

Triennial Assessment Report: ACES Triennial Assessment of LSWP (6/2025)

District: AREA COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Introduction

Introduction to the ACES Triennial Wellness Assessment:

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) is committed to fostering a healthy, supportive school environment that promotes lifelong wellness for all students, staff, and community members. Every three years, ACES conducts a Triennial Assessment of its Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) to ensure that our district's practices align with federal regulations and reflect best practices in school wellness.

How ACES Compares to Federal Requirements and Best Practices:

Based on the most recent evaluation conducted in June 2025 using the nationally recognized WellSAT Policy and Practice Assessment tools, ACES demonstrated strong alignment between its written policies and the wellness practices implemented across schools. Nearly all policy and practice areas, including nutrition education, school meals, physical activity, employee wellness, and marketing, received full scores—indicating that ACES not only has clear and comprehensive policies in place, but also fully implements them in day-to-day practice.

This year's assessment showed continued strength in maintaining compliance with federal meal standards, protecting student privacy, promoting physical activity, and integrating wellness education throughout the curriculum. Compared to previous assessments, this triennial review confirms ACES's ongoing progress and consistency in upholding wellness standards districtwide.

Assessment Process and Stakeholder Involvement:

The Triennial Assessment was led by the ACES Wellness Advisory Council, a collaborative body composed of parents, students, teachers, administrators, health professionals, and school board representatives. This council meets regularly to monitor policy implementation, provide feedback, and update the wellness plan as needed. The 2025 assessment was completed through a thorough review of policy documents and on-the-ground practices across schools, utilizing structured tools to compare current efforts against federal and model wellness policy guidelines.

Through this inclusive and data-informed process, ACES ensures that its commitment to student wellness is more than just a policy—it's a lived reality in every classroom, cafeteria, and playground. The full assessment results are available to the public and serve as a foundation for continued growth and improvement in the years ahead.

Strong Policies and Aligned Practices

ACES Wellness Policy: Areas of Success:

The 2025 Triennial Assessment highlights several areas in which Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) has achieved notable success in both developing strong wellness policies and fully implementing aligned practices across all schools. These accomplishments demonstrate ACES's continued commitment to cultivating a healthy school environment that supports students' physical, emotional, and academic well-being.

Federal Requirements Successfully Met:

In alignment with federal mandates, ACES has achieved full compliance across all federally required components of the Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP).

These include:

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- Nutrition Education Goals: ACES promotes student wellness through sequential, skills-based, and interactive nutrition education at all grade levels.
- Federal Meal Standards: School meals meet or exceed USDA nutritional standards, ensuring age-appropriate portions, nutrient-rich offerings, and caloric balance.
- Student Privacy Protection: The district safeguards the privacy of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- Access to Free Drinking Water: Free, safe, and accessible drinking water is available to students during meals and throughout the school day.
- Professional Training: All food service staff meet or exceed required USDA training standards.
- Smart Snacks Compliance: All foods sold during the school day—including a la carte items, vending machines, and school stores—adhere to Smart Snacks nutritional standards.
- Celebrations and Fundraisers: Class celebrations and school fundraisers align with federal nutrition guidelines.
- Food Marketing: Items marketed on campus meet Smart Snacks criteria.
- Wellness Committee Representation: The Wellness Advisory Council includes diverse stakeholder groups.
- Building-Level Oversight: A designated official ensures school-level implementation and compliance.
- Policy Transparency and Public Access: The wellness policy and triennial assessment are made publicly available and regularly updated.
- Assessment and Revision: The district consistently evaluates and revises the policy based on new data and evolving wellness goals?.

Sustained Progress Since the Last Assessment:

Compared to the previous triennial assessment, ACES has demonstrated sustained progress and consistency in maintaining full alignment between wellness policies and actual practices. Many items that required enhancement in the past have since been strengthened. For example, previous assessments may have highlighted the need for improvement in stakeholder representation or food marketing policies—areas that now receive full scores due to expanded council membership and marketing practices that meet Smart Snacks standards.

ACES's focus on continuous improvement has been key to these successes. The district leveraged findings from the last assessment to implement more targeted staff training, increase transparency with the community, and ensure a consistent student experience in meals and physical activity offerings across all schools?.

These achievements reflect not only regulatory compliance but a broader organizational culture that prioritizes student wellness as a foundation for learning and growth. ACES remains committed to using data, stakeholder input, and national benchmarks to guide its wellness initiatives into the future.

