

Food Service Facts

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21. The Healthy School Nutrition Environment

A healthy school nutrition environment gives students consistent, reliable health information – and ample opportunity to use it. For example, in a healthy environment:

- ◆ The classroom, the school dining room, and other school activities provide clear and consistent messages that explain and reinforce healthy eating and physical activity habits.
- ◆ Students learn to make healthy lifestyle choices not only in the classroom and the school dining room, but also at class parties, sports events—wherever they are throughout the day.
- ◆ Students have many opportunities to practice healthy habits. They can choose from an array of healthy food options, eat in relaxed and comfortable surroundings and enjoy daily physical activity.

Why is a Healthy School Environment Important?

Trends in Childhood Overweight

- ◆ During the past two decades, the percentage of American children aged six to 11 who are overweight has more than doubled (from seven to 15 percent), and the percentage of adolescents aged 12 to 19 who are overweight has tripled (from five to 15 percent).
- ◆ Almost 80 percent of young people do not eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- ◆ Soft drink consumption among children of all ages has increased dramatically since the 1970s; especially among teenage boys, whose initial intake nearly tripled between 1977-78 and 1994.
- ◆ Children spend more time watching television than they spend on physical activity.
- ◆ Over 60 percent of all advertisements during children’s programming are for foods and beverages, and many of the advertised foods are high in calories and low in nutritional value.

Health Consequences of Obesity

- ◆ Children who are obese at six to nine years of age have a 55 percent chance of being obese as adults. Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- ◆ One quarter of children ages five to ten years of age show early warning signs for heart disease such as elevated blood cholesterol and high blood pressure.
- ◆ Type 2 diabetes, formerly referred to as “adult-onset” diabetes, is a potentially life-shortening disease that is related to overweight. Until recently it was typically detected only in adults. But now it is often diagnosed in children.
- ◆ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one in three children born in 2000 ultimately will develop diabetes because of eating too much and not exercising enough.
- ◆ In addition to the physical consequences, overweight children may also suffer psychologically and emotionally, through discrimination, stigmatization and a poor body image.
- ◆ Overweight children are likely to miss four times more school than children who are not overweight.
- ◆ Severely obese children rate their quality of life comparable to that of children with cancer being treated for chemotherapy.

Six Components of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

There are six components of a healthy school nutrition environment. Each one is important and has an impact on nutrition and physical activity. Definitions for success, some suggested activities are listed for each component. The components are:

1. A commitment to nutrition and physical activity
2. Quality school meals
3. Other healthy food choices
4. Pleasant eating experiences
5. Nutrition education
6. Marketing

1 - A Commitment to Nutrition & Physical Activity

Healthy eating and physical activity are essential for students to achieve their full academic and physical potential, mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Schools are a great place to influence students' eating and physical activity patterns. In a school committed to a healthy environment, each member of the education team makes nutrition and physical activity top priorities every day.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ Nutrition education and physical activity are included in the school's daily educational program from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.
- ◆ Administrators support the development of healthy lifestyles for students, and establish and enforce policies that improve the school nutrition environment. They address issues such as the kinds of foods available on the school campus; mealtime schedules; dining space and atmosphere; nutrition education; and physical activity.
- ◆ School staff, students and parents are part of the policy-making process and support a healthy school environment.
- ◆ School food service staff are part of the education team and participate in making decisions and policies that affect the school nutrition environment.
- ◆ The school has a health council to address nutrition and physical activity issues.

How to Make a Difference

1. Encourage everyone involved (superintendent, principals, business officials, school board members, teachers, food service staff, parents, students) to develop and support nutrition and physical activity policies and programs.
2. Strive to base financial decisions on students' nutrition and physical activity needs—not on profits or other budget considerations.
3. Develop coalitions with organizations such as the PTA, local chapters of the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Dietetic Association, local medical groups and other civic or business organizations to build partnerships that support a healthy school environment.
4. Coordinate with existing educational initiatives such as school improvement, parental involvement and coordinated school health programs. Work with the school nurse, school food service director, physical education teacher and school counselor.

