

# Healthy School Meals, Snacks and Beverages: State and Local Policy Options

Below are policy options to help you implement the new national school nutrition standards in your state and community. These policy changes can be accomplished through legislation, regulation, school board policies, school wellness policies, media advocacy, or other approaches.

- The new national school lunch and breakfast standards begin to go into effect in the 2012-2013 school year, with certain standards phased in over time. Many schools will need help to achieve full implementation.
- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act resulted in new rules, which will make school lunches more wholesome and nutritious, with double the fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, only fat-free and low-fat milk, limits on heart unhealthy saturated and trans fats, and less salt.
- USDA is currently updating the standards for foods sold in schools through vending, a la carte, school stores, fundraisers, and other foods sold outside of the school meal program. Schools should continue to transition to healthier foods through those venues.



## Implementation Plans

State Child Nutrition Program: Each state has a child nutrition agency working on school food issues. The agency is generally housed within the department of education (in a few states it is in the department of agriculture). The state child nutrition program is responsible for providing technical assistance to help schools implement the school food standards, certifying that schools meet the standards, and monitoring schools to ensure they remain in compliance.

- Require your state child nutrition program to develop and carryout a state plan to implement the nutrition standards in schools, including technical assistance and training for food service.
- Request the secretary of education or agriculture write a letter to each school and/or school district in support of the standards, raising awareness of and elevating the importance of the standards for school administrators.
- Find out how your state is using their State Administrative Expenses (SAE) increased resources and encourage them to use the funding for training and technical assistance for schools and districts.
  - States are provided with SAE funding. They will be receiving increased SAE resources for two years to help with implementation of and accountability for the new meal standards.
- States should provide incentives for schools to participate in HealthierUS School Challenge or the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program.

- Districts and individual schools should work to meet the programs criteria.

### Technical Assistance/Training

- Work with your state child nutrition program to provide technical assistance and training to school and district level food service staff.
  - Materials and trainings could include model menus and recipes, healthier product specifications, how to use commodities healthfully, strategies to increase meal participation and reduce stigma, how to get certified for the additional six cent reimbursement, how to accurately price meals and a la carte items, how to get students to eat the healthier options, resources on vendors offering healthy items, etc.
- Work with your local school district or school to ensure they are getting the technical assistance they need from the state child nutrition program, USDA, National School Food Management Institute, School Nutrition Association, Alliance for the Healthier Generation, or others.

### School Food Funding

Healthier school meals may cost more money, but there are several ways to increase food service funding.

- The state child nutrition program should provide all school districts with a checklist of required activities to receive the additional six cent reimbursement.
- Sensible school food pricing:
  - The state child nutrition program should provide technical assistance and information on how to price paid lunches and a la carte items to ensure they cover their own costs and do not drain resources from meals for low-income children, as required by the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.
  - Local school districts or schools should analyze current paid meal and a la carte item prices to ensure they reflect the true cost purchasing, preparing, and selling the item, including indirect costs.
  - Schools should price a la carte items to ensure the school breakfast or lunch is the best deal for students.



Indirect Costs: Indirect costs are costs charged to the food service program other than direct costs (direct costs include labor and food costs). In some districts, food service programs are expected to pay for the electricity used in the cafeteria and kitchen, a share of the wages paid to janitors, and a portion of the superintendent's salary. In contrast, the science department does not pay for the electricity used in science classrooms, the math department does not pay a share of the janitor's wages, and the art program does not budget for the superintendent's salary.

In some school districts, food service is paying more indirect costs than in other districts. The more money a food service program pays in indirect costs, the less funding available for healthy school food.

- Investigate what indirect costs are being charged to food service in your state or district. Work to reduce indirect charges to make more funds available for healthy school foods.
  - Mobilize parents to speak to district administration and/or school board about direct costs.

### Increase Participation

Work with your school district and school to:

- Encourage all students to apply for free lunch. By encouraging all students to apply you increase the number of eligible students applying to receive free and reduced-price lunch, and reduce stigma of submitting the paperwork.
- Increase direct certification and categorical eligibility for free and reduced lunch students to reduce paperwork and increasing participation. Students who receive SNAP, TANF, or Food Distributions on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits, or who are foster, Head Start, homeless, runaway, or migrant children are automatically eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- Use a method of payment for meals that does not identify which children are receiving free or reduced price meals.
- Consider providing universal free breakfast or lunch to students in schools with a high percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- Do not have a separate a la carte line in school cafeterias. By placing a la carte items in the regular meal line it reduces stigma for students who receive free or reduced lunch and allows other students to see the price of the school meal compared to the price of a la carte items.
- Periodically send reminders home to parents that they can apply for free and reduced lunch at any time of the year if their financial situation changes or if the number of members in their household increases.