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
FR1	Does the district have specific goals for nutrition education designed to promote student wellness?	2	2	☆

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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	☆
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	☆
FR8	Do all foods and beverages sold in vending machines meet Smart Snack standards?	2	2	☆
FR9	Do all foods and beverages sold in school stores during the school day meet Smart Snack standards?	2	2	☆
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?	2	2	☆
FR11	Does your district regulate foods and beverages served at class parties and other school celebrations in elementary schools?	2	2	☆


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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?	2	2	☆
FR13	Which groups are represented on the district-level wellness committee?	2	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?	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	☆
FR17	What is included in the triennial assessment report to the public?	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	☆
NES3	Does your school or district provide information to families about eligibility for free or reduced-price meals?	2	2	☆
NES4	Does your school use strategies to maximize participation in the school breakfast program and/or school lunch program?	2	2	☆
NES5	Are marketing strategies used to promote healthy food and beverage choices in school?	2	2	☆

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NES7	 In your district, is it a priority to procure locally produced foods for school meals?	2	2	☆
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?	2	2	☆
NES9	Are you familiar with any state laws allowing exemptions for school-sponsored fundraisers during which foods and beverages do not have to meet Smart Snacks?	2	2	☆
NES10	Are foods or beverages containing caffeine sold at the high school level?	2	2	☆
NES14	Do students have consistent and easy access to free drinking water throughout the school day?	2	2	☆
NE1	Are skills-based, behavior-focused, and interactive/ participatory methods used in nutrition education to develop student skills?	2	2	☆
NE2	Do all elementary school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆
NE3	Do all middle school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆
NE4	Do all high school students receive sequential and comprehensive nutrition education?	2	2	☆
NE5	Is nutrition education integrated into other subjects beyond health education?	2	2	☆
NE6	Do school nutrition services staff members use the following methods to collaborate with teachers to reinforce nutrition education lessons taught in the classroom?	2	2	☆

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PEPA1	 Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is implemented consistently for every grade?	2	2	
PEPA2	Does the district have a written physical education curriculum that is aligned with national and/or state standards?	2	2	
PEPA3	How does your physical education program promote a physically active lifestyle?	2	2	
PEPA4	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in elementary school receive?	2	2	
PEPA5	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in middle school receive?	2	2	
PEPA6	How many minutes per week of PE does each grade in high school receive?	2	2	
PEPA7	Are all physical education classes taught by state certified/licensed teachers who are endorsed to teach physical education?	2	2	
PEPA8	Is ongoing professional development offered every year for PE teachers that is relevant and specific to physical education?	2	2	
PEPA9	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to exemptions?	2	2	
PEPA10	What percentage of students do you estimate do not take PE each year due to substitutions?	2	2	

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PEPA11	 Are there opportunities for families and community members to engage in physical activity at school?	2	2	
PEPA12	 Are there opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity before and after school?	2	2	
PEPA13	Is there daily recess for all grades in elementary school?	2	2	
PEPA14	 Do teachers provide regular physical activity breaks for students in the classroom?	2	2	
PEPA15	Does the district have “joint-use” or “shared-use” agreements?	2	2	
PEPA16	What proportion of students walk or bike to school?	2	2	
PEPA17	 Are teachers encouraged to use physical activity as a reward for students?	2	2	
PEPA18	Do teachers ever use physical activity as a punishment?	2	2	
PEPA19	Do teachers ever withhold physical activity as a classroom management tool?	2	2	
EW1	 Are there strategies used by the school to support employee wellness?	2	2	
IC1	Is there an active district-level wellness committee?	2	2	

Create Practice Implementation Plan

ACES Plan for Strengthening Practice Implementation:

While Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) has achieved strong alignment between many of its wellness policies and practices, the 2025 Triennial Assessment identified specific areas where written policy

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exists but practice implementation is limited or absent. These gaps present an opportunity to reinforce district-wide consistency and ensure full compliance with all aspects of the Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP).

Federal Requirements in This Section:

The federal requirements falling into this category include:

- Foods and Beverages Served or Sold After School (NES11 & NES12): Currently, foods and beverages served or sold to students after the official school day (e.g., in aftercare, clubs, and extracurricular programs) do not consistently meet federal nutrition standards like CACFP or Smart Snacks.
- Use of Food as a Reward (NES13): While policies discourage using food as a reward, some staff still practice this, suggesting the need for consistent implementation and staff training.
- Staff Modeling of Healthy Behaviors (EW2): The policy encourages staff to model healthy eating and physical activity, but this is not yet fully integrated or reinforced across all schools.
- School-Level Wellness Committees (IC2): The district has a strong district-level Wellness Advisory Council, but school-level wellness committees are not yet active, limiting local engagement and oversight?

Steps to Improve Practice Implementation:

To address these areas, ACES will develop and roll out a Practice Implementation Plan that includes the following steps:

- Clear Guidance and Training
- Develop guidelines and training modules for staff on:
 1. Avoiding the use of food as a reward.
 2. Promoting healthy behaviors by modeling them in front of students.
 3. Understanding nutrition standards for all after-school programming.

