

**Nutrition Environment and Services: The CT WSCC Partnership On-Demand Webinar Series Transcript**

Welcome to the nutrition environment and services on-demand webinar. There are 10 webinars in this series, each corresponding with one domain of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. This webinar will focus on the nutrition environment domain, also referred to as nutrition environment and services. We will continue to refer to this domain as nutrition environment. Each webinar will begin with an overview of the WSCC model and an introduction to our practice briefs before a deep dive into the WSCC domain of focus.

The CT WSCC Partnership is a joint collaboration between the University of Connecticut’s Collaboratory on School and Child Health and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge our funding partners and share that the content of this webinar does not necessarily reflect the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Our practice briefs draw on the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model, which is the CDC and ASCD’s framework for addressing health in schools. The model is student-centered and stresses the need to coordinate policy, processes, and practice across ten domains of student health and well-being to maximize student success. As can be seen in the outmost ring, the model is situated within the community, and emphasizes drawing upon community context and expertise to use the model in contextually-aligned ways. The model is not a prescriptive program. Instead, it is a framework for organizing a school or district’s efforts to support the whole child, facilitate high quality teaching, and maximize student learning and success.

Today's content comes from our WSCC Practice Brief series. These are freely available on our website at ctwscc.org. If you'd like to learn more about how these briefs were developed and our CDC-funded project, please watch our "Intro to the WSCC Webinar Series" video.

What is the nutrition environment?

Let’s hear what one of our community partners has to say about this WSCC domain.

The nutrition environment to me means three different things. It means the three Cs, the community, the classroom, and the cafeteria. It is very important that the cafeteria is a place where students can come and feel comfortable and get healthy meals and be in an environment where they can enjoy a nourishing meal because nourishing food means that they can learn better when they’re not hungry. The classroom is the nutrition environment where they can learn about nutrition, sometimes in a traditional way as part of a health class, sometimes in a less traditional way by incorporating nutrition into something like a math or a science or a history lesson. And the community is very important as well because we want to make sure our families are connected to different hunger resources if they need extra food and ensure they have access to grocery stores so they can access that healthy food.

So, why is the nutrition environment relevant to child outcomes?

As school nutrition professionals, our job goes beyond the four walls of the cafeteria and the nutrition environment needs to reflect that. Although our students eat two meals a day with us, we need to educate students and staff and have healthy habits extend to both the classroom and the home. Focusing on the nutrition environment is important to make sure students have equal access to nutritious options that support their health, wellness, and overall development. When schools are able to prioritize nutrition, they create an environment where students can develop healthy habits for life.

Now that we know the why behind nutrition environment, let’s look at some evidence-based strategies that you can use in your practice.

We’ve organized the strategies by the required resource demand to help schools choose appropriate initiatives for their setting.

We begin with strategies that require a low resource demand.

The first recommendation is to ensure students are getting adequate time to eat.

Students are more likely to eat too much or not enough if they are not provided enough time to eat their meals. According to CDC recommendations, students should be allowed appropriate seat time for eating. This means students should get at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and 20 minutes to eat lunch. This time should not include the time it takes students to stand in line or get their lunch – instead, they should have this amount of time for eating specifically.

Another low-resource demand strategy is to promote school personnel involvement in a healthy nutrition environment. School personnel involvement in the school nutrition environment is associated with positive changes in fruit and vegetable consumption, nutrition knowledge, and dietary behaviors. Schools can involve personnel in strategies such as incorporating nutrition instruction and activities into classes, modeling healthy nutrition habits, creating an inviting eating environment, providing verbal encouragement and praise for eating fruits and vegetables and encouraging nutritional awareness. School personnel can also offer non-food rewards such as public praise, extra recess, free choice time, or homework passes.

Next, we move into moderate resource demand strategies. The first recommendation is to incorporate student choice and hands-on learning activities. Hands-on learning experiences are associated with increases in students’ healthy food consumption and general nutrition knowledge when provided in addition to nutrition education. Schools can offer hands-on activities such as involvement in choosing foods, creating promotional materials, and cooking classes, which are associated with increased healthy fruit and vegetable consumption and overall improved food-related preferences, attitudes, and behaviors.

A second moderate resource strategy is to collaborate with families and community organizations. Schools can provide newsletters, recipes, activities, and workshops that support healthy eating at home. Hands-on learning activities in school for families, such as cooking classes, taste tests, and school garden maintenance, can also help students apply nutrition knowledge at home and with their families. Finally, schools should engage with community partners and families to foster a healthy nutrition environment that incorporates student preferences and healthy foods familiar to students.

Next, we transition to the most resource-intensive strategies.

Schools can improve the school nutrition environment by developing a strong and comprehensive school-wide food environment policy that aligns with best practices. Schools can use the WellSAT tool to evaluate and improve their wellness policy.

For example, by modifying the presence and marketing of healthy food and beverage options, students are more likely to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption, nutritional knowledge, and healthy eating behaviors. When assessing the school nutrition environment, it’s important to ensure that practices are consistent throughout the school building. For example, consider what the environment looks like in vending machines, fundraisers, class parties, and student rewards. Modifications to the school nutrition environment include testing water for safety and providing reassurance to families, allowing students to bring water bottles to class, seeing if your district qualifies to offer universal free school meals with the Community Eligibility Provision and making sure that students are not identifiable based on free meal status or meal debt. Within the cafeteria, Schools can solicit student feedback and recommendations, hold taste tests, and introduce composting.

Our second high-resource recommendation is to provide competitive pricing for healthy foods. Competitive pricing programs like those that supply fruits and vegetables at little or no cost, or put competitive pricing restrictions on sugary beverages, encourage students to choose healthier foods instead of other snacks. Schools can apply for grants to obtain funds to support the implementation of competitive food pricing. For example, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service provides funding to promote nutritious local foods in schools through implementation, planning, and training grants. The USDA also provides Farm to School contacts for each state.

If you are interested in learning about additional resources related to the nutrition environment domain of the WSCC model, please see the full nutrition environment and services WSCC practice brief.

This brief, among the others, can be found on the Tools page of our website: ctwscc.org. After clicking on our tools, scroll down to Best WSCC practices. Here you will find our practice briefs.

Thank you for joining us! We hope you enjoyed today’s webinar. To view the other webinars in our WSCC on-demand webinar series, please visit our website at ctwscc.org. If you have any questions about the Connecticut WSCC Partnership, please feel free to contact us at ctwscc@uconn.edu.