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Introduction

Arizona Autism Charter Schools, Inc (hereto referred to as “school,” “our school,” or “the school”) is committed to the optimal development of every student.

Research shows that two components, good nutrition and physical activity during the school day, are strongly correlated with positive student outcomes. For example, student participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) School Breakfast Program is associated with higher grades and standardized test scores, lower absenteeism and improved cognitive performance (CDC). Conversely, less-than-adequate consumption of specific foods including fruits, vegetables and dairy products, is associated with lower grades among students (CDC). In addition, students who are physically active throughout the day tend to have better grades, attendance, cognitive performance, and behavior (CDC).

As stated on the Autism Speaks (autismspeaks.org) website, while nutrition plays an integral role in living a healthy lifestyle, many children with autism face challenges that can make a nutritious diet especially difficult. Food sensitivities, gastroenterological issues and restricted or repetitive behaviors are just a few examples. AZACS will work collaboratively with families who have children in need of special diets and will involve the school nurse and other professionals as needed.

AZACS is also committed to supporting students with autism in physical activity and sports programs. Research cited by Autism Speaks states that physical activity programs for youth with autism produced moderate to large benefits in a variety of important areas. These include improving motor skills, skill-related fitness, social functioning and muscular strength and endurance. AZACS has specially trained staff and strategies to teach sports and fitness skills in an adapted fashion. AZACS also has a great partnership with the Special Olympics. Through this program, students have opportunities to compete, participate in tournaments and make new friends and connections in the community.

This policy outlines our school’s approach to ensuring environments and opportunities for all students to practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors throughout the school day.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms will be defined as follows when used in this document:

- School campus: areas that are owned or leased by the school and used at any time for school-related activities, including on the outside of the school building, school buses or other vehicles used to transport students, athletic fields and stadiums, or parking lots
- School day: 7:30am to 4:00pm



Wellness Goals

Nutrition Promotion

- Participation in meal programs is encouraged as appropriate (School Breakfast, National School Lunch).
- School meal program menus are posted on the school website.

Nutrition Education

- Teachers and Instructional Lead Teachers receive training in nutrition education and write lesson plans according to the Arizona State Standards.
- Nutrition education is taught through other subjects like math, science, language arts, social sciences and electives.

Physical Activity

- Physical activity during the day (including but not limited to recess, classroom physical activity breaks, or physical education) is not used or withheld as punishment for any reason.
- Schools ensure that inventories of physical activity supplies and equipment are known and more ordered when necessary.

Nutrition Standards and Guidelines

School Meals

AZACS is committed to serving healthy meals to children, with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat milk and water; that are moderate in sodium, low in saturated fat, and have zero grams *trans* fat per serving (nutrition label or manufacturer's specification); and to meeting the nutrition needs of children within their calorie requirements. The school meal programs aim to improve the diet and health of children, help mitigate childhood obesity, model healthy eating to support the development of lifelong healthy eating patterns and support healthy choices while accommodating cultural food preferences and special dietary needs.

Our school participates in USDA child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). We are committed to offering school meals through the NSLP and SBP programs, and other applicable Federal child nutrition programs, that:

- Are accessible to all students;
- Are appealing and attractive to children;
- Are served in clean and pleasant settings;
- Meet or exceed current nutrition requirements established by local, state, and Federal statutes and regulations. Note: The school offers reimbursable school meals that meet [USDA nutrition standards](#).
- Promote healthy food and beverage choices using [Smarter Lunchroom techniques](#), including but not limited to:



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- Displaying fruit options in a location in the line of sight and reach of students.
- Offering vegetables on all service lines.
- When cut raw, serve healthy, low-fat dips (e.g., hummus, salsa, ranch) with vegetables.
- Keeping milk cases and coolers stocked throughout the meal service.
- Offering white milk in all beverage coolers.
- Politely prompting students who do not have a full reimbursable meal to “complete their meal” (e.g., by selecting a fruit or vegetable).
- Ensuring a reimbursable meal can be created in any service area available to students.
- Providing a monthly meal menu to students, families, teachers, and administrators.

