



St. Mary's Catholic Schools, O'Neill, Nebraska
School Wellness Policy
Updated 9/2025



Mission Statement for Wellness:

St. Mary's Catholic School is committed to providing school environments that promote and protect children's health, well-being, and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity.

Nutrition Guidelines

Nutrition guidelines have been selected by St. Mary's Catholic School for all foods available in each school building during the school day with the objective of promoting student health and increasing healthy behavior and personal lifestyle. The guidelines include the following:

1. The school lunch program will be offered which meets or exceeds the requirements of federal and state law,
2. No foods in competition with the lunch program shall be made available to the students anywhere on school premises.
3. St. Mary's does not, at this time, provide school breakfast.

Nutrition Education

The main goal is to implement a curriculum that meets or exceeds the health and nutrition education objectives established by the Nebraska Department of Education. The entire school environment, not just the classroom, shall be aligned with healthy school goals to positively influence a student's understanding, beliefs, and habits as they relate to good nutrition and regular physical activity. The following are actions to achieve such goals:

1. Curriculum

Nutrition education will be integrated into other subjects to complement, but not replace, the health and nutrition education curriculum that is provided in accordance with NDE Rule 10. Educators will incorporate the promotion of healthy eating nutrition lifestyles in all subject areas as appropriate.

2. Display Nutrition Education Materials

The cafeteria shall display, when available, posters or other communication suitable to the ages of students served that promote healthy nutrition choices. Educators are encouraged to incorporate such communications in their classrooms as well.

3. Nutrition Health Events

Educators are encouraged to search for and take advantage of events that promote nutrition education. Activities may include: Health fairs, traveling health exhibits, field trips to farm or food production facilities and health and wellness speakers (school assemblies and classroom presentations). When possible, classes will produce vegetables from the school's Grow Tower.

4. Family

Parents are welcome to join their children at school lunch as appropriate. Health Wellness information will be sent to parents through school communication venues.

5. Staff

Our employees are encouraged to be healthy role models for students. It is important for students to receive consistent messages. Staff is discouraged from eating foods and drinking beverages of minimal nutritional value during the school day in the presence of students.

Physical Activity to Promote Student Wellness:

One of St. Mary's established wellness goals is to implement a curriculum that meets or exceeds the health and physical education objectives established by the Nebraska Department of Education. In addition, students are encouraged to be physically active before and after school. The administration establishes the following additional goals:

1. Curriculum

Health and physical education will be integrated into other subjects to complement, but not replace, the health and physical education curriculum provided in accordance with NDE Rule 10. Educators will incorporate physical activity promotion in all subject areas as appropriate. The physical education curriculum follows existing standards and promotes a physically active lifestyle.

2. Physical Activity during the School Day

- Elementary students will have the opportunity for twice-daily recess. Weather and other conditions permitting, recess will be outdoors. Physical activity within class periods will be encouraged.
- 90 minutes per week are allotted for PE class in the elementary.
- 225 minutes per week of physical education are allotted in the high school.
- Both the elementary and high school PE program courses should be taught by a licensed physical education teacher if possible.
- As with any area of specialty, PE teachers are encouraged to take advantage of available professional development opportunities.
- Unless otherwise exempted, all students will be required to engage in the physical education program at St. Mary's School. St. Mary's discourages the substitution of other activities for physical education time.

3. Punishment

Physical activity will not be used as punishment and will not be withheld as punishment. This guideline shall not apply to extra-curricular activities. In no event will physical activity be used as a form of corporal punishment. However, we strongly recommend staff use physical activity as a reward when feasible. Some examples would be—a dodgeball tournament in the high school or extra recess in the elementary school.

4. Physical Activity Health Events

Educators are encouraged to search for and take advantage of events that promote physical activity education.

- St. Mary's participates in the annual 'Walk to School' program and encourages students to walk or ride their bikes to school when possible.