Policy Dissemination and Reinforcement:

Distribute user-friendly policy summaries to after-school program staff, club leaders, and food service workers to reinforce compliance expectations. Incorporate policy reminders into monthly staff newsletters and professional development days.

Establishing School-Level Wellness Committees:

Each ACES school will form its own Wellness Committee by Fall 2025. These teams will include staff, students, and family representatives and will meet at least twice a year to support local implementation and feedback loops.

Monitoring and Feedback Systems:

Incorporate observation checklists and end-of-semester surveys to assess:

- Compliance with Smart Snacks and food reward policies.
- Visibility of staff modeling healthy habits.
- Functionality of school-level wellness committees.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Wellness Advisory Council: Will oversee the overall plan design, resources, and progress monitoring.
- Building Principals: Will coordinate the formation and operation of school-level wellness committees.
- Food Services Director & After-School Program Leads: Will ensure that food offerings during extended-day programming meet Smart Snacks or CACFP standards.

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-Professional Development Team: Will incorporate wellness-related training modules into the annual PD calendar.

Timeline for Implementation:

- Plan Creation: May–June 2025
- Initial Training and Resource Rollout: August 2025
- Implementation Launch: September 2025
- Mid-Year Check-In and Adjustments: January 2026
- Full-Year Evaluation: June 2026

Assessing Implementation Success:

ACES will measure success through:

1. Documented reductions in the use of food as reward practices.
2. Post-training surveys showing increased awareness of wellness policy requirements.
3. Confirmation that school-level committees are formed and active.
4. Nutrition audits of after-school food offerings.

These steps will ensure that ACES continues to lead with integrity and intention in promoting wellness, not only through policy but through consistent practice at every level of the school day and beyond.

Update Policies

Updating the ACES Wellness Policy for Full Alignment:

The 2025 Triennial Assessment identified several areas where ACES is fully or partially implementing wellness practices, but the written wellness policy lacks sufficient or specific language to reflect these efforts. Updating the Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) to include these components is a priority to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with federal mandates.

Federal Requirements Identified in This Section:

While ACES continues to implement strong wellness practices, the following federally required areas were flagged for lacking robust policy language despite being in practice:

- Marketing of Foods and Beverages (FR12): ACES ensures that all food and beverage marketing during the school day aligns with Smart Snacks standards, but the current wellness policy includes only general references to food marketing and lacks strong, specific language consistent with federal expectations.
- School-Level Oversight (FR14): Each school has an identified official responsible for policy implementation, yet this role is not clearly codified in the written policy.
- Public Reporting of the Triennial Assessment (FR17): The district shares the results publicly, but the policy does not explicitly require detailed public reporting on the triennial assessment outcomes.

Additionally, staff modeling of healthy behaviors (EW2) and use of food as a reward (NES13) received partial practice implementation scores (1) and require both stronger policy language and more consistent application?.

Other District Priority Areas:

ACES has also identified the following items as local priorities for policy strengthening:

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- School-Level Wellness Committees (IC2): Although not federally required, the lack of policy language and practice in this area limits opportunities for school-specific wellness initiatives.
- Integration of Agriculture and the Food System in Nutrition Education (NE7): This practice is partially implemented and aligns with ACES's values around sustainable food systems and culturally responsive education.

Policy Update Responsibilities and Timeline:

Responsibility: The ACES Wellness Advisory Council will lead the policy revision process in coordination with:

- The Executive Director or designee(s)
- Asst. Director of Operations and Risk Management
- Curriculum Coordinators
- Food Services Director
- School Principals or designee(s)

Timeline:

- Policy Review & Drafting: May–June 2025
- Stakeholder Review & Feedback: July–August 2025
- Policy Finalization and Board Approval: September 2025
- Public Posting and Implementation: October 2025

Improving Practice Implementation:

For items that were only partially implemented:

1. Staff Modeling Healthy Behaviors (EW2):

- ACES will add professional development opportunities to emphasize the importance of staff as role models.
- A district-wide awareness campaign will encourage staff to demonstrate healthy eating and physical activity.

2. Use of Food as a Reward (NES13):

- Clear, written guidance will be added to the wellness policy to prohibit the use of food as a reward.
- Alternative reward strategies will be promoted through training and resource sharing with teachers.

3. Nutrition Education on Agriculture/Food Systems (NE7):

- ACES will build on its participation in the Farm to School program and include specific curriculum references in the updated policy.
- Additional classroom resources and experiential learning opportunities (e.g., school gardens, field trips) will be developed to support this goal?.