### Encourage Students to Eat the Healthy School Foods

Work with your school district or school to:

- Get students involved -- have recipe contests, student ambassadors who strategize how to get peers involved and excited about school meals, taste tests, voting on meal options, student-led school food marketing campaigns, etc.
- Work with teachers-- offer taste tests so teachers are familiar with new school offerings and talk supportively about them with students, encourage teachers to eat school lunch with students, conduct teacher trainings on nutrition education and the benefits of the new school nutrition standards, etc.
- Send information home to parents -- send a letter or include messages in the school newsletter and website about the improvements to school meals, provide tips for how parents can reinforce healthy eating at home, invite parents to eat lunch at school, have taste tests and a school nutrition table at parent nights, encourage parents to participate on a school wellness policy or health committee, etc.

- Implement a policy to require that recess be held before lunch. Students are more likely to finish their meals and are more ready to learn when they return to the classroom if recess is held before lunch.
- Increase school meal appeal -- cook vegetables to preserve vibrant color; vary the cuts of fruits, vegetables, sandwiches; use catchy names like zippin' zucchini and fire engine red tomatoes, etc.
- Implement cafeteria practices that promote healthy choices.
  - Look at the set up of the cafeteria. Are there other cafeteria configurations that would promote better student flow and selections?
  - Change the placement and prominence of healthier choices. For example place plain milk closer to the students than chocolate milk, have healthier options before less healthy options in the serving lines, place fruit in colorful bowls, etc.
- Increase variety of fruits and vegetables -- install salad bars, have a new fruit and/or vegetable featured every month with fun facts, offer a variety of choices so children can find one they like, vary the way fruits and vegetables are served or prepared to find preparations students enjoy, etc.
- Offer fresh, safe, free drinking water to students throughout their time at school. This includes in the cafeteria during mealtimes, but also during after-school programs, sports practices, and school-sponsored events.
  - The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act requires all schools to provide free drinking water in cafeterias during mealtimes.
- Require menu labeling to allow students to identify healthier options.
- Work with local farmers to bring more fresh produce into schools.



### Wellness Policy

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires each school districts with a federally-funded school meal programs to develop and implement a wellness policy that addresses nutrition and physical activity by the start of the 2006-2007 school year. Though many districts have adopted a policy, they are often weak and not fully implemented throughout all schools in the district.

- Require that school districts have a plan for implementation of their school wellness policy in all schools within the district.
- Require periodic monitoring and assessment of the school wellness policy.
- Require districts to report their policy and status of implementation to the state and that the state issue a report on statewide wellness policy implementation every three years.
- Ensure the state child nutrition program provides technical assistance and training to schools to help them overcome barriers to implementation of their wellness policies.

- Require school district to have a standing wellness committee that meets regularly and includes representation from administration, staff, parents and students.
- Work with your school district or school to strengthen and fully implement your school wellness policy.
  - Have a strong plan to ensure the policy is implemented in every school in the district.



- Ensure there is a wellness policy coordinator in each individual school who serves as liaison with the district and coordinates implementation of the policy in the school.
- Send information about wellness policies to parents and post on school website.
- Institute a closed campus policy to support participation in school meal programs and reduce children's exposure to unhealthy foods during the school day.

- Implement nutrition standards for all foods sold on campus including those sold through a la carte, vending machines, or snack bars at all grade levels, or sell no competitive foods during mealtimes.
- Apply nutrition standards to all school fundraisers.
- Apply nutrition standards to marketing and advertising of foods, beverages, and brands on school property.
- Apply nutrition standards to all school-sponsored events.
- Set nutrition standards for foods at school parties and prohibit use of food as a reward.

### Fundraisers

Healthy fundraisers set a positive example and support healthy eating and physical activity by children, nutrition education, and parents' efforts to feed their children healthfully. Schools have found healthy fundraising options to be practical and profitable.

- Apply nutrition standards to all school fundraisers on or off campus through legislation, regulation, local or state board of education policy, or through school wellness policy.
- States should provide technical assistance and ideas for healthy fundraising options to all school districts and individual schools.
- Schools should provide ideas for healthy fundraising to all teachers, PTAs, and school groups.



