

Schools Take Action

5 simple steps to success

Principals, teachers and parents can help make schools healthier places to learn by providing quality nutrition, integrating physical activity during the school day, and teaching children about the importance of embracing a healthy active lifestyle.

1 Create a School Health Advisory Council

- Create or become an active member of the school health advisory council. The council should include students, parents, teachers, administrators, other school staff, and community representatives.
- Guide your process on implementing healthy eating and physical activity policies and environment using the CDC's Make a Difference at Your School: Key Strategies to Prevent Obesity.
- The council can assess your school's physical education, physical activity, and nutrition policies and environments using the CDC's School Health Index.
- Conduct a "walkability assessment" of the area around your school to identify unsafe crossings, broken sidewalks, or other environmental factors that deter students from walking to school. The Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers a "walkability checklist" that your community can use.
- Ensure that school policy does not allow physical activity to be withheld (e.g. withholding recess) or used (e.g. making students do pushups or run laps) as punishment.
- Make sure vending machines offer healthy options.
- Encourage parents to bring fruits or other non food treats for celebrating birthdays.
- Consider what is being sold through fundraisers and choose companies that provide non food options, such as plants, candles, or wrapping paper.
- Work with families of students with special needs, chronic health conditions, or disabilities to ensure that physical activities are part of the student's learning plan, during and after school.

2 Join the Healthier US Schools Challenge

The Healthier US Schools Challenge establishes rigorous criteria for schools' food quality, participation in meal programs, physical activity, physical education, and nutrition education the key components that make for healthy and active kids and provides recognition for schools that meet these criteria. With more than 31 million children participating in the National School Lunch Program and more than 11 million participating in the National School Breakfast Program, good nutrition at school is more important than ever.

Schools can participate in this model program by going to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html> and learning about the range of educational and technical assistance materials that promote key aspects of the Dietary Guidelines, including a Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals, which provides tips on serving more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and lower amounts of sugar, sodium, and saturated and trans fats in school menus.

Major school food suppliers in more than 75% of America's schools along with principals, superintendents, and school board members across America have committed to work together to improve the health of our students by meeting the Institute of Medicine's recommendations within five years to decrease the amount of sugar, fat and salt in school meals; increase whole grains; and double the amount of produce they serve within 10 years. With these commitments, children will receive more nutritious meals in school and have better information on the importance of healthy eating, putting them on track to a healthier life.

Over the next school year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working with partners in schools and the private sector, will double the number of schools that meet the Healthier US Schools Challenge and add 1,000 schools per year for two years after that.

3 Make Your School a Healthy Worksite

Be a role model to students for a healthy lifestyle. Encourage staff to be active and consume healthy foods and beverages.

- Evaluate worksite policies for teachers and other school staff.
- Determine employee health related costs.
- Identify nutrition and physical activity interests and needs of school employees.
- Establish goals for improving healthy behaviors among staff (e.g., increase the proportion of school employees that meet the national physical activity guidelines.)
- Obtain administrative support for school employee wellness programs that offer a variety of healthy eating and physical activities for staff.
- Implement a variety of healthy eating and physical activities that emphasize health education, skill building, and changes to the school environment.
- Consider making changes to create healthier workplace, such as including incentives for physical activity or walking or biking instead of driving to school.
- Encourage "walking meetings," or make athletic facilities and equipment available to staff after hours.
- Lead by example. Walk with your students, and eat with them.

4 Incorporate Nutrition Education and Physical Education into the Curriculum

Engage students in healthy eating and physical activity concepts by making them age appropriate and relevant to their daily lives and experiences.

- Teach younger children their colors using fruits and vegetables.
- Have middle school children learn about weights and measures using fruits and vegetables from the school garden.
- Older students can learn about nutrition through calorie counts and daily nutritional value charts.
- Take a walk outside as part of a science class or ask students to name and act out action words from a story through physical activity.

5 Plant a School Garden

School gardens offer opportunities for fun and physical activity while also serving as an important educational tool to help students understand how healthful food is produced. Some research suggests that school gardens used as part of a nutrition education strategy can increase knowledge of fruits and vegetables and influence behavior change among children.

- Plant an outside or inside fruit, vegetable, or herb garden that students are responsible for tending to and growing. Enjoy the “fruits” of your labor at harvest time!
- Help students develop a partnership with local businesses, parents, or other community groups, such as the Cooperative Extension Service if resources are an issue. Many communities have “master gardener” programs that could help.
- Incorporate school gardens into classroom lessons (e.g., science, cooking) to provide students with hands on, multi disciplinary learning activities. Food service staff can make students more familiar with the school garden produce through taste tests and learning food preparation techniques for a healthy meal.
- Schools can further make the link between agriculture and nutritious food by inviting local farmers markets to operate from area school yards.