

Taking Action for Healthy School Environments: Linking Education, Activity, and Food in California Secondary Schools

The strategies listed below have been field-tested and found successful in some or all of the 16 middle and high schools that participated in the Linking Education, Activity and Food (LEAF) Pilot Program Grants. Participating school districts were charged with developing district-level wellness policies and implementing them in select secondary school sites over a 21-month period. Many of these strategies also apply to or could be adapted for elementary schools.

The California Department of Education (CDE) is developing a publication featuring these strategies and more promising practices from other California schools; currently planned for release in September 2005. Check with CDE Press at 800-995-4099 for availability or check the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/rc/>. Meanwhile, CDE Nutrition Services staff hopes that this information inspires you to take action toward creating healthy school environments.

LINKING STRATEGIES:

CREATING POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTS FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

- **Developing strong health councils** or nutrition and physical activity advisory committees with broad based representation: food service staff, physical education teachers, after school program coordinators, school nurses, health and science teachers, board members, principals, parents, students, school administrators, community leaders, pediatricians, and public health professionals.
- **Adopting comprehensive school health policies** that include nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold and offered in the district; goals for improving physical education and increasing opportunities for vigorous physical activity; and goals for integrating nutrition education into classroom curricula.
- **Implementing effective community outreach** throughout the policy process, including public events and effective communication tools, to educate the public about the health policies and gain critical feedback from parents, community leaders, and local businesses.

EDUCATION STRATEGIES: INTEGRATING NUTRITION AND ACADEMICS

- **Providing experiential nutrition education**, including garden-based learning, cooking classes and farm field trips linked to specific subject areas, to help students discover fresh food, make healthier food choices and become better nourished.
- **Integrating nutrition education concepts** throughout multiple subject areas, such as science, health, physical education, culinary arts, home economics, computer, and other electives, to reinforce messages about healthy eating.

- **Preparing secondary students to teach younger students** so that they take an active role in their own learning process as they synthesize information and knowledge in new ways for others to understand.

ACTIVITY STRATEGIES: PROMOTING HEALTHY BODIES AND MINDS

- **Improving physical education instruction** using improved curriculum content, new equipment, and staff development to engage students in vigorous physical activity and recreation.
- **Providing physical activity opportunities** through community-based, after school, and cross-age fitness programs to increase students' physical activity through programs beyond formal physical education classes.

FOOD STRATEGIES: MODELING HEALTH IN OUR SCHOOLS

- **Improving school lunch choices** (more menu choices, new and higher-quality entrées, and new offerings such as salad bars) **while reducing or eliminating a la carte items** to offer more healthful foods while increasing school lunch participation rates.
- **Upgrading facilities** (murals, eating tables, food service layout, and the like) and **marketing school meals** (improved packaging and signage with student input) to increase student appeal.
- **Purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables** for school meal programs, with the help of nonprofit partnerships and local farmers' markets.
- **Offering successful breakfast programs** that make food readily accessible, such as when served in classrooms and at school fitness centers.
- **Increasing access to school meals** by providing incentives for submitting student applications, increasing points of sale, and installing computer point of sale systems.
- **Increasing healthy offerings outside of the school lunch program** through vending machines, student stores, and student food fundraisers by eliminating less healthful foods and beverages and/or replacing them with healthful alternatives.
- **Supporting healthy fundraising through profit-sharing** partnerships between food services and student groups or parent organizations.