



Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line Tip Sheet

Creating and Implementing Policies for Healthier Competitive Foods Standards

Tip Sheet 2 of 5: Engaging champions • Adapting current wellness policies and practices • Using an incremental approach to policy implementation • Communication and training • Full set of tip sheets available online at iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-the-bottom-line.

Implementation of the new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards provides an opportunity to offer healthier competitive foods--snacks and à la carte foods and beverages--in schools. This tip sheet, *Creating and Implementing Policies for Healthier Competitive Foods Standards*, is one of five tip sheets that share strategies, best practices, and tips from middle schools and high schools in eight districts across the country that participated in the *Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line* study in 2012. These districts have improved nutrition standards for competitive foods without experiencing significant financial losses. This document focuses on developing and implementing strong school district-level nutrition policies.

Developing and implementing policy changes that improve student nutrition and control the bottom line requires approaches that work together. This tip sheet gives strategies for creating and implementing policies for competitive foods, including the new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards. Districts in the study identified some keys to success in developing and implementing policies that reduced or eliminated junk food, which are outlined below. For example, setting policy should involve a group of individuals (e.g., a wellness committee) to develop new policies or revise existing policies. Additionally, leaders who act as wellness champions can help build acceptance and buy-in for the changes by communicating with students, staff, faculty, and families. Professional training for food service staff, teachers, and other school staff was also reported as an essential element of success.

"Almost without exception, our board members really do take a forward look at childhood obesity and creating a healthy environment and supporting their physical health to help the kids achieve the best they can. They really do."

Penny Parham, Food Service Director,
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Creating and Implementing Policies for Healthy Competitive Foods Standards

Engaging champions

Many of those interviewed identified particular people or groups of stakeholders who took a leadership role in developing and implementing stronger competitive food and beverage standards. Very often, specific individuals were pointed to as being effective champions. These leaders were lauded as being passionate about students' health. Food service directors, superintendents, school boards, and principals were all cited as being important leaders who helped to ensure the success of stronger standards.

Doug Joersz, food service director for Bismarck Public Schools in North Dakota, credits the building principals: "...that's where the rubber hits the road. So you've got to have the folks in those buildings making sure that those policies are being followed." School board members are also credited with policy success: according to Penny Parham, food service director at Miami-Dade County Public Schools, "Almost without exception, our board members really do take a forward look at childhood obesity and creating a healthy environment and supporting...physical health to help the kids achieve the best they can."

Many districts pointed to wellness committees as the source of strength in setting and implementing competitive food policies. In Perry County School District (Alabama), members of the wellness council included students, nurses from the community, school nurses, principals, community organizations focused on health, and pastors.

To create a comprehensive policy, the Boston Public Schools included the local health commission, local centers for youth and families, the New England Dairy and Food Council, the children's hospital in Boston, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation in their policy discussions. A local pediatrician participating on a wellness committee for Bismarck Public Schools offered stories of the health problems faced by overweight and obese children, which helped the committee to see the long-term consequences of the foods students consume.

Adapting current wellness policies and practices

Many districts used the language in federal and state policies in writing their own policies. Additionally, some districts, including Miami-Dade County Public Schools, used the materials from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Going forward, the new Smart Snacks in School standards should be used to guide district policies across the country. While the Smart Snacks in School standards are required for all districts with Title I funds, districts can set policies that exceed the standards and include areas such as fundraising and after-school activities. Monitoring of compliance with policies is also critical; Perry County School District used the CDC School Health Index as a way to track the implementation of the standards, and the New London Public Schools (Connecticut) used the guidelines in the Healthier US Schools Challenge.

To implement policies, schools that use existing resources make for a smooth transition to healthier foods. For example, integrating locally grown vegetables and fruits--available through Farm to School programs--into the meal program was commonly cited as a successful strategy for increasing produce consumption. Partnerships like this benefit both the students and the community by using local, in-season produce. In Corvallis School District 509J (Oregon), Food Service Director Sharon Gibson said that the Farm to School program is exciting for the town because students are eating produce grown by neighbors and friends.

