STARTWELL

LEARNWELL
AN INITIATIVE OF HEALTHY CPS
EARLY CHILDHOOD WELLNESS

In Chicago, 22% of children ages 3-7 are obese—twice the national average. Research shows that attitudes about nutrition and physical activity develop from a very early age. Early Childhood Education is often children’s first exposure outside the home. This is an ideal opportunity to start building healthy behaviors right from the beginning that will set children up for success as they enter primary school and throughout their education. StartWELL defines early childhood program criteria for LearnWELL and encompasses a variety of components that support healthy learning environments for preschoolers.

**CPS Policy Guidelines for Early Childhood Education**

Early childhood programs within CPS will strive to meet the guidelines set forth in the CPS Local School Wellness and Healthy Snack and Beverage policies by addressing the following:

- **School Leadership:** Choose an early childhood representative to serve on the School Wellness Team.
- **Physical Activity:** Create opportunities for physical activity throughout the program each day, including outdoor play and structured physical activity.
- **Nutrition Education:** Integrate nutrition education into the program day, in addition to healthy food and drink options.
- **Healthy Celebrations and Rewards:** Focus on fun rather than food for celebrations and provide non-food rewards for students.
- **Parent Engagement:** Provide at least one annual parent engagement that includes health and wellness content.

**Physical Activity:** Include 30 minutes of daily indoor or outdoor gross motor time as well as frequent movement activities integrated with academic learning.

**StartWELL recommends at least 10 minutes of structured physical activity daily.**

The Centers for Disease Control Physical Activity Guidelines for preschool-aged children include at least 120 minutes of active play per day, 60 minutes of which should be structured and guided by a caregiver. Teachers and caregivers should provide students with opportunities to learn and practice age-appropriate motor and movement skills. Physical activity should include several bouts of vigorous or breathless play and 2-3 sessions of daily outdoor play.
Integrating physical activity that align with the Teaching Strategies GOLD objectives:

· Encourage students to vote on a song and dance at the carpet.
· Create an obstacle course in the block area.
· Give different locomotor directives such as “Jump to the carpet” or “Side slide to line up.”
· Show a numeral and prompt students to respond with a movement (e.g., hold up a 4 and students perform four jumping jacks).
· Use floor tape to create a hopscotch area or lines for walking, jumping and balancing.
· Act out movements during story time.
· Take yoga breaks in between whole group activities.
· Practice throwing and catching lightweight objects like balloons or scarves.

Nutrition Education: Integrate nutrition education into learning activities.

Young children are notorious for being picky eaters. Research shows that new foods may need to be introduced up to ten times before children will try them, which can cause difficulties in providing a varied diet. In the United States, almost one third of infants and toddlers receive no discrete fruit or vegetable daily, and french fries are the most common vegetable consumed. The Illinois Health and Physical Development Early Learning Standards are a useful resource in planning nutrition education in the classroom.

Ways to incorporate nutrition education into an early childhood classroom:

· Make predictions about new foods in a shared writing activity and record descriptions after tasting to see if the predictions were correct.
· Sort foods by color, size and food group.
· Turn the dramatic play area into a farmer’s market or restaurant.
· Make a bar graph of the number of fruits, vegetables and grains your school’s program serves each week and discuss why each food group is important.
· Read stories featuring different foods.
· Take a field trip to a local grocery store.
· The Illinois Health and Physical Development Early Learning Standards are a useful resource in planning nutrition education in the classroom.

Physical Activity Resources

· *Let’s Move! Child Care* offers physical activities, nutrition guides and goal-based action plans to fight obesity among young children.
· *Head Start Body Start* helps families and classrooms capitalize on outdoor play spaces with physical activities, games, and resources.
· *Healthy Habits for Life: Get Moving! uses familiar characters from Sesame Street to promote healthy eating, hygiene and exercise through videos and activity guides.*
· *Nemours’ Best Practices for Physical Activity Guide* outlines physical activity recommendations for children from birth through 18 years of age.
· *Get Moving Today* provides a calendar with creative physical activities for every day of the year.

