

FALL 2002

# SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

## Partnership Promotes Health for Better Learning

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**A**cademic performance is clearly linked to health and well-being. Children who eat well learn better. By promoting healthy eating and physical activity in a unified way, schools and families together make a big difference in student energy and readiness to learn today, as well as in health and productivity as adults, and in success and well-being throughout life.

Providing a healthy environment requires a team approach, including administrators, food service staff, teachers, school counselors, nurses, coaches, students, families, community leaders, and others. Conduct a needs assessment to identify where change is needed, and develop an action plan. Exchange information with all segments of the community to ensure that efforts are meaningful to all and reinforced in other aspects of children's lives. With the help of families and the community, schools can provide students with the skills, opportunities and encouragement they need to adopt healthier lifestyles that will foster success throughout their lives.

### What Schools Can Do

Schools can create a healthy environment that gives students consistent, reliable health information, and ample opportunity to use it. For example, in healthy school nutrition environments:

- Teachers with appropriate training teach behavior-focused nutrition education in all grades.
- Students learn to make healthy choices in the classroom, cafeteria, and at school events.
- Students have many opportunities to practice healthy habits. They can choose from an array of healthy foods, eat in relaxed, comfortable surroundings, and enjoy daily physical activity.
- Students, teachers and volunteers serve as healthy eating role models.
- Decisions regarding sale of foods on school grounds are based on nutrition goals, not profit making.

### What Families Can Do

Good nutrition begins at home. Families can help children develop healthy habits by providing healthy choices, talking about good nutrition, encouraging an interest in cooking, promoting physical activity, and participating in school health and nutrition programs. When children see that parents value health and nutrition, they will too. Promote healthy eating at home and school by:

- Making sure children eat a healthy breakfast everyday, at home or at school.
- Advocating for a healthy school environment. Learn about school policies and talk to administrators about the importance of nutrition, health education and physical activity at school.
- Providing healthy snacks for school events and promoting healthy ways of fundraising.
- Organizing a classroom tasting party to introduce nutritious new foods, or volunteering to coordinate an edible school garden.
- Reinforcing school messages by actively supporting good nutrition and physical activity in your own life, and in family activities.
- Discussing nutrition so children understand how healthy eating serves their bodies *and* minds.

By working together to encourage healthy eating and physical activity habits, schools and families promote achievement and lifelong success for children. For more information on promoting a healthy school nutrition environment, contact *Susan Fiore*, (860) 807-2075, [susan.fiore@po.state.ct.us](mailto:susan.fiore@po.state.ct.us).

**Useful Tools** For conducting a needs assessment and developing an action plan: *The School Health Index* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Available in PDF format at [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/SHI/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/SHI/index.htm).

For developing local policies: *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn* (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2000). Available for purchase at [www.nasbe.org/NASBE\\_Bookstore/Safe\\_Healthy.html](http://www.nasbe.org/NASBE_Bookstore/Safe_Healthy.html).

For strategies to promote healthy eating and physical activity in schools: *Improving the School Nutrition Environment: A Guide to Local Action* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2000). Found in *Changing the Scene* (see back).

## All Children Need a Healthy Breakfast Everyday

*Learning Takes More Than Books*

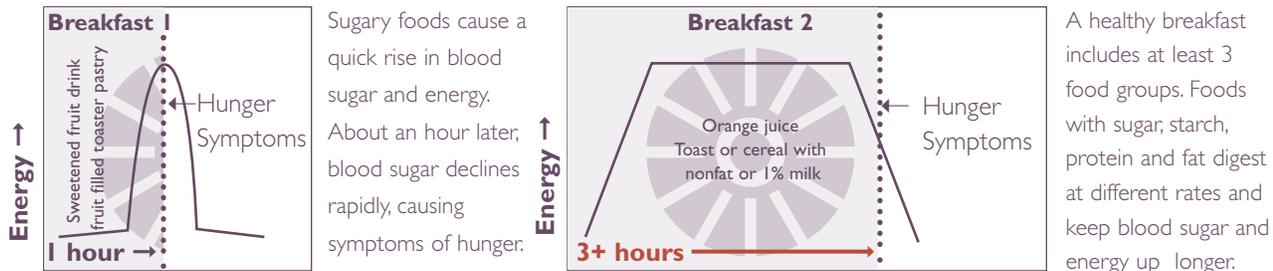
A hungry child cannot learn, yet many come to school without breakfast. Perhaps they did not have time, or were not yet hungry. Busy family schedules mean many children prepare their own breakfast, and those who do eat may choose low-nutrient foods that don't sustain energy levels through the morning when many core subjects are taught. All children need a healthy breakfast everyday to maximize learning.

