

# Mott Haven Academy - Wellness Meeting Minutes 2024

**Date:** 6/17/2024

**Attendees:** Geoffrey Ramsey, Tsedale Tomlinson, Milagros Torres, Kiersten Ott

**Wellness Committee Members:** Milagros Torres, Kiersten Ott, Jessica Nauiokas

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## **Agenda Topics:**

Nutrition Education

Physical Activity

Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals

Wellness Promotion and Marketing

## **In Detail:**

### **1) Nutrition Education**

**a.** To satisfy Family & Community engagement, we discussed that there is nutrition info on the school website. The newsletter includes links to the website.

The Wellness Policy will also be posted on the school website.

**b.** Our school sends out a monthly newsletter and we discussed periodically adding nutrition and health 'fun facts' going forward.

**c.** Although there isn't a specific nutrition class, healthy eating and healthy living are ingrained in the community and culture of this school, as clearly evidenced in our cafeteria and meal plan. The topic might also naturally come up in Movement or Dance classes. Staff in general is very good about reminding students about healthy eating, about food and proper components, and about being healthy overall. They often talk to students about sugary foods, and healthier snack options, for example. This information is also found in the Student Handbook.

Kitchen Manager Baron hopes to start highlighting a vegetable once a month. Along with serving this vegetable, we discussed how he is interested in displaying its health facts at the serving window so students can learn about the benefits of that particular vegetable being highlighted.

**d.** As mentioned above, there are many opportunities for staff to discuss the topic of lifelong lifestyle balance (healthy living, healthy eating, feeling better) during the course of the school day, at meal times and in class.

e. In terms of nutrition education outside the classroom, Kindergarten students recently took a field trip to Queens Zoo and got to meet farm animals, and even learned how to milk cows.

There is also a gated garden area that is next to the yard that students use for recess. The school was given permission to use this garden a few years ago, and since then students have been working in it under the supervision of a staff member who leads the program. We recently had Garden Day at school and harvested cilantro and mint leaves from the garden, among others. Students also put in a new garden bed and fresh soil recently. All grades have access to the garden, but it is mostly 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders who work on it.

Additionally, in the past there was a garden on the terrace, but the water from the plants was leaking into the ceiling of the classroom below, and so it was stopped. Maybe in the future there will be a way to use the terrace for growing again, with careful planning so that there is no issue with leaking.

We also talked about the school's ongoing success with Rent-A-Chicken, a yearly program that the school participates. Every year, towards the end of the school year, the Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms get to observe eggs that hatch into baby chicks right in their own classrooms. The older students are also welcomed to come and visit, remembering their own experiences as Pre-K and Kindergarten students and further instilling these lessons. When the school closes for the summer, two staff adopt the chickens, and the money is donated.

## **2) Physical Activity**

a. Physical Activity is covered in Movement Class, which meets 3 x week, and Dance Class, which also meets 3 x week.

b. These classes are 40 or 45 minutes long.

c. ES and MS students have 25 minutes of supervised recess every day.

e. K-8<sup>th</sup> grades have After School programs with Sports and Dance. The MS has sports teams in soccer, basketball, track, and softball.

f. In terms of promoting walking, biking, or scooting to school, we discussed that staff at school is always encouraging students to be active and walk when possible. Many families and students walk to school. The school also has a bike rack outside.

We are also in the process of looking into a city-led bike program for 7<sup>th</sup> graders, which hopefully can be brought to the school in Fall 2024 once a proper storage area for the bikes can be secured.

**g.** For involvement with community events that promote physical activity, as well as community partnerships, our school participates in quite a few. Just recently, our school held a walk-a-thon called Walk This Way, which took place at one of the piers on the East River, on 5/18/24. This is a yearly event. Our school also has Field Day every June. The location for this changes every year, but this year, K through 5<sup>th</sup> graders went to a campsite in Westchester and participated in various outdoor activities. This is a very active day and was a big success this year. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders go to sleep away camp (1 night 2 days, and 2 nights 3 days, respectively). 8<sup>th</sup> Graders go to Washington DC –although not a camp, this does involve a lot of walking and is still an active trip.

We also talked about Family Day, which is held every year, on a Saturday. This day has offered activities such as Zumba, trampoline, yoga. There is always a physical activity component.

**h.** We have not had comments from parents about the amount of time students have to be active because our students have a lot, and on a regular basis.

**i.** Our school talks a lot about self care, and staff know that their health and mental well-being is important. The social worker at school sees as many staff members as students, which shows that they are comfortable in staying on top of their own wellness needs. The school health insurance company also offers a lot of Wellness tools for staff. When there are stressful events involving the school community, the school will hold staff meetings as well as send out emails to offer support and coping tools.

During Family Day, sometimes meditation is offered, as well as Yoga and other activities that are great Wellness tools.

The school employee medical insurance offers a reimbursement incentive of \$250 for staff who attend a gym.

### **3) Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals**

**a.** We discussed that BAB is mandatory, and the school already offers this to students. If they come late, students know that they can always get food and bring it to the classroom.

Also, the school purchases cereal bars like Nutrigrain as backup, if students ever need. Staff keep them in the office, or social worker's office, and students are aware that they are always available.

**b.** Not many students come late for breakfast, typically no more than 5 to 10 on any given day.

**c.** ES students eat in the cafeteria. For MS students, breakfast is Grab & Go style, and they eat in their classrooms. When school is holding testing days, food is still offered, and we always ensure that food is available to those that need it. Students do not go hungry at Mott Haven.

**d.** Free drinking water is always made available.

**e.** Staff exceeds hiring requirements (two in the kitchen with Food Protection Certificates, and Kiersten Ott in the office).

**f.** Parents are very vocal about giving feedback on the meal program. This is a large part of why the school switched vendors, because the parents were not happy with the previous vendor and spoke up about it. The school listened. For feedback from students, kitchen staff is always observing what students like, and through their daily interactions are able to adjust the menu.

Meal participation has been way up since the school started cooking breakfast on-site in May. The next step is to transition to on-site cooking for lunch as well. We are working on scheduling a meeting with our current vendor to discuss steps needed to make this happen for Fall 2024. We also want to transition to real cutlery and regular dishes for some meals, which will also help reduce waste. We hope to continue the growth of our breakfast participation as we implement further changes and continue to interest even more students.

**d.** We talked about our participation in the two fresh fruit and vegetable programs, and how our students are exposed to many healthy foods this way, as well as some local food.

#### **4) Wellness Promotion and Marketing**

**a.** Our school held two bake sales over the course of the year, both at the end of the school day, at dismissal. The parents oversee this. The Wellness Committee—Millie and Kiersten in particular—have discussed with the PTA (and will continue to remind them) about transitioning to more healthy food options. This was already evidenced in the most recent bake sale, which had much healthier options than in the past. The items were prepacked and carefully selected, versus cakes and cupcakes of prior bake sales, for example.

Also, our kitchen manager has ideas for healthy food offerings for these fundraising events, such as selling homemade pickles and hummus.

**b.** As previously mentioned, the school takes field trips to farms and also has worked with the garden next to the recess area.

**c.** The students get healthy meal choices. Our participation in both the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program, as well as the FFavors program, presents our students with a large variety of healthy offerings.

Our kitchen manager had the idea to put together bags of extra fruit and vegetables to donate to families on the last day of school.