Outcome and Accountability:

Updated policy language will reflect the full scope of current practice and reinforce areas that require improvement. Progress will be monitored through:

- Annual internal reviews
- Community feedback mechanisms
- Next Triennial Assessment in 2028

By ensuring that the written policy accurately reflects both existing practices and aspirational goals, ACES will

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deepen its commitment to a comprehensive, equitable, and legally compliant wellness framework for all students and staff.

Opportunities for Growth

Opportunities for Growth: Enhancing ACES Wellness Policy and Practices:

The 2025 Triennial Assessment has identified several areas where Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) has either not addressed wellness topics in its Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) or has only done so in a limited manner. These findings present a valuable opportunity for the district to strengthen both its wellness policies and the implementation of key practices to ensure compliance with federal regulations and to promote holistic student and staff well-being.

Federal Requirements Needing Immediate Attention:

The two federally related areas in this section that received a score of 0 for both policy and practice are:

1. NES11 – Foods/Beverages Served After the School Day: There is currently no policy language or consistent practice ensuring that foods and beverages served to students in afterschool settings (e.g., clubs, extracurricular activities, enrichment programs) meet federal nutrition standards.
2. NES12 – Foods/Beverages Sold After the School Day: Similar to NES11, no policy or enforcement is in place to guarantee compliance with USDA Smart Snacks or CACFP standards during after-school hours when food or beverages are sold to students?.

District Wellness Priorities for Improvement:

In addition to the above, school-level wellness committee activity (IC2) was also rated as absent in both policy and practice. While not a federal requirement, establishing school-level wellness committees is a district priority to foster site-based ownership and more localized health promotion efforts.

Practice Implementation Plan:

To address these gaps, ACES will develop a comprehensive practice implementation plan with the following steps:

Improving Implementation of After-School Nutrition Standards:

1. Guidelines and Tools:

- Create clear procedures for after-school program leaders and club advisors on allowable food/beverage offerings.
- Distribute USDA Smart Snacks checklists and training materials to all after-school personnel.

2. Staff Training:

- Include specific training on after-hours food compliance in the annual professional development calendar starting Fall 2025.

3. Monitoring and Support:

- Begin site-level monitoring of after-school snack offerings in collaboration with school nurses and food services.

Activating School-Level Wellness Committees:

1. Launch Campaign:

- In August 2025, ACES will initiate a campaign to establish Wellness Committees at each school.

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-Committees will include a mix of staff, students, and family/community representatives.

2. Guidance and Accountability:

-Each school will receive a toolkit outlining the roles, meeting frequency, and reporting responsibilities of the committee.

-School principals will ensure the formation and sustainability of these teams.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Practice Implementation Plan Lead:

The ACES Wellness Advisory Council, in partnership with the Executive Director, will oversee the development and rollout of practice changes.

Implementation Timeline:

-Plan Development: May–June 2025

-Training & Communication: August 2025

-Implementation Start Date: September 2025

-Monitoring and Evaluation: Ongoing, with an initial review in January 2026 and full evaluation in June 2026

Success Assessment:

-Compliance checklists for after-school food offerings

-Documentation of school-level committee activity (e.g., meeting notes, rosters, action plans)

-Staff feedback surveys on training effectiveness

Policy Language Updates:

To match these implementation goals, ACES will revise its LSWP to explicitly include:

1. Clear standards for foods and beverages served or sold outside of regular school hours

2. Requirements for establishing active school-level wellness committees at each site

3. Policy Revision Responsibility:

-The Wellness Advisory Council and district leadership team, with input from food service and program staff


Policy Update Timeline:

-Draft Policy Revisions: June–July 2025








-Stakeholder Review: August 2025

-Board Review and Adoption: September 2025

-Public Dissemination: October 2025

		Policy Score	Practice Score	
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?	1	1	

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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)?	0	0	
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)?	0	0	
NES13	Do teachers or school staff give students food as a reward?	1	1	
NE7	 Does nutrition education address agriculture and the food system?	1	1	
EW2	Are school staff encouraged to model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors in front of students?	1	1	
IC2	Is there an active school-level wellness committee?	0	0	

Conclusion

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) remains deeply committed to creating a school environment where students thrive physically, emotionally, and academically. The 2025 Triennial Assessment of our Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) confirms that ACES continues to meet or exceed federal requirements in many key areas, including school meals, nutrition education, physical activity, and staff training. These successes reflect the dedication of our educators, food service teams, administrators, and community partners.

The assessment also helped us identify several areas where we can further strengthen our practices and policies, especially related to food and beverage options during after-school programs and enhancing staff wellness efforts. We are creating action plans and updating our policy to reflect these goals, ensuring that every aspect of our school environment supports student well-being throughout the day.

Finally, we are committed to increasing community involvement by establishing school-level wellness committees and making our wellness efforts more visible and inclusive.

Thank you to all the families, staff, and community members who support our mission. Together, we are building a stronger, healthier future for all ACES students.

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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

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