Why? When children eat a healthy breakfast, everyone benefits because students:

- Have higher test scores, work faster, make fewer errors, and are more creative;
- Are less likely to be sent to the principal or visit the school nurse;
- Have longer attention spans and are better able to concentrate;
- Are healthier and have improved attendance;
- Are more cooperative and get along better with classmates, minimizing classroom disruption and allowing all students to spend more time on learning.

The key to academic excellence is a healthy breakfast. When demanding subjects like math and science are taught in the morning, it is especially important that students start the day fueled to do their best.

### Comparison of energy levels from two breakfasts



*Breakfast: Key to Academic Excellence. CT State Department of Education and New England Dairy & Food Council (2002).*

## Building Bridges to Healthier Students

*A School-Based Effort to Support Access to Health Insurance*

Because of its commitment to the idea that healthy children make better students, Connecticut has been chosen by a professional organization for leaders in education to participate in an exciting project to improve access to health care. The Connecticut State Department of Education is partnering with the Departments of Social Services and Public Health, and community-based organizations to form *Connecticut Building Bridges* to build more effective systems for school-based outreach and enrollment in children's health insurance.

Lack of access to health care is a barrier to learning that Connecticut has the immediate capability to remove through the HUSKY program. Access to health insurance is a critical first step in ensuring children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn.

The *Connecticut Building Bridges Team* seeks to expand its partnership to avoid duplication and fragmentation of outreach and enrollment efforts. For more information on how you can help keep students healthy and ready to learn, please contact Cheryl Carotenuti, Health Promotion Consultant, State Department of Education,

860-713-6584,  
cheryl.carotenuti@po.state.ct.us.

CT School-Family-Community Partnerships, a project of the State Department of Education, helps educators, parents and community members develop partnerships by providing training and resources that promote effective local policies and practices, and increase public awareness of the positive impact of school-family-community partnerships on student learning.

Staff: Judy Carson, Harriet Feldlaufer & Wendy Harwin, CT State Department of Education  
Project Partners: CREC, SERC & CT Parents Plus, United Way of CT

## Are CT Students Fit, Healthy and Eager to Learn?

Health is not just the absence of disease—it requires physical, mental and social well-being. Schools in CT are recognizing the importance of addressing student health to ensuring students are ready and able to learn. Three school systems last year piloted coordinated approaches to school health. These Coordinated School Health Programs or CSHPs improve health and ability to learn through families, communities and schools working together.

Children's health and education are compromised by risky behaviors like tobacco, alcohol and drug use, early sexual activity, lack of physical activity, and poor diet. Coordinated school health addresses such issues, promotes healthy choices, and positively affects school instruction, services, physical and social environments by integrating 8 components: 1) health education; 2) school environment; 3) school nutrition; 4) school health services; 5) physical education; 6) counseling services; 7) staff wellness; and 8) parent/community partnerships.

A coordinated approach requires interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration at every level, but communities have wide variation in their resources, needs, institutions and individuals. For this reason CSHPs look very different from school to school. Below is a brief look at the programs in the three Connecticut pilot districts. For more information about how to help students be fit, healthy and eager to learn, go to [www2.edc.org/makinghealthacademic](http://www2.edc.org/makinghealthacademic) or contact Cheryl Carotenuti, (860) 713-6584, [cheryl.carotenuti@po.state.ct.us](mailto:cheryl.carotenuti@po.state.ct.us).

### Danbury Public Schools

**Goals** include:

- 1) identify modifiable risk factors among students;
- 2) develop a staff wellness program;
- 3) strengthen current health-related activities and services;
- 4) integrate academics with health related activities, and foster a broader understanding of nutrition and lifelong health.