2 - Quality School Meals

Healthy school meals provide energy and nutrients children need for sound minds and bodies. Studies confirm what parents and teachers have said for years—children who are not well nourished have difficulty learning. The variety of healthy foods offered in school meal programs allows children to learn to enjoy many different foods and develop healthy eating patterns.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ Schools offer lunch, breakfast and after school snack programs, and students are encouraged to participate.
- ◆ The Child Nutrition Programs are administered by school food service employees who are properly qualified according to current professional standards.
- ◆ All school food service staff have appropriate training and regularly participate in professional development activities.
- ◆ School meals are offered at prices students can afford.
- ◆ Menus are planned with input from students and include local, cultural and ethnic favorites of the students.
- ◆ Menus meet nutrition standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conform to good menu planning principles, and feature a variety of healthy choices that are tasty, attractive, of excellent quality and are served at the proper temperature.
- ◆ School food service staff use food preparation techniques to provide school meals that are low in saturated fat, sodium and sugar. They offer healthy food choices that include lean meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat or non-fat milk.
- ◆ School meals are marketed to appeal to all students, who are encouraged to choose and consume the full meal.
- ◆ School meal participation rates are approximately the same for paying students as for students eligible for reduced price or free meals.
- ◆ Food safety is a key part of the school food service operation.

How to Make a Difference

1. Work to start a breakfast or after school snack program if your school does not have one—or encourage students to participate if the programs are under-used.
2. Educate others about the value of school meals.
3. If school meals need improvement, involve students and teachers in working with the food service staff to develop new menu choices including a variety of healthy options.
4. Promote ongoing training or certification for school food service staff to enhance their skills in planning, preparing and serving nutritious and appealing meals.

3 - Other Healthy Food Options

The quality of the school nutrition environment depends on the quality of all foods and beverages sold or served at school. Foods that provide little nutrition compete with healthy school meals—and send mixed messages to students. This undermines nutrition education efforts and discourages healthy eating. School nutrition policies must address all foods and beverages sold or served on school grounds or at school events. This includes:

- ◆ A la carte offerings in the school dining room
- ◆ Foods and beverages sold in vending machines, snack bars, school stores and concession stands, if these are available
- ◆ Foods and beverages sold as part of school fundraising activities
- ◆ Refreshments served at parties, celebrations and meetings

Decisions about the sale of competitive foods should be based on nutrition goals for students, not on profit making.

Healthy People 2010, Objective 19-15, encourages schools to “Increase the proportion of children and adolescents aged 6-19 years whose intake of meals and snacks at schools contributes proportionally to good overall dietary quality.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ All foods and beverages that are available at school contribute to meeting the dietary needs of students; that is, they are from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.
- ◆ School policies include nutrition standards for foods and beverages offered at parties, celebrations and social events.
- ◆ If foods are sold in competition with school meals, they include healthy food choices offered at prices students can afford.

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- ◆ If a la carte foods are available, they include a variety of choices of tasty, nutritious foods and beverages, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or non-fat dairy foods.
- ◆ If foods and beverages are sold in competition with schools meals, they are not more highly marketed than the reimbursable school meals.
- ◆ There are appropriate restrictions on students' access to vending machines, school stores, snack bars and other outlets that sell foods and beverages, if these options are available. For example, no access:
 - In elementary schools
 - Until after the end of the school day for middle and junior high schools
 - Until after the end of the last lunch period in senior high schools
- ◆ School staff does not use food as a reward or punishment for students. For example, they don't give coupons for fast food meals as a reward for an "A" on a class project or withhold snacks as punishment for misbehavior.
- ◆ The school encourages parents to provide a variety of nutritious foods if students bring bag lunches from home.
- ◆ The school encourages organizations to raise funds by selling non-food items.

How to Make a Difference

1. Promote choices from the five major groups of the Food Guide Pyramid for any foods that are offered outside the school meals programs.
2. Work to decrease commercialism in schools; especially related to the promotion of foods and beverages that are low in nutrients and/or high in calories.
3. Encourage organizations to raise funds through the sale of non-food items.
4. Work with local businesses, foundations, organizations, school board members and state legislators to identify new sources of funding for needed school programs and activities.

