



# Partners In NUTRITION

## Wellness:

*Bringing schools and families together  
for the health of all our kids*

**T**oday, health experts know that it's not enough to treat illnesses and get a checkup every year. All of us—including our kids—need to take a good look at the way we live. Are we making choices every day that promote our own health and well-being and our families'? Do we understand what our bodies need daily—nutritious food and physical activity—to stay as healthy as we can?

This whole-life approach to health is called wellness, and it's becoming an important focus in healthcare and education. In fact, in 2004, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, which requires all schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program to have a wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006–07 school year.

This makes a lot of sense. Schools are in a great position to teach and encourage healthy habits for life. Many children and adults spend large amounts of time in schools. Plus, savvy school districts know that good nutrition and exercise can improve academic achievement and reduce behavior problems.



## It's a whole-school effort

**M**aybe you already know that the lunch served in the cafeteria at school must meet the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. But what about the cookies or chips your child might buy in the a la carte line or from a vending machine, or the piece of candy your daughter gets as a prize for a perfect spelling test? And how can you be sure your son gets enough exercise, even if P.E. and recess are available, to keep him in his seat during class?

Wellness policies can give parents answers to these important questions. A school wellness policy must include the following components:

**Nutrition Standards**—food served at school meets nutritional guidelines, not only for the lunch tray, but throughout school: a la carte lines, vending snack bars, and classroom parties, too.

**Physical Activity**—students have the opportunity and encouragement to get lots of physical activity—ideally 60 minutes per day—by safeguarding recess and P.E.

**Nutrition Education**—nutrition education is incorporated as part of the school day, using a variety of classroom subjects, school-wide events and activities, and even the cafeteria itself as a hands-on learning laboratory.

**Other School-based Activities**—promote after-school activities that incorporate nutrition and physical activity, and even try making it easier for kids to walk or bike to school.

By developing a local wellness policy that meets the new federal law, each school district has the chance to get ahead of the curve and take a proactive approach to promoting good health to children. But wellness efforts shouldn't stop at the school's front door—it's a team effort, and parents play a critical role.



## EXERCISE YOUR OPTIONS



**K**ids should get a healthy dose of exercise—60 minutes or more—almost every day. That sounds like a lot, but there are ways to slip physical activity into every kid's day. Here are some clever ideas to get them moving without complaining:

- Have a backyard hula-hoop contest: The kid who goes the longest without dropping the hoop wins!
- Make them earn that video game: five laps around the backyard for every 15 minutes of PlayStation®.
- Walk them to school, even if it's just one or two days per week. If it's too far, try walking to the next bus stop on the route. Walking together is a great way for parents and kids to get exercise and some one-on-one conversation time.
- Teach them some of the jump rope rhymes you knew as a kid—and jump along with them!
- Create a backyard obstacle course, and get out your stopwatch. Kids love trying to best their own fastest time.
- On rainy days, have a dance contest. Put on your favorite music—old or new—and teach them your best moves.

### Did you know...

- ? Between 1991 and 1999, the percentage of kids who took P.E. every day declined from 42 percent to 29 percent;
- ? Teenagers today drink twice as much carbonated soda as milk;

? Less than 20 percent of school children eat the recommend servings of vegetables from the Food Guide Pyramid;

? Students who participate in the National School Lunch Program eat substantially lower amounts of added sugars than those who don't participate;

## MILK WORKS FOR WELLNESS

- ▲ Milk and other dairy products like cheese and yogurt are hard-working pieces of the wellness puzzle for kids. Milk is rich in nutrients like calcium and potassium, and promotes healthy bones, lower risk of high blood pressure, and healthy weight. But the majority of kids ages 6 to 19—and as many as 88% of teenage girls—don't get enough calcium in their diets.
- ▲ Serving cold milk (even flavored milk) at home just like the milk offered in school breakfast and lunch programs can reduce the consumption of empty-calorie beverages. A study found children who drink flavored milk got more calcium than those who didn't, but no more added sugars, and no more total fat.
- ▲ Schools and families can work dairy products into meals and snacks to encourage kids to get enough dairy every day. A yogurt at breakfast, a container of milk with lunch, and a snack of cheese in the afternoon mean a full day's supply of calcium for growing children.



### Learn More About What's Working!

For more information on child nutrition, fitness, and wellness issues, check out these web sites:

- **School Nutrition Association**  
[www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org)
- **National Dairy Council®**  
[www.NutritionExplorations.org](http://www.NutritionExplorations.org)

- **USDA/Team Nutrition**  
[www.fns.usda.gov/tn](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn)
- **Changing the Scene**  
[www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/changing.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/changing.html)

- **Action for Healthy Kids**  
[www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org)
- **Kidnetic**  
[www.kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com)



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