5. School Communications

Wellness ideas to parents will include information that promotes physical activity. Such communications may include information about the benefits of physical activity to children and distribution of information about youth sports programs.

6. Employees

Our employees are encouraged to be healthy role models for students by modeling healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. School equipment will be available for use by staff before or after school to support employee wellness.

Other School Activities to Promote Student Wellness

Another established goal is to offer other suitable opportunities to students to engage in health-promoting activities. The Wellness Team establishes the following additional goals and actions to achieve such goals:

1. Extracurricular Programs

The school will offer access to athletic and other activity programs subject to and in compliance with, the bylaws of the Nebraska School Activities Association. Coaches or sponsors of activities shall provide plans to parents or students regarding nutritional guidelines desired for pre-game or pre-event meals.

2. Advertising

- The administration will monitor advertising that occurs in the school and endeavor to limit messages that promote foods of minimal nutritional value.
- In addition, the healthiest choices, such as salads and fruit, will be prominently displayed on the salad bar in the cafeteria to encourage students to make healthy choices.
- School based marketing shall be in line with products that meet the school's nutrition standards. Advertising unhealthy foods is strongly discouraged on school grounds.
- A review of the advertising content of all classroom and online materials/websites used for teaching should be made prior to selection of materials. Use of materials depicting food brands or logos is discouraged.
- There will be no advertising in the cafeteria where school lunch is served. Existing coolers with logos in the concession area are allowed.
- St. Mary's will not market unhealthy products in school publications.

3. Professional Growth

Professional staff members will be provided with professional development and guidance on appropriate practices and procedures to implement the school wellness goals and recommendations. Professional development activities will include activities related to the integration of physical activities and nutrition education into the academic curriculum, information on how wellness impacts learning, and wellness goals and activities. The school will provide ongoing training and development for food service staff related to nutrition and wellness goals and activities.

4. Community Resources

The administration will strive to coordinate the school wellness program efforts with those available from medical, public health and other community organizations. The school shall actively develop and support the engagement of students, families, and staff in community health enhancing activities and events at the school and throughout the community. In addition, access to the gym and weight room to members of the community is possible with a signed agreement between the school and the community member.

The administration establishes the following actions to meet the nutrition guidelines:

Free and Reduced Lunches:

- **St. Mary's makes every effort to ensure that the privacy of students and their families qualifying for free and/or reduced lunch is protected.**
- **St. Mary's tries, whenever possible, to find alternative ways to keep lunch bills current for those families who cannot pay for their meals.**
- **Applications for free and reduced lunches are sent out at the beginning of each school year.**

1. Conditions for school meals

- a. Students will be provided adequate time to eat. In general, students will, upon arrival in the cafeteria, have at least 20 minutes to eat lunch.
- b. Efforts shall be made to establish acceptable eating conditions. The factors to promote these conditions will be a clean, orderly environment, pleasant adequate seating, and enforcement of student conduct rules with staff supervision.
- c. Several times each year, classes will be given an opportunity to choose their favorite lunch to be served.
- d. Water is available in the cafeteria for those students who have a milk allergy or do not desire milk.
- e. All food service personnel receive updated training in the Fall.
- f. At this time, St. Mary's does not have an option for Farm to School. However, wherever possible, the lunch coordinator will purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from local entities.

2. Selection of School Meals

School meals shall at a minimum meet nutrition requirements established by state and federal law. Emphasis is on good menu planning principles that offer healthy food choices including lean meats, a variety of fresh fruits and non-fried vegetables daily, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat milk daily. These choices shall be located where they are readily accessible to students and staff.

3. Limit portion sizes of desserts and fried foods

Elementary students in grades K-3 are offered balanced meals. Elementary students are not to be sold individual food or beverage selections except for milk. Student's meals from home: Parents will be encouraged via health promotional materials to make healthy choices for student lunches when students bring their meals from home.

4. Closed Campus

To encourage students to eat a nutritious lunch, students will not be permitted to leave school during the school day for the purpose of lunch.