Additionally, our school is committed to:

- Promoting participation in federal child nutrition programs among students and families to help ensure that families know what programs are available.
- Accommodating students with special dietary needs.
- Serving lunch at a reasonable and appropriate time of day.
- Allowing reasonable time for students to eat meals.

Competitive Foods and Beverages

Our school is committed to ensuring that all foods and beverages sold to students on the school campus during the school day support healthy eating. Nutritional requirements of the foods and beverages sold outside of the school meal programs (i.e., “competitive” foods and beverages) will be determined in accordance with [USDA Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards](#). These standards aim to improve student health and well-being, increase consumption of healthful foods during the school day and create an environment that reinforces the development of healthy eating habits.

To support healthy food choices and improve student health and well-being, all foods and beverages outside the reimbursable school meal programs that are sold to students on the school campus during the school day will meet or exceed the USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards (7CFR§210.11). These standards will apply in all locations and through all services where foods and beverages are sold, which may include, but are not limited to, à la carte options in cafeterias, vending machines, school stores and snack or food carts.

Celebrations and Rewards

The school will encourage the use of foods and beverages that meet nutrition standards, as well as make available to parents and teachers resources suggesting healthy alternatives for



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the following activities, though food and beverages served in these instances are not required to meet USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards.

- Celebrations and parties. The school will provide a list of healthy party ideas to parents and teachers, including non-food celebration ideas. Healthy party ideas are available from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and from the USDA.
- Classroom snacks brought by parents. AZACS will provide to parents in the handbook a list of foods and beverages that meet Smart Snacks nutrition standards.

Fundraising

Foods and beverages that meet or exceed the USDA Smart Snacks in Schools nutrition standards may be sold through fundraisers on the school campus during the school day. The school will make available to parents and teachers a list of healthy fundraising ideas and encourage the use of non-food fundraisers and those promoting physical activity (such as walk-a-thons, Jump Rope for Heart, fun runs, etc.). Foods and Beverages Marketing

Food and beverage marketing is defined as advertising and other promotions in schools. Food and beverage marketing often includes an oral, written, or graphic statements made for the purpose of promoting the sale of a food or beverage product made by the producer,

manufacturer, seller or any other entity with a commercial interest in the product. This term includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Brand names, trademarks, logos or tags, except when placed on a physically present food or beverage product or its container.
- Displays, such as on vending machine exteriors.
- Corporate brand, logo, name or trademark on school equipment, such as marquees, message boards, scoreboards or backboards.
- Corporate brand, logo, name or trademark on cups used for beverage dispensing, menu boards, coolers, trash cans and other food service equipment; as well as on posters, book covers, pupil assignment books or school supplies displayed, distributed, offered or sold by the school.
- Advertisements in school publications or school mailings.
- Free product samples, taste tests or coupons of a product, or free samples displaying advertising of a product.

Our school is committed to providing a school environment that ensures opportunities for all students to practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors throughout the school day while minimizing commercial distractions. We strive to teach students how to make informed choices about nutrition, health and physical activity. These efforts will be weakened if students are subjected to advertising on school property that contains messages inconsistent with the health information the school is imparting through nutrition education and health promotion efforts. It is the intent of the school to protect and promote student's health by permitting advertising and marketing for only those foods and beverages that are permitted to be sold on the school campus, consistent with the school's wellness policy.



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Any foods and beverages marketed or promoted to students on the school campus during the school day will meet or exceed the USDA Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards, such that only those foods that comply with or exceed those nutrition standards are permitted to be marketed or promoted to students.

As the school reviews existing contracts and considers new contracts, equipment and product purchasing (and replacement) decisions should reflect the applicable marketing guidelines established by the local wellness policy. Note: Immediate replacement of school equipment (e.g., scoreboards) is not required; however, the school will replace or update equipment when existing contracts are up for renewal or to the extent that is financially possible over time so that items follow the marketing policy.

