received scores of zero (0) across all categories, indicating that no policy language currently exists and that practices supporting staff wellness are not meaningfully in place. Despite staff being vital role models for students and essential to a healthy school environment, there are no formal programs, policies, or expectations around:

- Promoting physical activity opportunities for staff;
- Encouraging healthy role modeling;
- Providing access to healthy food and beverage options in staff lounges.

In addition, some Federal Requirements (FRs)—specifically FR14, which mandates naming responsible parties for compliance—remain unaddressed in policy. Although some oversight exists informally, without explicit roles outlined in policy, accountability and consistency across schools are lacking.

Plans to Strengthen Policy and Practice

To address these gaps and ensure full compliance with USDA requirements and best practices, CTECS will undertake a two-pronged approach:

1. Policy Updates

- Responsible Party: The District Wellness Advisory Committee (WAC), led by the Nutrition and School Meals Consultant and the

Director of Food Services, with collaboration from district-level Administration, Human Resources, Labor Relations, Health & PE leadership, and school-based stakeholders.

- Scope of Revisions:

- o Add specific policy language around employee wellness goals, including access to healthy food options, physical activity opportunities, and modeling behaviors for students.

- o Clearly define roles and responsibilities for wellness policy oversight at both district and school levels (e.g., naming specific administrators responsible for implementation).

- Timeline:

- o Draft policy revisions complete by October 2025

- o Final policy adoption and dissemination by December 2025

2. Practice Implementation Plan

- Responsible Party: The WAC will appoint a Practice Implementation Task Group, which will include:

- o Representatives from District Administration

- o Human Resources & Labor Relations

- o The District Health & PE Consultant

- o Wellness policy leads from a cross-section of schools

- Implementation Plan Timeline:

- o Plan developed by December 2025

- o Pilot programs and staff training roll out by March 2026

- o Full implementation in all schools by Fall 2026

- Strategies for Practice Development:

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- o Introduce optional staff wellness activities such as walking groups, wellness challenges, or before/after school fitness access.
- o Provide guidance for school leaders to offer healthy vending and break room options.
- o Establish wellness communications and incentives through the district HR and communications teams.
- Assessment of Success:
 - o A mid-year review in Spring 2027 will measure progress using school feedback surveys, participation rates, and visual walkthroughs.
 - o Adjustments will be made as needed based on school-level feedback and implementation tracking logs.
















3. Additional Wellness Goals

Beyond federally required updates, CTECS will also prioritize broader wellness goals aligned with the district's mission to support the whole student and staff experience. These include:

- Incorporating physical activity breaks during instructional time (e.g., "brain breaks" between classes).
- Strengthening the integration of nutrition and physical activity topics across content areas.
- Increasing family and community engagement through district-led wellness events and building-level outreach.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR1	Does the district have specific goals for nutrition education designed to promote student wellness?	1	1	
FR8	Do all foods and beverages sold in vending machines meet Smart Snack standards?	1	1	
FR10	Are there fundraisers that sell foods or beverages to be consumed during the school day? If yes, do the foods and beverages sold meet Smart Snacks standards?	1	1	
FR11	Does your district regulate foods and beverages served at class parties and other school celebrations in elementary schools?	1	1	
FR12	Is there food or beverage marketing on the school campus during the school day? If yes, do the marketed items meet Smart Snacks criteria?	1	1	
NES8	Do you know where to access the USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards to check and see if an item can be sold in school during the school day?	1	1	

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NES12	Do all foods or beverages SOLD (not served) to students after the school day on school grounds (including aftercare, clubs, and afterschool programming) meet federal nutrition standards (e.g., CACFP or Smart Snacks)?	1	1	
NE6	Do school nutrition services staff members use the following methods to collaborate with teachers to reinforce nutrition education lessons taught in the classroom?	1	1	
NE7	 Does nutrition education address agriculture and the food system?	1	1	
PEPA1	 Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is implemented consistently for every grade?	1	1	
PEPA6	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in high school receive?	0	1	
PEPA11	 Are there opportunities for families and community members to engage in physical activity at school?	0	1	
PEPA12	 Are there opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity before and after school?	1	1	
PEPA16	What proportion of students walk or bike to school?	0	1	
PEPA19	Do teachers ever withhold physical activity as a classroom management tool?	1	1	
EW1	 Are there strategies used by the school to support employee wellness?	0	1	

Conclusion

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Conclusion of the CTECS Wellness Policy Triennial Assessment

CTECS remains committed to fostering a healthy, supportive school environment for all students and staff. This year's Wellness Policy Triennial Assessment shows that our district has made important progress—especially in strengthening our policies and aligning practices around nutrition education, meal standards, and student wellness initiatives.

We've also identified areas where we can do more to match policy with actual practice, including improving staff training, clarifying accountability, and making wellness practices consistent across all schools.

Some topics, like employee wellness and physical activity breaks, are not yet fully addressed in either policy or practice. These areas will be a focus in the coming year as we update our policies and roll out new wellness initiatives.

Moving forward, CTECS will:

Update our wellness policy to meet all federal requirements;

Provide clearer guidance and training to staff;

Expand wellness efforts for both students and employees;

And work with school leaders, families, and community partners to ensure our policies support long-term, districtwide success.

Together, we can build a stronger foundation for student health and well-being—one that supports learning, growth, and lifelong wellness.

Key



Strong Policies and Aligned Practices - District has a strong policy and is fully implementing practices that align with the policy



Create Practice Implementation Plan - District has a strong or weak policy, but practice implementation is either absent or limited



Update Policies Update Policies - District is fully implementing a practice but there is no or only weak language in the written policy, or the district is partially implementing practices and there is no language in the policy



Opportunities for Growth - District has either not addressed the topic in policy or practice; or has only addressed the topic in a very limited way

For more resources, visit: wellsat.org/resources

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