

## II. Providing a Comprehensive Program on Nutrition and Physical Activity

Schools alone cannot meet all the nutrition and physical activity-related needs of students. However, because the relationship between health, nutrition, physical activity and learning is so strong, and because young people spend so much of their time at school or at school-related activities, schools can be a vital part of the solution.

A comprehensive school nutrition and physical activity program can help students attain full academic potential and optimal health by providing the skills, social support and environmental reinforcement necessary to adopt lifelong healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. By adopting effective programs, districts and schools ensure that the health of students is a top priority.

This chapter presents eight successful ways to support a healthy school nutrition and physical activity environment. These recommendations have been adapted from the Surgeon General's Prescription for Change, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's School Health Index, the United States Department of Agriculture's Changing the Scene and the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's Model Local School Wellness Policies on Physical Activity and Nutrition. School districts are encouraged to establish and maintain a Coordinated School Health Program that addresses all components of school health, which are not addressed in this chapter. (See Appendix C: "Coordinated School Health Program.")

The subsequent section looks more closely at the role of school boards in promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and Chapter III provides information to help boards develop effective policies on nutrition and physical activity.

### WHAT DISTRICTS CAN DO

To provide a comprehensive nutrition and physical activity program, districts should consider the following steps:

#### 1. Emphasize proper nutrition and physical activity as a priority.

- Establish a vision and goals for the district's child nutrition and physical education programs.
- Adopt policies that ensure all foods and beverages available on school campuses and at school events and fundraisers contribute toward eating patterns that are, at a minimum, consistent with the school food standards in state and federal law. Extend nutrition standards to apply to middle and high schools where appropriate.
- Adopt policies that ensure students in grades K-12 have opportunities, support and encouragement to be physically active on a daily basis.
- Retain well-trained food service professionals and certified physical education instructors who reinforce students' adoption of healthy eating and physical activity habits.
- Ensure that nutrition and physical activity policies are implemented and evaluated annually.

#### 2. Ensure quality school meals.

- Involve students in the selection, tasting and marketing of healthy foods and beverages that appeal to students.
- Provide a variety of food options, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and dairy foods, which are low in fat and added sugars.
- Offer a variety of healthy choices that appeal to students, including cultural and ethnic favorites.
- Commit all schools to participating in available child nutrition programs, including breakfast, lunch, after-school snacks, child care and summer food service.
- Work to eliminate any social stigma attached to, and prevent overidentification of, students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

#### 3. Monitor a la carte food sales.

- Restrict student access to unhealthy foods in vending machines, school stores and other venues that compete with healthy school meals in all grades, pre-kindergarten through grade 12.
- Ensure that healthy snacks and foods are provided in vending machines, school stores and other venues within the district's control. These options should cost the same or less than unhealthy alternatives.

#### 4. Provide an environment conducive to good health.

- Allow an adequate amount of time and space for students to eat school meals, and schedule lunch periods at reasonable hours around midday. Ensure lunch lines are not too long and students have plenty of time to eat their food and socialize in a safe, comfortable and inviting place.
- Ensure that drinking fountains are operable, clean and convenient for students to use throughout the school day.
- Make available adequate and safe access to school physical activity facilities before, during and after school, on weekends, and during school vacations where feasible.
- Allow sufficient time during the day for supervised recess for elementary school students.
- Offer extracurricular physical activity programs, such as physical activity clubs, intramural programs, or interscholastic athletics.
- Assess and make needed improvements to make it easier and safer for students to walk and bike to school. Explore funding availability of the federal “safe routes to school” program.

#### 5. Support nutrition education and physical education.

- Offer adequate time in the curriculum for nutrition education and daily physical education in all grades, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, as part of a sequential, comprehensive, standards-based program. At a minimum, 200 minutes/10 days of physical education are required for elementary students and 400 minutes/10 days are required for middle and high school students.
- Provide physical education that is consistent with California’s Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools.
- Ensure that qualified nutrition education and physical education specialists focus on knowledge and skill development so students are able to learn and adopt healthy eating and physical activity behaviors.

- Offer nutrition education in the school dining area, and in the classroom, with coordination between food service staff and teachers.
- Assess whether students are engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity at least 50 percent of physical education class time.