Participation, Implementation and Monitoring

Wellness Leadership

The school will convene a Wellness Committee periodically to oversee the Wellness Policy and related decisions or actions. The committee will include (to the extent possible), but is not limited to: parents or caregivers; students; school nutrition program leaders (e.g., school nutrition manager; operations manager); teachers; school administrators; school board members; health professionals; and the general public. The Talent Management Director, or a designee, is responsible for overseeing and convening the committee, and serves as Wellness Coordinator.

The Wellness Committee members are included in the table below, which is updated when/if membership changes:

Name	Title or Relationship to School	Contact Information (email and/or phone)	Role on Committee
Yvonne Cass	Talent Management Director	ycass@autismcharter.org	Wellness Coordinator
Kelly Hardegree-Ullman	Physical Education Manager	khardegree-ullman@autismcharter.org	Member
Holly Vaughan	School Nutrition Manager	hvaughan@austimcharter.org	Member
Jessica Mangieri	School Nurse	jmangieri@autismcharter.org	Member
Lisa Long	Chief of Staff	llong@autismcharter.org	Member

Implementation

The school will develop and maintain a plan for implementation to manage and coordinate the execution of this wellness policy. The plan delineates actions, responsibilities, outcomes and timelines for general implementation as well as aligned to the goals set for nutrition promotion, nutrition education, physical activity, and other activities to promote wellness.



Evaluation

At least once every three years, our school will assess implementation of the Wellness Policy. The Wellness Coordinator will oversee triennial reviews by convening the Wellness Committee and any additional stakeholders to conduct the assessment and develop a report of the findings.

Triennial assessments will include the following components:

- Evaluate compliance to standards and guidelines in the Wellness Policy
- Monitor progress toward Wellness Policy goals
- Compare our Wellness Policy to the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation's model wellness policy](#)

The assessment team(s) will evaluate the school for compliance to standards/guidelines and of progress toward goals using an appropriate rubric or checklist. Additionally, the evaluation will compare the local wellness policy to the Alliance for Healthier Generation's model. The completed tools and corresponding notes or recommendations for improvement will serve as the report for each evaluation. Reports will be shared publicly via our website.

Revision

The Wellness Policy will be revised as needed, including but not limited to responding to:

- Local, state, or federal policy changes
- Needs identified by students, staff, parents/families, or other stakeholders brought to the Wellness Coordinator
- Completed triennial evaluation report reviews

Revision to the Wellness Policy will be made by convening the Wellness Committee, in whole or part, to discuss and revise the policy. Note: When revision is required as a result of local, state, or federal policy changes, Wellness Policy revisions may be made in consultation with qualified experts and in the absence of committee meetings.

The school will inform all members of the school community and public at large of revision to the Wellness Policy via our website.

Public Involvement

Our school is committed to being responsive to community input, which begins with awareness of the wellness policy. We will actively communicate ways in which members of the Wellness Committee and others can participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of the Wellness Policy. We will also inform parents/families of any substantial changes that have been made to school meal programs and compliance with school meal standards, the availability of child nutrition programs and how to apply, and other pertinent information related to wellness.

We will use electronic mechanisms, such as email and website/social media notices, as well as non-electronic mechanisms, such as newsletters, presentations to parents, or sending



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information home to parents, to ensure that all families are actively notified updates to the Wellness Policy, as well as how to get involved and support the policy. We will ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate to the community, and accomplished through means similar to other ways that we are communicating important information with parents.

The school will notify the public/community at large about the content of or any updates to the Wellness Policy at least annually, as well as the availability of the annual and triennial reports, via our website.

Resources and References

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). "Health and Academic Achievement." Retrieved from. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation. (2018). "Alliance's Model Wellness Policy." Retrieved from https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/wellness_committees_policies/.