Danbury began by partnering with UCONN's Public Health program and establishing a Community Health Team with representatives from area hospitals, community agencies, and public health groups. Recognizing the importance of parent and community involvement, parents, students and community members participated together in activities such as Don't Laugh at Me training, Great American Smokeout talks by local physicians, and National Trails Day.

### Granby Public Schools

**Goals** include:

- 1) create and maintain a positive school environment;
- 2) implement an effective health and wellness program involving all of the learning community;
- 3) provide appropriate services for physical, emotional and mental health.

A Governance Team, including school members, community members, and parents, provides oversight and guidance. Character education is a focus in all schools. Granby developed a five-year strategic plan for health and wellness, and a wellness program for staff.

### New Haven Public Schools

**Priorities** were based on the results of a survey of each community. The district started by focusing on three schools.

- Elementary - nutrition, staff wellness/mental health, school environment
- Middle - physical education, nutrition, parental involvement
- High - staff wellness, school environment, nutrition

New Haven's initiative is supported by its School Based Health Clinics. A district-wide school health committee provides assistance and advice, and a district-wide coordinator promotes consistency. Healthy snacks introduced were embraced by students, and other benefits include improved communication between disciplines and departments, and between parents and food services. The team uses newsletters, a website and bulletin boards to link the entire school community to health programs and information.

## Connecticut for Healthy LGBTQ Youth

The Connecticut State Departments of Education and Public Health recently partnered with the American Psychological Association as a pilot state for the *Healthy Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Students Project*. This project addresses the physical and mental health concerns of LGBTQ youth, including risk reduction, HIV prevention and other wellness issues.

Connecticut has selected and trained a cadre of trainers that includes nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists working in schools.

The trainers will provide professional development to physical and mental health providers in schools, including research-based information and strategies for best addressing the physical and emotional health issues of high-school-aged LGBTQ youth.

For more information, visit [www.apa.org/ed/hlgb.html](http://www.apa.org/ed/hlgb.html) or contact Bonnie Edmondson, State Department of Education, HIV Coordinator, 860-713-6578, [bonnie.edmondson@po.state.ct.us](mailto:bonnie.edmondson@po.state.ct.us)

# Nutrition Resource Library

The library of the State Department of Education's Office of Child Nutrition in Middletown loans out a wide variety of educational materials free of charge. In addition to those listed, resources include nutrition curriculums, training materials for school nutrition programs, videos, books, audiovisuals, puppets and games. To borrow materials, or for more information, contact Susan Fiore, (860) 807-2075.

**Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment.** U.S. Department of Agriculture (2000).

Helps administrators, educators, school foodservice staff, parents and community members examine the school nutrition environment, and develop and implement a plan for better incorporating concepts of healthy eating and physical activity into the school day.

Resources include an action guide, improvement checklist, fact sheets, video, PowerPoint presentation, and reproducible brochure. (The free kit can be ordered at [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/kit.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/kit.html).)

**Let's Party: Party Ideas for School and Home.** West Virginia Department of Education (1993).

Focuses on helping children develop sound eating habits and positive attitudes toward food. Celebrations that offer healthy and tasty foods reinforce classroom lessons about eating and good health, and send an important message that healthy eating can be fun. The book provides suggestions, ideas and recipes, many of which encourage children's participation.

**Gobble Up Science: Fun Activities to Complete and Eat for Kids in Grades 1-4.** Johmann, C.A. & Rieth, E.J. (1996).

Contains creative cooking activities that can be used by teachers and parents to teach basic science concepts. Children can eat their nutritious science experiments when they are done learning.

**yourSELF Middle School Nutrition Education Kit.** U.S. Department of Agriculture (1998).

Contains materials that help 7th & 8th graders learn to make smart choices about eating and physical activity. The materials convey respect for increasing adolescent control over their own health. Multimedia kit includes multiple copies of magazines and workbooks, a teacher's guide, duplication masters, video, and ideas for linking the school dining room and classroom. (For information about ordering the \$25 kit go to [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Educators/yourself.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Educators/yourself.html).)

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