



# Local School Wellness Policy Trends in San Diego County 2015-2024



# PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTHY SCHOOLS



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## TO COMBAT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM...

MORE THAN  
**81,000**

SAN DIEGO COUNTY  
STUDENTS MISSED  
10% OR MORE OF  
SCHOOL DAYS IN  
SY 2023-2024

Since School Year (SY) 2023-2024, the number of chronically absent students in San Diego County has decreased from **24.7%** to **20.1%**, a difference of **over 19,000 students**.



## ...DISTRICTS NEED STRONG WELLNESS POLICIES...

WellSAT\* scores of district Wellness Policies show significant improvement over the past 10 years.

+

**50%**

**Comprehensiveness**

+

**87%**

**Language Strength**

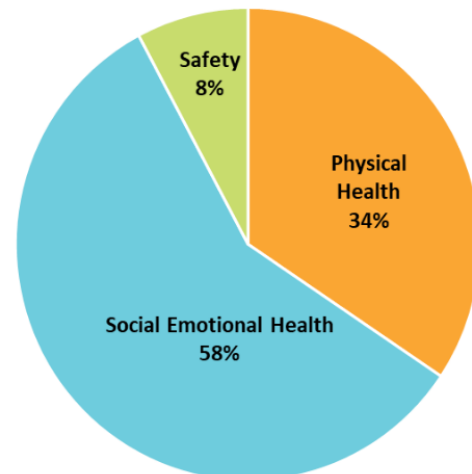
\*The WellSAT 3.0 is a national assessment tool to identify where local school wellness policies are strong and where they could be improved to meet current requirements and best practices.

**38**

DISTRICTS HAVE  
UPDATED THEIR  
WELLNESS  
POLICIES SINCE  
JANUARY 2017

## ...SUPPORTED BY FUNDING.

- In 2023-2024, San Diego County school districts collectively spent **\$190 million** on Health and Wellness actions, a decrease of **48%** from the previous year.
- This number represents **8%** of the state funding provided, a decrease of **10%** over the previous year.
- Similarly, itemization of funding decreased by **46%** from the previous year (**52% to 28%**) making district spending for Health and Wellness less transparent.



To learn more about your district's trends in these key areas, contact [Pam Smith](#) of Live Well Schools.



**LIVE WELL**  
SAN DIEGO

Revised March 2025

# WELLNESS POLICY



## 1. What is a wellness policy?

A written document that guides school districts' efforts in creating healthy and safe environments. These policies can help inform a district's budget and spending.



## 2. Who must have a policy?

A school district participating in any Federal Child Nutrition Program is required to develop and implement a wellness policy.

## 3. How does Live Well Schools help?

Our team created a model policy, does continual analysis of school wellness policies as they are updated, and works hand in hand with school districts in the updating process.



## 4. Why is this important?

Research tells us that "place" has a significant impact on health and well-being. Adults need to create healthy schools as places where children can thrive.

## For more information, visit the resources below:

- COI Policy Clearinghouse
- Live Well Schools Model Wellness Policy
- Topics to Include in Wellness Policy

## Brief Background

A Local School Wellness Policy is a written document that guides a school district's efforts to create supportive school nutrition and physical activity environments. All school districts participating in any federal Child Nutrition Program were required to develop and implement a wellness policy beginning in 2007.

San Diego County school district wellness policies may be found in the [Policy Clearinghouse](#) of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative.

[Live Well Schools](#) has assessed the quality of district wellness policies in San Diego County since 2015 using a tool called the WellSAT.

## The WellSAT Tool

The [WellSAT 3.0](#), developed by the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health, is a tool used across the United States to rate 67 policy components to produce a report scoring comprehensiveness and language strength, each on a scale of 0 to 100 points.