Using an incremental approach to policy implementation

Almost every district we spoke with followed an incremental approach when transitioning to stronger competitive food standards. With incremental changes, students were allowed to adapt to new foods over time. Student acceptance of new foods was a primary concern for many schools in their transition, but with small changes made over a few years, students were given time for their tastes to adjust. One way schools in our study implemented changes gradually was through phasing in healthier snacks and beverages while removing unhealthier foods at the same time. Some districts introduced veggie cups with hummus and yogurt parfaits, which were accepted well by students. Allowing students the time to adapt to things like baked chips and water instead of full-fat chips and soda facilitated a smoother transition and can reduce pushback from students. According to Andrew Morton, child nutrition director at Marshall County Schools (Alabama), students are adaptable and he noted that in his district they adapted well when the cafeteria's selection changed. Deb Murray, cafeteria manager at Douglas Middle School in Marshall County, stated that *"It's easier, to me, when you start out slow, instead of trying what we call 'cold turkey.'"*

With the new Smart Snacks in School standards, districts will have to move more quickly on implementation. Fortunately, there are now more resources in place to facilitate expedited changes in school food options than there were when the schools in the study were launching their efforts. For example, there are more products available that meet the healthier standards, examples of lessons learned and successful strategies for marketing and promoting healthier options, and other resources to support implementation of strong nutrition standards (see Resources section below). The districts in the study learned that students do adjust--especially if they are engaged in the process, as described in more detail in Tip Sheet 4--and making changes at the start of a school year is a good strategy. One way to apply what these districts learned is to be willing to experiment and use trial and error, as these schools did: if some items don't work, don't get discouraged, try others.

Communication and training

Communicating policy changes and gaining students' acceptance of changes is a group effort. Study participants cited champions, including active wellness committees, teachers (especially P.E. teachers), students, and even local physicians, as helping to build support for and assisting with the transition to stronger nutrition standards. Engaging a wide group of stakeholders, such as members of district wellness committees, is also essential. Perry County School District involved families and the community as a whole in its initiatives. According to Child Nutrition Director Joyce Banks, *"We're doing things to help our community as a whole alleviate some of the health disparities in our area."* The school district organized walk-to-school days that couple physical activity with healthy eating and provided an opportunity for the schools and community to celebrate the changes. The district has also hosted "Bring Your Parents to Lunch" days at the schools so parents could see and taste what their children eat during the school day. The Boston Public Schools leveraged its Parent University program to help parents easily prepare healthy, inexpensive meals at home. Parent University offered classes for parents on weekends that included nutrition education and cooking.

Finally, training food service staff was also cited as essential to policy implementation according to Mary Hill, food service director in the Jackson Public Schools (Mississippi). Director Hill added that monitoring and supervision in the cafeterias are also critical components to effective policy implementation. In the Boston Public Schools, monthly manager meetings were essential for providing feedback to district food service staff regarding students' acceptance of healthier foods. In Perry County School District, school nurses presented information on nutrition education to school staff members as part of in-service education.

"Our Food Service Director Gail Sharry has done a tremendous job educating the cafeteria staff in changing how they're interacting with the students...So instead of a student going through the cafeteria line and just being served, the cafeteria staff now knows a little bit more about what they're serving and why it's healthy. [They] can present that to the students, and the students are seeing healthy options and [understand] why it's good for them to eat in that particular way."

Alison Burdick, Principal, Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London, Connecticut

Conclusion

Successful development, adoption, and implementation of healthier nutrition standards occurred in school districts in the study when a combination of strategies was used. Study participants identified the need for an inclusive approach to developing policy; at least one champion to ensure policy adoption and implementation; clear communication with students, families, and staff; and the use of an incremental approach to changing foods offered to students. Together with the strategies outlined in the other four tip sheets, districts that use a comprehensive approach can introduce healthier foods and beverages to students that will improve student health and learning.

For more ideas, please visit iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-the-bottom-line for four more tip sheets.

Resources

USDA: United State Department of Agriculture

Smart Snacks in School Nutrition Standards <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/allfoods.htm>

HealthierUS Schools Challenge <http://www.fns.usda.gov/hussc/healthierus-school-challenge>

School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/local-wellness-policy-resources/school-nutrition-environment-and-wellness-resources-0>

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Competitive Foods Resource Center <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/standards.htm>

State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health

<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/statepubhealthactions-prevCD.htm>

School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6005.pdf>

School Health Index <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI/>

Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/>

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Healthy Schools Builder <https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/>

Swap Your Snack https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/swap_your_snack/

Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs, Cornell University

Smarter Lunchrooms Movement <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>

IOM: Institute of Medicine

Stallings, V. A., & Yaktine, A. L., eds. (2007). *Nutrition standards for foods in schools: Leading the way toward healthier youth*. National Academies Press. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth.aspx>

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 3U38HM000520-03 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the National Network of Public Health Institutes. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC or NNPHI.

Thank you to the Kid's Safe and Healthful Food Project for partnering on the development of this tip sheet.