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Nutrition Resources

- Healthy Habits for Life: Food and Drink to Grow On suggests recipes, games and learning activities to help introduce children to a nutritious lifestyle.
- Cooking Matters: Exploring Food Together offers detailed activity plans to guide children in identifying, purchasing and preparing foods from around the world.
- Grow It, Try It, Like It uses a garden-themed unit to introduce fruits and vegetables to children, complete with planting instructions and recipes.

Healthy Celebrations and Rewards: Early childhood classrooms affiliated with K-8 elementary schools will adopt and implement the school’s Healthy Celebration Plan. Food and physical activity may not be withheld as a punishment, and non-food rewards are recommended. Celebration is an important part of the classroom culture in early childhood. Celebrations and rewards can focus on fun rather than food. Furthermore, bringing outside food into the classroom can put students at risk of having an allergic reaction, especially for young children who may be undiagnosed.

Ways to incorporate healthy celebration into an early childhood classroom:

- Students celebrating a birthday could wear a favorite costume to school.
- Parents could bring in kazoos, games or party hats to celebrate a birthday.
- Reward the class with a bubble-blowing party or an outdoor science experiment.
- For holidays, students could celebrate by wearing pajamas or dressing like their favorite athletes or animals.

Healthy Celebration and Rewards Resources

- Blue Cross Blue Shield’s Healthy Alternatives for Snacks and Rewards offers tips for celebrations, rewards and fundraising that doesn’t rely on food.
- The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies’ Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward lists techniques for avoiding the use of food as a reward, comfort or punishment.

Parent Engagement: Health and wellness content will be included in at least one parent engagement each year.

Healthy habits and attitudes start at home. Parents have the greatest influence on young children, both as role models and children’s first educators. For parents, early childhood education is likely their first encounter with the school system since attending school as children. For these reasons, parents tend to be more engaged at the early childhood level than any other stage of a child’s education. Teachers should take this opportunity to educate parents about their children’s physical activity and nutritional needs, as well as provide resources to help their students develop healthy behaviors.
Ways to incorporate parent engagement into an early childhood classroom:

· Offer parent workshops with topics like cooking for preschool students, reading food labels, movement activities for children and developing healthy eating habits.

· Include information about StartWELL policies in parent orientation.

· Designate an area within parent newsletters devoted to health and wellness resources or education.

· Create a health and wellness bulletin board featuring tips for promoting healthy behaviors for families.

Parent Engagement Resources

· Healthy Habits for Life: Every Day is a Healthy Day provides ideas to help families promote wellness throughout a child’s home and community.

· Vanderbilt University’s Growing Right Onto Wellness (GROW) partners with parents and families to promote healthy habits outside of school.
### STARTWELL CHECKLIST

**Wellness Teams**
- The School Wellness team includes an early childhood representative, which could be a teacher, teacher’s assistant or parent.

**Physical Activity**
- All students are provided with the opportunity to participate in age-appropriate physical activity, including 30 minutes of daily outdoor play or gross motor time. (Gross motor time: Students are engaged in activities that allow them to move their entire body.)
- Teachers integrate structured and guided physical activity into daily learning activities and routines in order to develop age-appropriate motor skills.
- Students engage in frequent movement breaks and should not be inactive, or sitting, for periods longer than 30 minutes.

**Nutrition Education**
- Teachers provide nutrition education in accordance with the Illinois Physical Development and Health Early Learning Standards.

**Healthy Snacks and Drinks**
- When schools provide snacks, all items must align with the CPS Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy.

**Healthy Celebrations & Fundraising**
- Classrooms follow their school’s K-8 School Healthy Celebrations and Fundraising Plan.
- Standalone preschool buildings submit a Healthy Celebrations and Fundraising Plan to the Office of Student Health and Wellness.

**Healthy Rewards**
- School staff does not use physical activity or food as a punishment.
- School staff reinforces positive behavior with non-food rewards.

**Engaging students and families in school wellness initiatives**
- Teachers offer at least one parent engagement incorporating health and wellness content each year.
- Teachers communicate with parents about wellness initiatives happening at the school.