## Data Summary

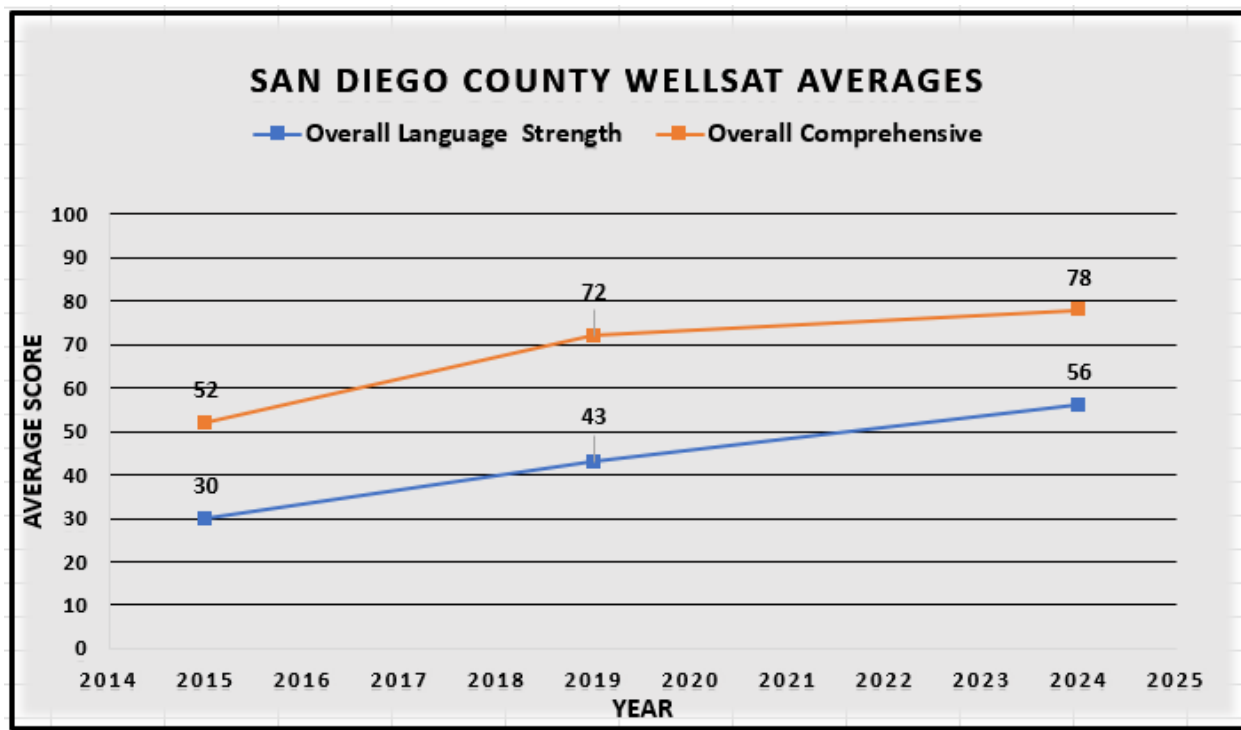
Live Well Schools created the table below to show the San Diego County WellSAT score averages by year based on overall comprehensiveness and language strength. As can be observed:

- There was a large increase in overall comprehensiveness and language strength from 2015 to 2019. This large increase can be partly explained by the fact that 22 school districts updated their wellness policies during that period.
- From 2019 to current, a much smaller number of districts updated their policies which is reflected in the minor increase in averages from 2019 to the present day.

| San Diego County School District WellSAT Averages |      |      |      |
|---|------|------|------|
| Scoring Year                                      | 2015 | 2019 | 2024 |
| Overall Comprehensiveness (max. 100 points)       | 52   | 72   | 78   |
| Overall Language Strength (max. 100 points)       | 30   | 43   | 56   |