5. Vending Machines

Vending machines with foods/beverages will not be available to use by elementary/middle/high school students at any time.

6. Foods available during the school day

- Students will be allowed access to water during the school day. Water fountains are available and water is available free of charge at all school meals. Students are encouraged to bring water bottles to classes.
- For classroom celebrations, parents and staff are encouraged to find a non-food or healthy food alternative for classroom celebrations including individual birthdays and special occasions.
- No competitive foods may be sold during the school day.
- St. Mary's does not allow for the operation of school stores.
- Only water, milk, and juice shall be sold to students during the school day.
- The only food/beverages sold to students after the school day are Concession items at athletic events. St. Mary's has no after school programs.
- Whenever possible, teachers are encouraged to use non-food rewards in the classroom.

7. Fund-raising

School clubs are discouraged from selling foods of minimal nutritional value as part of fund-raising efforts. School clubs are not to sell food during the school days.

Smart Snacks in School Standards are followed in most cases. The link describing this program is here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks-school> . St. Mary's strives to include some healthy choices for all fundraisers. It is recommended that St. Mary's clubs avoid participating in fundraising or corporate incentive programs that promote a message inconsistent with our goals for a healthy school community.

8. School activities/events

Concession stands at school activities and events will include healthy food choices such as water, popcorn, and fresh fruit when/if available.

9. Definition of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value

For purposes of this regulation, "foods of minimal nutritional value" has the same meaning as in the federal regulations for the National School Lunch Program. Specific foods of minimal nutritional value include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- a. Soda, pop, energy drinks
- b. Water ices except those which contain fruit and fruit juices
- c. Chewing gum
- d. Processed candies
- e. Fruit snacks or gummies
- f. Non-baked potato chips

10. Definition of Healthy Foods

For purposes of this regulation, "healthy foods" means foods that are not foods of minimal nutritional value, are low in fats, sodium and sugars, and high per serving in the nutrients which are needed to meet Reference Daily Intakes.

School Environment

1. School buildings and grounds, structures, buses, suburbans, and equipment shall meet all current health and safety standards, including environmental air quality, and be kept inviting, clean, safe and in good repair.
2. Schools shall maintain an environment that is free of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs. This applies to staff, students and visitors.
3. Safety procedures and appropriate training for students and staff shall support personal safety and a violence and harassment free environment.

*****Note—In October 2024, our school experienced a natural gas explosion in the Parish Center on campus. While we have worked diligently to keep the buildings and grounds welcoming, clean, safe, and in good repair, some repairs are still ongoing as we continue to restore the campus.***

Goals

1. **Movement during indoor recess.**
2. **Provide at least a quarterly activity to promote exercise and physical activity among our high school students.**
3. **All students, K-12, should have access to free mental health counseling within the school day and on the school campus.**
4. **The lunchroom needs to provide a better variety of fruits and vegetables for students to choose from.**

St. Mary's Wellness Team:

Jennie Schneider, Elementary Principal

Paula Atkeson, Secondary Principal

Patty Bauer, School Lunch Coordinator

Luke Bulau, Health/PE Teacher

Keith Willis, Retired School Mental Health Therapist

Nancy Berg, St. Mary's Advisory Board

- *A copy of this Wellness Plan, as well as the triennial progress report, when completed, will be posted on the SIS and St. Mary's School website.*
- *St. Mary's Wellness Team will meet each fall to go over the School Wellness Policy, suggest possible improvements/changes, and determine how we are progressing toward our goals. Students, parents, staff, and other stakeholders are welcome and encouraged to join the Wellness Team.*
- *In addition, periodically throughout the year, the school principals review the wellness plan to determine progression toward goals.*
- *Members of the St. Mary's Wellness Team will conduct a quantitative assessment of policy implementation every 3 years using the WellSAT-I or another school assessment tool and will revise the policy as needed. The next quantitative assessment will take place in the spring of 2026.*