## Food Marketing to Students

- Prohibit unhealthy food to be marketed in schools through legislation, regulation, local or state board of education policy, or school wellness policy.
- Assess food marketing and advertising in schools at the state, district and school levels.

## Monitoring

There will be several ways to assess how your school district is complying with the new school nutrition standards, including USDA reporting on applications for the six cent reimbursement and the administrative reviews conducted by the state children nutrition program every three years.

- State child nutrition programs should reach out to school districts that have not applied for the 6 cent reimbursement, and provide technical assistance to aid them in qualifying.
- Check USDA reporting on compliance with the new school meal standards or qualification for six cent reimbursement to determine if your school is meeting the standards. If not, work with your school to overcome barriers to implementation.
- Require schools to include nutrition and/or wellness goals as part of their School Improvement Plans and report on annual progress toward those goals.



## Resources

### Implementation Plans

Certification of Compliance with New Meal Pattern Requirements Powerpoint Presentation (FNS)

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/6centsrule.pdf>

HealthierUS School Challenge

<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/healthierus/index.html>

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

<http://www.healthiergeneration.org/schools.aspx>

### Technical Assistance/Training

Menus, Meal Planning, Recipes, Using Commodities (School Nutrition Association)

<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/ResourceCenter.aspx>

Meeting the New Meal Pattern Guide (School Nutrition Association)

*To access this resource, which is updated monthly, you must become an SNA member*

<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/login.aspx>

Meal Pattern Training (National Food Service Management Institute)

<http://nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=425>

### School Food Funding

Paid Lunch Equity Tool (FNS)

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2012/SP22-2012ra.xls>

Fact Sheet: Cost of New Meal Standards (CSPI)

<http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/cost-fact-sheet.pdf>

Indirect Costs Powerpoint Presentation (School Nutrition Association)

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/IndirectCosts\\_SNA7-11.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/IndirectCosts_SNA7-11.pdf)

### Increase Participation

Fact Sheet: Improving Access to Healthy Meals (Food Research and Action Center)

[http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/back\\_to\\_school\\_strategies\\_2010.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/back_to_school_strategies_2010.pdf)

### Encourage Students to Eat the Healthy School Foods

Fact Sheet: Recess before Lunchtime (Montana Department of Education)

<http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/recessbrochure.pdf>

Fruit and Vegetables Galore: Increase Meal Appeal (FNS)

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/fv\\_galore.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/fv_galore.html)

Recipe Contests (Fuel Up, Play 60)

<http://school.fueluptoplay60.com/playbook/play.php?id=15812006>

Smarter Lunchrooms: Arrange Lunchroom to Promote Healthy Eating (Cornell University)

<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/start.html>

Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools (Let's Move)

<https://saladbars2schools.org/resources>

Farm to School

<http://www.farmentoschool.org/resources.php>

### Wellness Policies

Model School Wellness Policy (NANA)

<http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/WellnessPolicies.html>

Policy in Action: A Guide to Implementing Your Local School Wellness Policy (California Project LEAN)

<http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/SchoolHealth/SearchSchoolHealth/PolicyinActionAGuidetoImplementingYourLocalSchoolWellnessPolicy.aspx>

Student Wellness: A Healthy Food and Physical Activity Policy Resource Guide (California Project LEAN)

<http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/SchoolHealth/SearchSchoolHealth/StudentWellnessAHealthyFoodandPhysicalActivityPolicyResourceGuide.aspx>

### Fundraisers

Sweet Deals: School Fundraising Can Be Healthy and Profitable (CSPI)

Report: <http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/schoolfundraising.pdf>

Fact Sheet: [http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/sweet\\_deals\\_one-pager.pdf](http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/sweet_deals_one-pager.pdf)

Fundraising Ideas: <http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/fundraiserfactsheet.pdf>

### Marketing to Children

Model State Legislation on marketing in schools (CSPI)

[http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/model\\_state\\_legislation.doc](http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/model_state_legislation.doc)

Fact sheet on marketing in schools (CSPI)

<http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/schoolfoodmarketingfacts.pdf>

District Policy Restricting Food and Beverage Advertising on School Grounds (NPLAN)

<http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/district-policy-restricting-food-and-beverage-advertising-school-grounds>