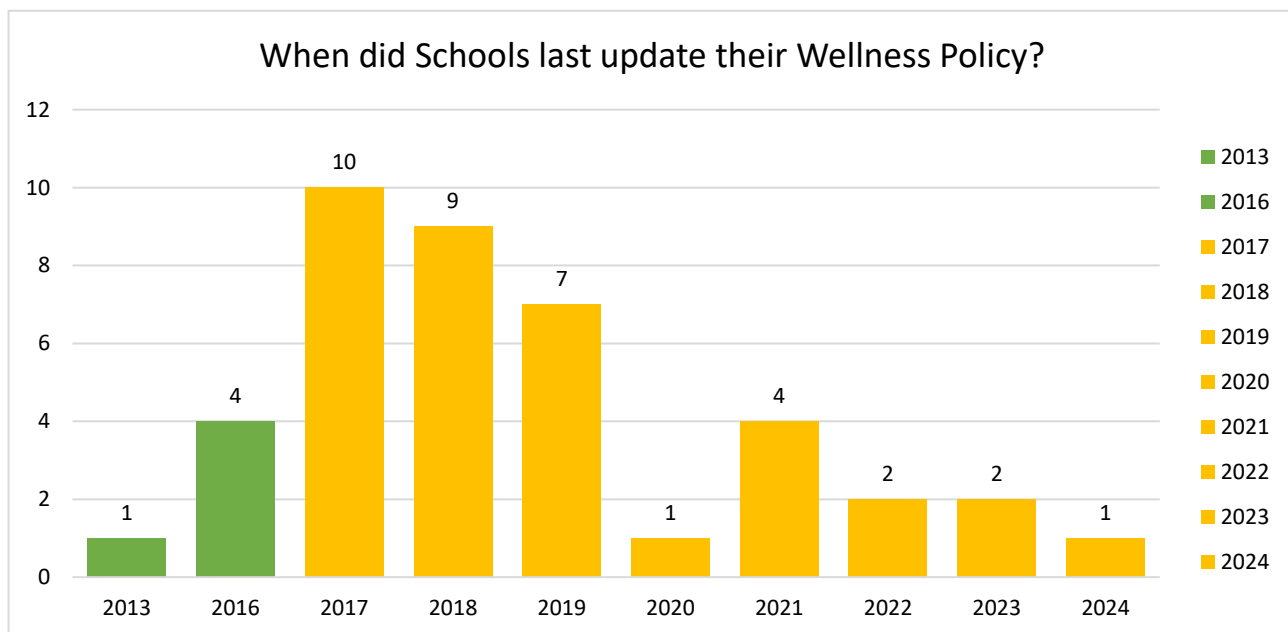
The figure below graphically displays the trends observed among San Diego County's 42 school district wellness policies as they relate to overall comprehensiveness and language strength. Encouragingly, county averages for overall comprehensiveness and language strength continue to steadily improve over time.

This improvement can be attributed to the collaborative efforts of school districts and supportive partners, including HHSA and the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, to revise and strengthen wellness policies.



Another factor contributing to the increase in Wellsat scores is that most school districts have updated their Wellness Policies to meet the requirements of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act Final Rule which was released in 2017.

The figure below, showing the distribution of current Wellness Policies by year of last update, demonstrates that nearly all school districts revised their Wellness Policies during the 2017 - 2024 period, with only five districts having Wellness Policies dated 2016 or earlier.



## Age of Wellness Policy is Connected to Strength and Comprehensiveness

Notably, Wellness Policies that have been revised more recently are more comprehensive and include stronger language, as evidenced by the higher WellSAT scores of Wellness Policies that have been updated since 2017.

| 2013-2016 Average Total Scores | 2017-2024 Average Total Scores | % Change in Average Total Scores |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 100.5                          | 128.0                          | 27.4                             |

| 2013-2016 Average Comprehensive Scores | 2017-2024 Average Comprehensive Scores | % Change in Comprehensive Scores |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 61.0                                   | 75.4                                   | 23.7                             |

| 2013-2016 Average Strength Scores | 2017-2024 Average Strength Scores | % Change in Strength Scores |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 39.5                              | 52.6                              | 33.1                        |

As displayed in the above charts:

- The average **total scores** for policies updated in the period 2017 - 2024 are approximately **27.4% higher** than the scores from policies that were last updated during the period 2013 - 2016.
- The average **comprehensive scores** for policies updated in the period 2017 - 2024 are **23.7% higher** than the scores from policies that were last updated during the period 2013 - 2016.
- The average **strength scores** for policies updated in the period 2017 - 2024 are approximately **33.1% higher** than policies that were last updated during the period 2013 - 2016.

School districts are encouraged to revise their Wellness Policies to meet current federal and state requirements and incorporate best practices. HHSA and other supportive partners are available to provide tools, resources, and direct assistance to school districts that would like to update their Wellness Policies.

School districts and supportive partners are to be commended for the continued progress in creating, updating, implementing, and assessing wellness policies that affirm a strong commitment to healthy school environments leading to student success.

- **Find** resources related to updating, implementing, and assessing Wellness Policies on the [Tools for Schools](#) searchable database from Live Well Schools.
- **Learn** what County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency programs are in, or could be in, your schools by using the [Live Well Schools Map](#).
- **Contact** [Live Well Schools](#) for additional information and support.