4 - Pleasant Eating Experiences

Children will enjoy their food more and may try more healthy options if they can relax, eat and socialize without feeling rushed. Studies show that environment has a powerful influence on behavior. A pleasant dining area allows students to pay attention to what they are eating, and to enjoy the sensory and social aspects of a healthy meal.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ Meal periods are scheduled at appropriate times; schools do not schedule tutoring, pep rallies, club and organization meetings, or other activities during meal times.
- ◆ Meal periods are long enough for students to eat and socialize.
- ◆ There are enough serving areas so that students don't have to spend too much time waiting in line.
- ◆ Dining areas are attractive and have sufficient space for seating; tables and chairs are the right size for the students.
- ◆ Recess for elementary grades is scheduled before lunch so that children will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat.
- ◆ Schools encourage socializing among students, and between students and adults. Adults properly supervise school dining rooms and serve as role models for students.
- ◆ Creative, innovative methods are used to keep noise levels appropriate—no “eat in silence”, no whistles and no buzzing traffic lights.
- ◆ Facility design (including the size and location of the dining/kitchen area, lighting, building materials, windows, open space, adequate food service equipment for food preparation and service, and food and staff safety), is given priority in renovations or new construction.
- ◆ Hand washing equipment and supplies are in a convenient place so that students can wash their hands before eating.
- ◆ Drinking fountains are available for students to get water at meals and throughout the day.
- ◆ Schools use an accounting system that protects the identity of students who eat reduced price or free school meals.

How to Make a Difference

1. Work to improve meal schedules so that students have adequate time to eat. Consider having recess before lunch instead of afterwards.
2. Survey students on ideas for making the school dining experience more enjoyable. Form a task force (or use the School Health Council) to address the survey findings.
3. Encourage adults to model healthy habits in school and to use appropriate supervisory techniques for managing the school dining room.

5 - Nutrition Education

Building nutrition knowledge and skills helps children make healthy eating and physical activity choices. To make a difference, nutrition education for children should be appropriate for the students' ages, reflect their cultures, and provide opportunities for them to practice skills and have fun. The nutrition education curriculum should be easy to teach and contribute to state learning standards.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ Students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 receive nutrition education that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors.
- ◆ Nutrition education is offered in the school dining room and in the classroom, with coordination between school food service staff and teachers.
- ◆ Students receive nutrition messages throughout the school that are consistent and reinforce each other.
- ◆ State and district health education curriculum standards and guidelines include nutrition education and physical education.
- ◆ Nutrition is integrated into core curriculum areas such as math, science and language arts.
- ◆ The school links nutrition education activities with the coordinated school health program.
- ◆ The school is enrolled as a Team Nutrition School and conducts nutrition education activities and promotions that involve students, parents and the community.

How to Make a Difference

1. Provide nutrition education that builds skills and helps students adopt healthy eating behaviors in pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

2. Provide basic nutrition and nutrition education training for teachers and school food service staff each year.
3. Offer a school wellness program that includes nutrition education and physical activity.
4. Sign up as a USDA Team Nutrition School.

6 - Marketing

Making healthy food choices and physical activity available for students is important. But it is also important to educate students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community about the benefits of a healthy school nutrition environment—and motivate them to take action. Special promotions and events are great marketing tools.

Indicators of Success

- ◆ Healthy eating and physical activity are actively promoted to students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community.
- ◆ Schools consider student needs in planning for a healthy school nutrition environment. They ask students for input and feedback, and listen to what they have to say.
- ◆ Students receive positive, motivating messages about healthy eating and physical activity throughout the school setting.
- ◆ Schools promote healthy food choices and don't allow advertising that promotes less nutritious food choices.
- ◆ Schools work with a variety of media to spread the word to the community about a healthy school nutrition environment.

How to Make a Difference

1. Get to know and understand what students buy and why. Use this knowledge to develop a marketing plan for school meals and other healthy choices.
2. Conduct a promotional event or activity in the school dining room.
3. Work with school/student organizations to develop promotional materials that include nutrition and physical activity messages.
4. Form a relationship with the media to get messages out to the community.

The previous section was adapted from *USDA's Changing the Scene, Improving the School Nutrition Environment*.

Healthy Fundraising

Food items are often sold in schools to generate funds for programs and activities. However, often these foods are low in nutritional value, widely available to students and sold in competition with healthy school meals. Following are some proven ideas for “healthy” fundraisers, excerpted from “Twenty Ways to Raise Funds without Candy” developed by the Illinois Nutrition Education and Training Program.