#### 6. Promote healthy eating and physical activity.

- Discourage the use of unhealthy foods (e.g., soda, candy or high-fat foods) as an incentive or reward for good behavior or academic performance the classroom, and instead encourage non-food alternatives (e.g., inexpensive stickers, pencils or erasers). (See Appendix C: “Constructive Classroom Rewards.”)
- Disallow the use of physical activity (e.g., running laps, pushups) or withholding of opportunities for physical activity (recess, physical education) as punishment.
- Serve healthy foods such as smoothies, fat-free or low-fat yogurt or salads for class parties.
- Use a variety of strategies to actively promote healthy eating and physical activity to students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community.
- Conduct promotional campaigns in the cafeteria and on campus that encourage healthy eating and do not promote less nutritious food choices.
- Discourage the promotion and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages. (See Appendix C: “Commercial Activities in Schools.”)

#### 7. Explore revenue-generating alternatives.

- Continually seek other sources of revenue for schools so food service programs, booster clubs, student clubs and Parent Teacher Associations do not have to support their activities through the sale of unhealthy foods in vending machines, snack bars, student stores and other food outlets. (See Appendix C: “Creative School Fundraising Ideas.”)
- Explore how some districts are able to be less reliant on the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages. (See Chapter V: Case Studies and visit CPL’s “Bright Ideas” at [www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org](http://www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org).)

## 8. Assess the district's nutrition and physical activity program.

- Visit the school cafeteria for breakfast and lunch and spend time with students and staff to learn what students are eating and drinking.
- Involve students, parents, school staff, administrators, nutritionists and community leaders in assessing the school's eating and physical activity environment. Develop a shared vision and an action plan to achieve it. (See Chapter VI: Resources.)
- Review successful school-based models. (See Chapter V: Case Studies and visit CPL's "Bright Ideas" at [www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org](http://www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org).)
- Access other resources to develop sound policies for other components of a Coordinated School Health program. (See Chapter VI: Resources.)

## WHAT SCHOOL BOARDS CAN DO

School boards are elected to govern the community's schools. This involves setting a direction for the district, establishing a structure for action, providing support, holding the system accountable and providing leadership in the community. Thus, the board is in a powerful position to encourage and facilitate programs that enhance student health.

The school board, working closely with the superintendent as a governance team, can enhance good nutrition and physical well-being for students in the following ways:

### 1. Set a vision for good nutrition and good health.

In a district's vision statement or in its mission and goals statement, a board can emphasize its priority for supporting student health. Goals and objectives of the district can include specific desired outcomes related to healthy eating and physical activity.

### 2. Become advocates for good health and nutrition.

The board has the responsibility to provide leadership in the schools and the community. Boards can draw attention to the needs of the students and schools and help garner the support necessary to address

those needs. The district should consider having a plan to address the nutritional and physical well-being of its students. Because state and federal officials also make decisions that impact children's nutritional health, the board can seek opportunities to influence legislative and regulatory bodies on this issue as well.

### 3. Adopt policy.

The board sets expectations and provides direction through the adoption of policies on a variety of topics. The board is required to adopt a districtwide wellness policy in accordance with Section 204 of the Federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, and can review the district's policy manual to look for other opportunities to promote healthier eating habits and physical activity. (See Chapter III: Policy Development.)

### 4. Adopt curriculum.

The board adopts guidelines for curricula, and thus can support efforts to teach students about healthy eating and physical activity.

### 5. Allocate resources to district programs.

The board adopts the district budget and, in so doing, must ensure that budget priorities reflect the goals and priorities set forth in its vision statement. If nutrition education, food programs and physical education are a priority, funds must be allocated to support those activities. These may include funds from foundations and government grants.

### 6. Ensure program accountability.

The board monitors program outcomes and holds the superintendent accountable. To fulfill this role, the board may want to request periodic information related to students' food choices, nutrition education and physical activity opportunities.

### 7. Encourage collaborative approaches.

The eating habits and activity patterns of children can be positively influenced by collaboration among agencies and community organizations. As public officials elected to represent the needs of students, school boards are in a powerful position to encourage a coordinated approach within the community.