Plant Sale – Ask parents to donate plants for sale. A garden club raises \$1,000 – 2,000 each year from this type of entrepreneurship.

G.S.T. (Goods, Services, Talents) Auction – Solicit local businesses, parents, community members or groups of school children to provide donations for an auction. One school that held such an auction had items available including a week at a time-share, a week at a cottage, hair care services, a lawn tractor, furniture, food and restaurant gift certificates. This school raised \$20,000.

Administrative Fun – Have jars available in which students can place money. On a daily basis, have the school secretary count the amount in the jars and post the total. At set increments (for example, \$100, \$200, \$500), the principal or a teacher could be required to do stunts such as dress as a cheerleader, do cheers, act out a scene from a play, etc. One school earned over \$3,300 in one year through this type of fundraiser.

Halloween Insurance – An organization sold insurance for \$1 and guaranteed to clean up any soaped windows, cars, etc. the day after Halloween. The organization, consisting of seven members, received only six “clean-up calls” and raised over \$1,000.

Spring Yard Work – A soccer team offered to rake yards and spread compost at a bargain rate. Ten players each worked for 3-1/2 days, and made on average \$240 for the soccer team.

Community Job Fair – Ask local companies to rent a booth space for a fee and solicit free advertisements from local radio stations and/or newspapers. One school that held a job fair charged \$4 for admission and raised \$24,000 in the two years they have held the fair.

School Event Planners – These planners sold for \$7 each at school registration. The planners included event dates such as football games, holidays, national tests, dances and band events. Fifty percent of the sales were profit.

Advertisements on Seat Cushions – Sell advertising space on seat cushions to local businesses. Sell seat cushions at sporting events.

Sled-a-thon – Every student can seek pledges for each sled trip down the hill. A school that conducted this event raised over \$2,000.

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Below are some creative fundraising ideas excerpted from “Creative Financing & Fun Fundraising for Schools, Sports & Clubs” developed by the California Department of Education, California Project LEAN.

Items You Can Sell

Batteries
Bumper stickers/decals
Buttons, pins
Candles
Cookbook made by school
Crafts
Emergency kits for cars
Erasers
First aid kits
Greeting cards
Magazines
Megaphones
Pet treats/toys
Rent a special parking space
School Frisbees
School supplies
Souvenir cups
Student directories
Trendy pencils
T-shirts with school insignia
Valentine flowers

Events that Involve the Community

Car wash
Conference
Gift wrapping
Golf tournament
Magic show
Recycling
Singing telegrams
Talent show
Treasure/scavenger hunt
Walk-a-thon
Workshop/class

Healthy Food Items

Frozen bananas
Fruit and nut baskets
Fruit and yogurt parfaits
Fruit smoothies
Trail mix

Local Wellness Policies

KSDE developed a prototype local wellness policy in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders from across the state. Sponsors can adopt the prototype policy as provided or modify it so suit local needs. KSDE will continue to provide training and technical assistance on implementing local wellness policies.

Literally Growing Before Our Eyes

Obesity and overweight affect 10 million U.S. children. That's a record, and there's no real sign that it won't be broken again soon. In the past 20 years, the number of obese children has doubled, placing more Americans at risk of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and cancer – all at an earlier age. Obesity contributes to 300,000 deaths each year. That's close to 1,000 lives lost each day at a cost to our health care system of \$70 billion a year, or eight percent of all medical bills.

We need to take this issue seriously. For at least one in five kids, overweight is not a phase that will be outgrown. It's the start of a lifetime of serious health problems. It is time we elevate this issue to its rightful place near the top of the public health agenda alongside cancer, heart disease and other leading killers of Americans today.

Dan Glickman
Former U.S. Representative from Kansas and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

Nutrition and Cognitive Development

- ◆ *Undernutrition along with environmental factors associated with poverty can permanently affect physical growth, brain development and cognitive functioning.*
- ◆ *The longer a child's nutritional, emotional and educational needs go unmet, the greater the likelihood of cognitive impairments.*
- ◆ *Iron deficiency anemia is associated with impaired cognitive development.*
- ◆ *Supplemental feeding programs can help to offset threats posed to the child's capacity to learn and perform in school, [threats that] result from inadequate nutrient intake.*

Tufts University Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy