

# CHANGING THE SCENE



## Improving the School Nutrition Environment

- Improvement Checklist
- Handouts
- Samples:
  - Letters
  - Meeting Notice
  - Press Release
  - Articles



## Support Materials

# Contents

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## ■ Improvement Checklist

Component 1: A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity

Component 2: Quality School Meals

Component 3: Other Healthy Food Options

Component 4: Pleasant Eating Experiences

Component 5: Nutrition Education

Component 6: Marketing

## ■ Handouts

Call to Action

Food Guide Pyramid

What You Can Do to Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

—School Superintendent and School Board

—School Principal

—School Foodservice Staff

—Teacher

—Parent

—Student

The Facts: Diet-related Health Risks

The Facts: Eating Habits

The Facts: Competitive Foods

The Facts: Nutrition and Learning

The Facts: Physical Activity

USDA School Meal Programs

## ■ Samples

Sample Letters to Parents

Sample Meeting Announcement

Sample Pitch Letter for Media

Sample Press Release

Sample Feature Articles

Sample Letter to the Editor

Sample Op-Ed Piece

# HEALTHY SCHOOL NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT Improvement Checklist

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**U**se the Improvement Checklist to take an honest look at where things stand in your school and to help focus on exactly what needs to be done. Review the following Definitions of Success for the six components of a healthy school nutrition environment and make copies for each member of your team to use. For each statement, check **OK** or briefly describe the problem(s) under **Needs Improvement**. Your responses will help you identify where your school is now, and where you want your school to be.

Many of these Definitions of Success were adapted from *The School Health Index for Physical Activity and Healthy Eating: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide (Elementary School and Middle School/High School)* published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**COMPONENT 1: A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity**

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>Nutrition education and physical activity are included in the school's daily educational program from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.</p>		
<p>Administrators support the development of healthy lifestyles for students, and establish and enforce policies that improve the school nutrition environment. They address issues such as the kinds of foods available on the school campus; mealtime schedules; dining space and atmosphere; nutrition education; and physical activity.</p>		
<p>School staff, students, and parents are part of the policy-making process and support a healthy school nutrition environment.</p>		
<p>School foodservice staff are part of the education team and participate in making decisions and policies that affect the school nutrition environment.</p>		
<p>The school has a health council to address nutrition and physical activity issues.</p>		

**COMPONENT 2: Quality School Meals**

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
Schools offer lunch, breakfast, and afterschool snack programs, and students are encouraged to participate.		
The Child Nutrition Programs are administered by school foodservice staff that is properly qualified according to current professional standards.		
All school foodservice staff have appropriate preservice training and regularly participate in professional development activities.		
School meals are offered at prices students can afford.		
Menus are planned with input from students and include local, cultural and ethnic favorites of the students.		

**COMPONENT 2: Quality School Meals (continued)**

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>Menus meet nutrition standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conform to good menu planning principles, and feature a variety of healthy choices that are tasty, attractive, of excellent quality, and are served at the proper temperature.</p>		
<p>School foodservice staff use food preparation techniques to provide school meals that are lower in saturated fat, sodium, and sugar. They offer healthy food choices that include lean meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or non-fat milk.</p>		
<p>School meals are marketed to appeal to all students, who are encouraged to choose and consume the full meal.</p>		
<p>School meal participation rates are approximately the same for paying students as for students eligible for full and reduced price meals.</p>		
<p>Food safety is a key part of the school foodservice operation.</p>		

### COMPONENT 3: Other Healthy Food Options

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>All foods and beverages that are available at school contribute to meeting the dietary needs of students; that is, they are from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.</p>		
<p>School policies include nutrition standards for foods and beverages offered at parties, celebrations, and social events.</p>		
<p>If foods are sold in competition with school meals, they include healthy food choices offered at prices children can afford.</p>		
<p>If a la carte foods are available, they include a variety of choices of tasty, nutritious foods and beverages, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or non-fat dairy foods.</p>		
<p>If foods and beverages are sold in competition with school meals, they are not more highly marketed than the reimbursable school meals.</p>		

### COMPONENT 3: Other Healthy Food Options (continued)

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>There are appropriate restrictions on students' access to vending machines, school stores, snack bars, and other outlets that sell foods and beverages, if these options are available. For example: no access in elementary schools, no access until after the end of the school day for middle and junior high schools, and no access until after the end of the last lunch period in senior high schools.</p>		
<p>School staff does not use food as a reward or punishment for students. For example, they don't give coupons for fast food meals as a reward for an "A" on a class project or withhold snacks as punishment for misbehaving.</p>		
<p>The school encourages parents to provide a variety of nutritious foods if students bring bag lunches from home.</p>		
<p>The school encourages organizations to raise funds by selling non-food items.</p>		



## COMPONENT 4: Pleasant Eating Experiences

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>Meal periods are scheduled at appropriate times; schools do not schedule tutoring, pep rallies, club and organization meetings, and other activities during meal times.</p>		
<p>Meal periods are long enough for students to eat and socialize.</p>		
<p>There are enough serving areas so that students don't have to spend too much time waiting in line.</p>		
<p>Dining areas are attractive and have enough space for seating; tables and chairs are the right size for the students.</p>		
<p>Recess for elementary grades is scheduled before lunch so that children will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat.</p>		

**COMPONENT 4: Pleasant Eating Experiences (continued)**

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
<p>Schools encourage socializing among students, and between students and adults. Adults properly supervise dining rooms and serve as role models to students.</p>		
<p>Creative, innovative methods are used to keep noise levels appropriate—no “eat in silence”, no whistles, no buzzing traffic lights.</p>		
<p>Facility design (including the size and location of the dining/kitchen area, lighting, building materials, windows, open space, adequate foodservice equipment for food preparation and service, and food and staff safety), is given priority in renovations or new construction.</p>		
<p>Hand washing equipment and supplies are in a convenient place so that students can wash their hands before eating.</p>		
<p>Drinking fountains are available for students to get water at meals and throughout the day.</p>		
<p>Schools use an accounting system that protects the identity of students who eat free and reduced price school meals.</p>		

## COMPONENT 5: Nutrition Education

Definitions of Success	OK	Needs Improvement
Students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 receive nutrition education that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors.		
Nutrition education is offered in the school dining room and in the classroom, with coordination between school foodservice staff and teachers.		
Students receive nutrition messages throughout the school that are consistent and reinforce each other.		
State and district health education curriculum standards and guidelines include nutrition education and physical education.		
Nutrition is integrated into core curriculum areas such as math, science, and language arts.		
The school links nutrition education activities with the coordinated school health program.		
The school is enrolled as a Team Nutrition School and conducts nutrition education activities and promotions that involve students, parents, and the community.		

**COMPONENT 6: Marketing**

<b>Definitions of Success</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Healthy eating and physical activity are actively promoted to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.		
Schools consider student needs in planning for a healthy school nutrition environment. They ask students for input and feedback, and listen to what they have to say.		
Students receive positive, motivating messages about healthy eating and physical activity throughout the school setting.		
Schools promote healthy food choices and don't allow advertising that promotes less nutritious food choices.		
Schools work with a variety of media to spread the word to the community about a healthy school nutrition environment.		

# Handouts

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**T**he handouts in this section are reproducible masters for your use in making presentations or in discussions with potential team members.

The “You Can Support...” and “The Facts” handouts are included on the CD-ROM. You may want to make your own similar handouts using local information.

# Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors

The American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dietetic Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Medical Association, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) call on schools and communities to recognize the health and educational benefits of healthy eating and the importance of making it a priority in every school. At the same time, the

associations are encouraging their members to provide leadership in helping schools promote healthy eating for our Nation's children. Establishment of local policies that create a supportive nutrition environment in schools will provide students with the skills, opportunities, and encouragement they need to adopt healthy eating patterns.

## Prescription for Change: Ten Keys to Promote Healthy Eating in Schools

*Ten keys have been developed to assist each school community in writing its own prescription for change.*

- Students, parents, educators and community leaders will be involved in assessing the school's eating environment, developing a shared vision and an action plan to achieve it.
- Adequate funds will be provided by local, state and federal sources to ensure that the total school environment supports the development of healthy eating patterns.
- Behavior-focused nutrition education will be integrated into the curriculum from pre-K through grade 12. Staff who provide nutrition education will have appropriate training.
- School meals will meet the USDA nutrition standards as well as provide sufficient choices, including new foods and foods prepared in new ways, to meet the taste preferences of diverse student populations.
- All students will have designated lunch periods of sufficient length to enjoy eating healthy foods with friends. These lunch periods will be scheduled as

- near the middle of the school day as possible.
- Schools will provide enough serving areas to ensure student access to school meals with a minimum of wait time.
- Space that is adequate to accommodate all students and pleasant surroundings that reflect the value of social aspects of eating will be provided.
- Students, teachers and community volunteers who practice healthy eating will be encouraged to serve as role models in the school dining areas.
- If foods are sold in addition to National School Lunch Program meals, they will be from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid. This practice will foster healthy eating patterns.
- Decisions regarding the sale of foods in addition to the National School Lunch Program meals will be based on nutrition goals, not on profit making.



American Academy  
of Family Physicians



American Academy of Pediatrics



NHMA  
National Hispanic  
Medical  
Association



NMA  
National  
Medical  
Association

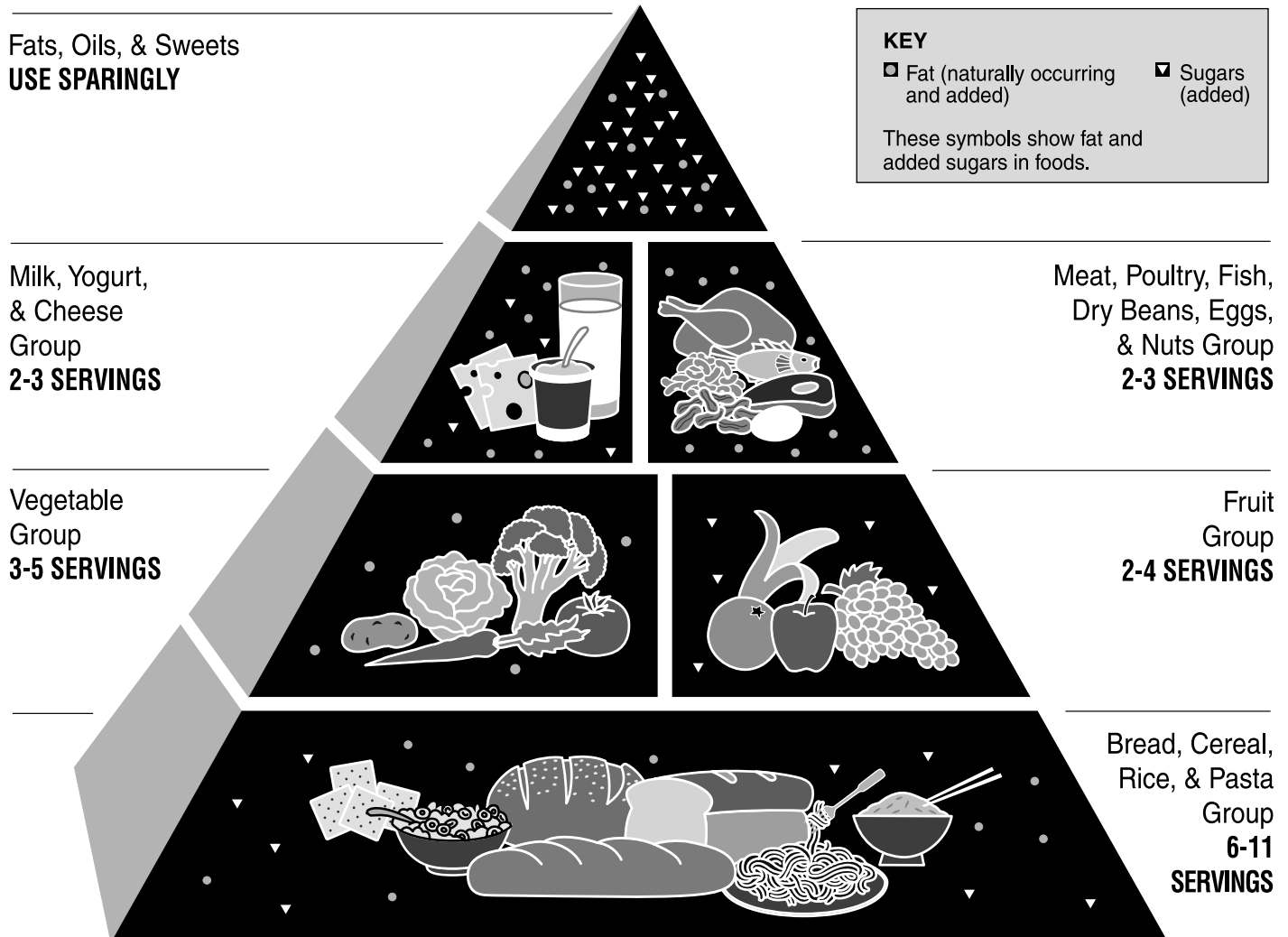


AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION  
"Your link to nutrition and health."



# Food Guide Pyramid

## A Guide to Daily Food Choices



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Use the Food Guide Pyramid to help you eat better every day...the Dietary Guidelines way. Start with plenty of Breads, Cereals, Rice, and Pasta; Vegetables; and Fruits. Add two to three servings from the Milk group and two to three servings from the Meat group.

Each of these food groups provides some, but not all, of the nutrients you need. No one food group is more important than another—for good health you need them all. Go easy on fats, oils, and sweets, the foods in the small tip of the Pyramid.

# ATTN: School Superintendent and School Board Members

- Schools are not responsible for meeting every need of their students; but where the need directly affects learning, schools must meet the challenge.
- Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Well-planned school nutrition programs positively influence students' eating habits.
- Regular physical activity reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being and long-term health benefits.
- A good breakfast gives children a jump-start on their ability to learn. Serving breakfast on "test days" is a good move. But learning is important every day—it builds on previous knowledge and is the foundation for future learning.
- Studies of the School Breakfast Program have demonstrated positive effects on school attendance and a reduction in school tardiness, and have shown that children who eat nutritious morning meals perform better academically, show improved behavior, and are physically healthier than children who skip breakfast.

## *You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment Here's How:*

- Let staff and the community know that you value and enthusiastically support a healthy school nutrition environment. Let your actions reflect your values.
- Provide guidance and direction for school staff, and require them to be accountable for actively supporting a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Make the necessary funds available to establish and support all six components of a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Establish and enforce policies requiring that all foods and beverages available at school contribute to meeting the dietary needs of students; that is, they are from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Seek other sources of revenue for schools so there is no need to raise funds through vending machines, school stores, snack bars, and other school food outlets that compete with nutritious school meals.
- Require that schools allow time in the curriculum for nutrition education and physical education.
- Establish appropriate qualifications for school foodservice staff and support ongoing professional development.
- Establish professional development for teachers in the areas of nutrition and nutrition education.
- Establish policy that requires a lunch and breakfast program in every school.
- Eat lunch in school dining rooms periodically and spend time with the students and staff.
- Promote positive local media coverage of schools.
- If vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and other food outlets are allowed on school property, establish policy for the district that appropriately limits access.
- Work to build support for shared local/State/Federal funding for the school meal programs—like the shared funding in other areas of education.



# ATTN: School Principal

- Schools are not responsible for meeting every need of their students; but where the need directly affects learning, schools must meet the challenge.
- Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Well-planned school nutrition programs positively influence students' eating habits.
- Regular physical activity reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being and long-term health benefits.
- A good breakfast gives children a jump-start on their ability to learn. Serving breakfast on “test days” is a good move. But learning is important every day—it builds on previous knowledge and is the foundation for future learning.
- Studies of the School Breakfast Program have demonstrated positive effects on school attendance and a reduction in school tardiness, and have shown that children who eat nutritious morning meals perform better academically, show improved behavior, and are physically healthier than children who skip breakfast.

## ***You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment Here's How:***

- Let staff and the community know that you value and enthusiastically support a healthy school nutrition environment. Let your actions reflect your values.
- Enforce district policies and establish and enforce school policies to support a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Establish and enforce policies requiring that all foods and beverages available at school contribute to meeting the dietary needs of students; that is, they are from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Start a School Breakfast Program if your school doesn't have one.
- Encourage school staff to recognize that they are role models for students.
- Seek sources of needed revenue for your school so there is no need for raising funds through vending machines, school stores, snack bars, or other food outlets.
- Emphasize that nutrition and physical activity are part of the total educational program and encourage staff to work together toward children's health.
- Provide adequate space and pleasant surroundings to reflect a value on the social aspects of eating; schedule lunch periods as close to the middle of the school day as possible; and make sure students have enough time to eat and socialize.
- Eat lunch in the school dining room, spend time with the students and staff, and encourage faculty to eat with students in the dining room.
- Schedule recess before lunch in elementary schools.
- Make physical activity a part of every school day; spend time on the playground during recess periods and interact with students.
- Regularly include news about physical activity and nutrition programs in the school newsletter and in presentations at parent or staff meetings.
- Don't use food as a reward or punishment.
- Work to build support for shared local/State/Federal funding for the school meal programs—like the shared funding in other areas of education.

# ATTN: School Foodservice Staff

- You want the best for your students. Show it by creating opportunities for them to make healthy food choices.
- Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Well-planned school nutrition programs positively influence students' eating habits.
- Studies of the School Breakfast Program have demonstrated positive effects on school attendance and a reduction in school tardiness, and have shown that children who eat nutritious morning meals perform better academically, show improved behavior, and are physically healthier than children who skip breakfast.
- The concept of foodservice is not limited to the reimbursable school meal program for which the USDA establishes nutrition standards. Although the immediate goal of the school foodservice may be the provision of student meals, the ultimate goals are providing education and establishing lifelong healthful dietary habits. (*Schools and Health*, Institute of Medicine, National Academy Press, 1997.)

## ***You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment Here's How:***

- Provide meals that are tasty, healthy, and appealing to students, meet USDA's nutrition standards, and reflect the cultural backgrounds and preferences of students.
- Offer only healthy choices from the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Coordinate activities with classroom and physical education teachers and other staff.
- Support classroom lessons by offering foods that illustrate key messages, decorate the dining room with educational posters, post the nutrition analysis of the foods you serve, and conduct promotions and events in the dining room that support healthy choices.
- Involve students and families in planning and evaluating school meals.
- Look for continuing education opportunities to learn more about nutrition, preparing healthier meals, food safety, and marketing healthy choices.
- Invite and welcome parents and grandparents to lunch or breakfast occasionally.
- Market complete meals to students and provide enough choices within the school meal programs to meet nutrition standards and student preferences.
- Provide nutrition information to parents along with school lunch menus.
- Establish a student Nutrition Advisory Council to taste test new foods and recipes, suggest how to improve the meals and dining room, and offer ideas for attracting more customers.
- If you offer a la carte items:
  - Consider students' total nutritional needs; a la carte offerings can undermine the nutritional value of a complete meal.
  - Offer only foods that are part of the menu cycle; this will eliminate discrimination against students who can't afford to buy a la carte items. It will also eliminate students' perception that a la carte items are better than school meal offerings and will encourage them to buy the complete reimbursable school lunch.
  - Price a la carte foods high enough to recover the full cost, including overhead and indirect costs, and to make a profit to be used to enhance the school meal programs.
- Work to build support for shared local/State/Federal funding for the school meal programs—like the shared funding in other areas of education.

# ATTN: Teacher

- The health and well-being of children can significantly affect achievement in the classroom. An appropriate diet can improve problem-solving skills, test scores, and school attendance rates.
- Children who are hungry, sick, troubled, or depressed cannot function well in the classroom, no matter how good the teacher.
- It's important for children to learn healthy lifestyle choices early—to build healthier minds and bodies; and they need to practice the skills to make healthy choices.
- Physically active students are more alert and concentrate better in the classroom; physical activity can also reduce anxiety and stress and increase self-esteem.
- Serving breakfast on “test” days is a good move. But, learning is important every day—it builds on previous knowledge and is the foundation for future learning.
- Be a good role model—your students are watching!

## *You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment Here's How:*

- Teach the importance of good nutrition and physical activity.
- Work with other teachers and school foodservice staff to coordinate nutrition education efforts and to give students consistent messages about healthy eating.
- Focus the lessons on skills—not just facts. Give students opportunities to practice what they learn, and make the lessons meaningful, hands-on, and fun.
- Be a good role model for students by making healthy food choices at school and participating in school sponsored physical activity events. Support school meals and encourage students to participate.
- Eat in the school dining room.
- Advocate for meal schedules and dining room supervision which provide time and atmosphere that support healthy eating and socialization.
- Take advantage of in-service training on nutrition and physical activity.
- Involve families and community organizations in nutrition and physical activity programs.
- Work to build support for shared local/State/Federal funding for the school meal programs—like the shared funding in other areas of education.

## ATTN: Parent

- You love your children. You want the best for them. Show it by creating opportunities for them to make healthy food and physical activity choices.
- By establishing healthy habits early in life, children can dramatically reduce their health risks and increase their chances for longer, more productive lives.
- Research has shown what parents have known all along—children who eat breakfast do better in school.
- If you knew then what you know now, would *you* do it differently? Would you have made better choices? Help your child make healthy choices for life—today!
- Eat healthy—your children are watching.

### ***You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment Here's How:***

- Support the school meal programs and have your children participate.
- Advocate for a healthy school nutrition environment for your children. Speak to administrators about the importance of nutrition and physical activity in the school day. Write letters to the editor or volunteer for an interview with the media about the importance of a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Learn about the school's curriculum and insist that schools provide appropriate nutrition education and physical activity for students of all ages.
- Provide healthy snacks for school parties and special events.
- Eat lunch or breakfast with your child at school occasionally.
- Volunteer to participate on the school health council.
- Stay informed about school activities and policies; respond to surveys and other communications from the school; and attend parent organization meetings.
- Help identify ways to raise money for the school other than selling foods.
- Serve as role models and actively support nutrition and physical activity.
- Reinforce the messages about nutrition and physical activity that your children learn in school by planning family activities that include physical activity and healthy food choices.
- Share nutrition information with your children and talk with them about nutrition activities that occur at school.
- Work to build support for shared local/State/Federal funding for the school meal programs—like the shared funding in other areas of education.

## **ATTN: Student**

- You can make your own choices; choose wisely!
- To do your best in school and to look and feel your best, make healthy eating and physical activity choices at home and at school. Put more action into your life—dance, skate, bike, swim, or shoot some hoops. Just move it!
- Be adventurous—try new foods—expand your tastes to include a greater variety.
- You can have a voice in your school; get involved to make a difference!

### ***You Can Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment***

#### ***Here's How:***

- Set personal goals for healthy eating and physical activity, and make healthy food choices at school.
- If your school has vending machines, school stores, or other food outlets, work to ensure the availability of healthy food choices.
- Serve on a Nutrition Advisory Council or school health council. Participate in focus groups, surveys, interviews, and take advantage of other opportunities to give feedback.
- Participate in physical education classes, and enjoy physical activity after school and at home.
- Advocate for nutrition education and physical activity options in your school; write letters (including a letter to the editor or newsletter article), make phone calls and give presentations about the importance of a healthy school nutrition environment
- Ask your parents to get involved.
- Serve as a role model for younger students.
- Make suggestions to the school food service staff or Nutrition Advisory Council on new foods that you will eat and enjoy such as lean meats, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat, or non-fat dairy products.

## THE FACTS:

# Diet-related Health Risks

- Diet is a known risk factor for the three leading causes of death—heart disease, cancer, and stroke—as well as for diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis.<sup>1</sup>
- Early indicators of atherosclerosis, the most common cause of heart disease, often begin in childhood and adolescence. The indicators are related to young people's blood cholesterol levels, which are affected by diet.<sup>2</sup>
- Iron deficiency is one of the most prevalent nutritional problems of children in the United States. Iron deficiency hampers the body's ability to produce hemoglobin, which is needed to carry oxygen in the blood. This deficiency can increase fatigue, shorten attention span, decrease work capacity, reduce resistance to infection, and impair intellectual performance. Among school-age youths, female adolescents are at greatest risk for iron deficiency.<sup>1, 3, 4</sup>
- As many as 30,000 children have non-insulin-dependent diabetes—a type of diabetes that was once limited to adults. This type of diabetes now accounts for about 20 percent of newly diagnosed diabetes cases in children.<sup>5</sup>
- By the age of 17, approximately 90 percent of children's bone mass has been established. By the age of 21 or soon after, calcium is no longer added to bones and a few years later, a steady process of loss of calcium begins.<sup>6</sup>
- Of U.S. young people aged 6-17 years, about 5.3 million, or 12.5 percent, are seriously overweight.<sup>7</sup>
- The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years; most of the increase has occurred since the late 1970s.<sup>8, 9</sup>
- Obese children and adolescents are often excluded from peer groups and discriminated against by adults, experience psychological stress, and have a poor body image and low self-esteem.<sup>10, 11</sup>
- Obese children and adolescents are more likely to become obese adults. Overweight adults are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some types of cancer, and gallbladder disease.<sup>1, 12</sup>
- Studies of young persons have found that television watching is directly associated with obesity.<sup>13, 14, 15, 16</sup>

## THE FACTS:

# Diet-related Health Risks

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## THE FACTS:

# Eating Habits

- Eating habits that contribute to health problems tend to be established early in life; young persons having unhealthy eating habits tend to maintain these habits as they age.<sup>1</sup>
- Of young people ages 6-17, 64 percent eat too much total fat, and 68 percent eat too much saturated fat.<sup>2</sup>
- Teenagers today drink twice as much carbonated soda as milk and only 19 percent of girls ages 9-19 meet the recommended intakes for calcium.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>
- The average daily calcium intake of adolescent girls is about 800 mg a day; the Recommended Dietary Allowance for adolescents is 1,300 mg of calcium a day.<sup>6</sup>
- Less than 15 percent of school children eat the recommended servings of fruit, less than 20 percent eat the recommended servings of vegetables, less than 25 percent eat the recommended servings of grains, and only 30 percent consume the recommended milk group servings on any given day.<sup>7</sup>
- Only two percent of youth meet all the recommendations of the Food Guide Pyramid; 40 percent meet only one or none of the recommendations.<sup>8</sup>
- Most of the foods advertised during children's TV programming are high in fat, sugar, or sodium; practically no advertisements are for healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Studies have indicated that, compared with those who watch little television, children and adolescents who watch more television are more likely to have unhealthy eating habits and unhealthy conceptions about food, ask their parents to buy foods advertised on television, and eat more fat.<sup>9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</sup>
- Children who eat more often with their families are more likely to eat the five or more recommended servings of fruits and vegetables and are less likely to eat fried foods away from home or drink soda.<sup>15</sup>



# THE FACTS: Eating Habits

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## THE FACTS:

# Competitive Foods

- More than three-fourths (77.7 percent) of all middle/junior high and senior high schools have vending machines that students can use. One in three (34 percent) senior high schools permit students to use the vending machines at any time, resulting in competition with the school meal program.<sup>1</sup>
- Foods sold as school fund raisers also compete with school meals in 25.3 percent of all middle/junior high schools and 41.6 percent of all senior high schools.<sup>1</sup>
- In 1994, more than one-third of all middle/junior high and senior high schools approached, or were approached by, a fast food restaurant about offering foods for school meals. Seventeen percent have contracted with fast food restaurants.<sup>1</sup>
- A la carte food sales at lunch are offered in less than half of all public elementary schools but in three-quarters of the public middle/high schools. Milk, fruit drinks, ice cream, and cookies lead a la carte sales in elementary schools. In middle/high schools, fruit drinks, pizza, snack chips, ice cream, cookies, and french fries are top a la carte sales items.<sup>2</sup>
- In some schools, teachers are using food as an incentive or reward in the classroom. Other teachers have recognized that food should not be used as a reward or withdrawn as punishment and have replaced food with non-food alternatives such as inexpensive stickers, pencils, and erasers.<sup>3</sup>
- Some schools are removing high fat foods from school lunch menus in order to meet nutrition standards, but are offering them as a la carte items, since there are no USDA-required nutrition standards for a la carte foods.
- Some schools market juice drinks or fruit-flavored drinks as a la carte items; many students purchase them and omit milk from their school lunch.
- Some schools are signing multi-year exclusive pouring contracts with soda companies in exchange for incentives and/or commissions.

# THE FACTS: Competitive Foods

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## THE FACTS:

# Nutrition and Learning

- Even moderate undernutrition can have lasting effects on children's cognitive development and school performance.<sup>1</sup>
- About 12 percent of students report skipping breakfast. Only 11 percent report eating a breakfast that contains foods from three food groups and food energy intakes greater than 25 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowance.<sup>2, 3</sup>
- Skipping breakfast can adversely affect children's performance in problem-solving tasks.<sup>4</sup>
- Studies of the School Breakfast Program show participation associated with improved test performance, reduced tardiness and absence rates, increased attention, improved behavior, and emotional adjustment.<sup>4</sup>
- Administrators at the Minnesota pilot schools say school breakfast plays an important role in their 40-50 percent decline in discipline referrals.<sup>4</sup>
- The attitudes of teachers in the Minnesota pilot schools toward school breakfast programs have been overwhelmingly positive. They say students are more energetic at the start of the day and complain less by mid-morning.<sup>4</sup>
- Nurses in the Minnesota pilot schools report a significant decline in morning visits to their offices due to minor headaches and stomachaches. They conclude school breakfast is why students spend less time at their office and more time in the classroom.<sup>4</sup>

# THE FACTS: Nutrition and Learning

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## THE FACTS:

# Physical Activity

- Poor diet and physical inactivity together account for at least 300,000 deaths among adults in the U.S. each year. Only tobacco use contributes to more deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- Chronically-undernourished children have low energy, which can limit their physical activity.<sup>2</sup>
- Increased physical activity and appropriate caloric intake are recommended for preventing and reducing obesity.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies of young persons have found that television watching is directly associated with obesity.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7</sup>
- Physical activity among adolescents is consistently related to higher levels of self-esteem and self-concept and lower levels of anxiety and stress.<sup>8</sup>
- The percentage of students who attended a daily physical education class dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 27 percent in 1997.<sup>9</sup>
- In 1997, only 22 percent of all high school students reported being physically active for at least 20 minutes in a daily physical education class.<sup>9</sup>

## THE FACTS:

# Nutrition and Learning

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# USDA School Meal Programs

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## National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

- The National School Lunch Program was established in 1946 after the government had to reject many World War II recruits because of malnutrition.
- NSLP is the largest of the Federal child nutrition programs in dollars spent and the number of children served. More than 27 million children are served lunch every school day, in more than 96,000 schools.
- Approximately 95 percent of all elementary and secondary school students are enrolled in participating schools.
- School lunches provide valuable nutrients for children. The lunch program must provide age/grade-appropriate calorie levels and 1/3 of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C. School lunches also meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans for total fat and saturated fat.

## School Breakfast Program (SBP)

- Begun as a pilot program with just 700 schools, more than 70,000 schools now serve breakfast to 7.3 million school children every day.
- The number of schools participating in the SBP has nearly doubled over the past 10 years.
- School breakfasts provide valuable nutrients for children. The breakfast program provides age/grade-appropriate calorie levels and 1/4 of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C. School breakfasts also meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans for total fat and saturated fat.
- In 1998, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School released results of a study confirming the benefits of breakfast. It showed that children who eat nutritious morning meals perform better academically, show improved behavior, and are physically healthier than children who skip breakfast. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.



# Samples

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**T**he examples in this section include letters, media pieces, and a sample meeting notice. They are meant to give you ideas for developing similar materials which address local issues for your targeted audiences.

# Sample Letters to Parents

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Letter writing is an effective, personal way to tell people your ideas. Keep letters to one page and make sure you spell the parents' names correctly and have the right address.

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## LETTER SAMPLE #1

*Use official  
letterhead*

Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Monroe  
72 Plains Avenue  
St. Bart, Missouri 72755

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Monroe:

Children who learn to live healthy, live longer. By establishing healthy habits early in life, children can dramatically reduce their health risks and increase their chances for longer, more productive lives. We all want the best for our children. Here's how you can help.

The Brentwood Middle School Health Council encourages you to support our efforts to create a healthy school nutrition environment. We are promoting healthy food choices throughout our school—in the school meal programs, in vending machines, and at school-sponsored events. We are also supporting nutrition education and physical activity. You can help your children lead the healthiest lives possible by supporting our efforts to create a healthy school nutrition environment, and by reinforcing healthy habits at home.

Please join us and other parents on Tuesday, October 17 at 7:00 p.m. in the school auditorium for a meeting to learn more about the healthy school nutrition environment project and how you can get involved. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Roger Peterson, a national expert on education, will talk about the importance of nutrition to good health and academic performance.

Please call me at (827) 339-2525 if you have questions. Hope to see you on October 17.

Sincerely,

David Dewhurst, PhD  
Principal

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**LETTER  
SAMPLE #2**

*Use official  
letterhead*

Mrs. Francina Tomlin  
315 Leavitt Circle  
Meyers, Delaware 80803

Dear Mrs. Tomlin:

As superintendent of the Henley Falls Public Schools, I would like you to know about a very critical issue that is facing our district—the addition of vending machines to our elementary schools. While our district has had vending machines for some time in its high schools, they have not been allowed in elementary schools. Because adding vending machines into our elementary schools can raise much needed revenue, several of our principals are supporting this change. At the same time, several principals, teachers, and school foodservice staff are concerned about the potential negative impact the machines could have on our children’s health and education.

This is a very important decision for our district. I want to solicit your ideas and suggestions on whether we should add vending machines and, if so, how we can implement the change to include standards for the foods and beverages they would contain. We also need ideas of how we can generate more revenue for school activities if we decide not to place vending machines in our elementary school. I invite you to attend a parent meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 17, in the school dining room. The chairperson of our District Health Committee, Suzanne Lewis, and our chief financial officer, Julie Frank, will make presentations. Please come, ask questions, and express your views.

Best regards,

Charles Fort, PhD  
Superintendent of Schools

# Sample Meeting Announcement

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You can use an announcement to let people know about your meeting. Post it in strategic locations around the school and community. Make it attractive and personal.

## Look Who's Talking!

- Who:** Dr. Samuel Cain
- What:** PTA Monthly Meeting
- When:** November 2 at 7:30 p.m.
- Where:** School Dining Room
- Why:** Dr. Cain—author, professor, and parent—will speak about the value and importance of creating a healthy school nutrition environment and the link between nutrition and learning.

*Join us for this session that is guaranteed to be lively and thought provoking. Learn how you can become a part of Littlefield Elementary School's healthy school nutrition environment project and how you can help your child reach his or her highest potential.*

**REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED!**

# Sample Pitch Letter for Media

*(Promotes Component 4: Pleasant Eating Experiences)*

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The pitch letter summarizes the story idea you're offering a reporter. It explains why the story is newsworthy and why it would interest the audience. Remember, to get the reporter's attention, your letter must stand out.

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***Use official  
letterhead  
if possible***

Ms. Jane Burke  
Education Reporter  
WLMN-TV  
Freemont, NC 27423

Dear Ms. Burke:

What looks like a food court, sounds like a food court, and draws the same teenage crowd? The new Lofton High School dining room! Three months plus \$200,000 and a lot of remodeling equals one completely new dining experience for students. It is scheduled to premier the day that school opens, September 5.

Gone are the institutional green walls of yesterday and the rows and rows of rectangular tables. Now, students' art decorates the walls, and round dining tables encourage socializing. We expect at least a 50 percent increase in the number of nutritious lunches we serve each day.

Students will choose from one of five stations—each serving a variety of attractive, tasty, and nutritious foods. The foods being served are the ones that the students themselves, along with the faculty and staff, told us they wanted. And although it is fast and tastes as good as the food at the mall, it wins the nutrition contest hands down because it's made with new lower fat recipes and include lots of lean meats, fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.

We invite you and your crew to join us for lunch September 5 at the premier of the Lofton High School dining room. The school is located at 7350 Holmes Road in Freemont. I will call you in a couple of days to confirm the date and arrange for close-in parking.

Sincerely,

Lynn Pierce  
Director, Community Relations  
Freemont School District

# Sample Press Release

*(Promotes Component 4: Pleasant Eating Experiences)*

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A press release announces an event, performance, or other news or publicity item. It should get the reporter's attention and answer five questions: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?

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*Use official  
letterhead*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Lynn Pierce  
Director of Community Relations  
Freemont School District  
(225) 373-4848

## School Cafeteria Goes High Fashion

**FREEMONT, NC, AUGUST 3**—On September 5 students at Lofton High School may wonder if they are eating lunch at the school cafeteria or in the food court at the mall.

But if they look closely they'll see that they are still in school. The lunchroom at Lofton has been transformed—it's now the kind of place where students want to be. There is artwork designed by students, living plants, softer lighting, and music. And there are five "mini-restaurants" serving a variety of healthy foods each day.

The dining room remodeling is part of a larger mission at Lofton to encourage students to eat healthier. Common sense dictates—and research supports—that eating should be a pleasant experience. Food should taste good and look good. Students should have enough time to eat and they should eat in a pleasant setting. Ideas for the dining room's new look came from its customers—the students. A year ago, students were asked to fill out surveys on what they thought were ideal dining conditions.

"We didn't just ask the regulars," says Mary Ann Freed, Lofton's school food service director, "We asked those who went off campus for lunch why they didn't eat here." She predicts the changes will increase use of the dining room by 50 percent or more. This means the school will serve 1,300 students during the three lunch periods that start at 11:30 a.m. each school day. The school has an enrollment of 1,500 students and about 80 faculty and staff.

Freed emphasized the difference between the food prepared at school and most fast food: "We will offer a variety of healthy choices including lean meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products," she said. "Through careful planning and better ingredients, we are meeting and going beyond Federal guidelines for nutritional content and it still tastes good."

Surrounded by brightly colored walls and neon signs are five serving stations offering Asian, Mexican, Italian, and other choices each day. No more rails and sliding trays. No more rows of long rectangular tables. The dining room is dotted with large round tables to encourage students to socialize with friends.

The \$200,000 project did not allow for carpeting. But hanging between the numerous skylights are cubes of sound-absorbing material, and the walls have been designed to soften the noise of lunchtime and enhance the eating experience.

**NOTE TO EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS:** If you want to cover the cafeteria's grand opening, call as soon as possible so we can arrange close-in parking. Please come early for interviews and pictures. And please stay for lunch as our guests.

# Sample Feature Article 1

*(Promotes Component 1: A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity)*

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A feature article gives special attention to an issue you want to spotlight. It can have a news or human-interest angle and generally focuses on real people, events, or activities related to the issue.

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*Use official  
letterhead*

For more information, contact:  
Stuart Rose  
(413) 272-6620

## Breakfast Helps Kids Learn and Behave Better

**C**an your child perform better in school? Maybe your child is like “Terry.” Typical of many 8-year-olds, Terry leaves just enough time in the morning to get dressed and get to school. Sorry Mom, no time for breakfast! By midmorning, Terry is having a hard time concentrating on tasks and is getting disruptive. He may be complaining of a headache or stomachache. The result? Terry has low test scores and low grades. There have been many children like Terry at Rhodes Elementary School. But last year, things changed. Rhodes started offering free breakfast to all students, and they saw both behavior and learning change significantly.

The teachers, administrators, and foodservice personnel at Rhodes decided last fall to conduct a simple experiment since the school was offering a free breakfast to every child. They wanted some data to prove what they see every day—children who don’t eat breakfast don’t learn as well as those who do. So they have kept logs on the children’s test scores and completed behavior assessments in 10 classes for the past 6 months. The children behaved better, were more attentive—and test scores went up. And what they’ve found is supported by more organized, scientific studies.

A study by Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital analyzed universal free breakfast programs in Philadelphia and Baltimore. They found that students who eat breakfast at school showed significant improvement in math, punctuality, and attendance.

“It just makes sense,” says Rhodes second grade teacher Mary Forbes. “When children are hungry or have headaches, they can’t concentrate as well.”

Some at Rhodes worried that breakfast would cut into valuable classroom time. Teachers who tried it now count school breakfast as a vital part of the educational day. School foodservice staff work closely with teachers on programs that fit into the day’s schedule and reinforce the curriculum by stressing the importance of nutrition.

Arleen Goode, Rhodes’ school foodservice manager, said, “the teamwork between the teachers and food service staff is the key to our success. The children see that all of the adults at school are encouraging them to get the benefits of breakfast.”

An evaluation of a universal breakfast pilot program in six Minnesota elementary schools found that when all students eat a school breakfast, learning and achievement scores increased.

*continued on next page*

# Sample Feature Article 1

*(Promotes Component 1: A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity)*

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*Continued from  
previous page*

For more information, contact:  
Stuart Rose  
(413) 272-6620

According to teachers in those schools, students were more energetic at the start of the day and complaints about mid-morning hunger noticeably decreased. Administrators say half as many children are sent to the principal's office—and the nurse's office—since the breakfast program started.

Proponents of universal school breakfast say that if all children eat breakfast at school it removes the stigma of subsidized meal programs. School breakfast programs, they say, do not benefit only low-income children.

Fewer than 70 percent of the schools in Lakewood school system offer students breakfast. And USDA says 12 percent of students eat no breakfast—at school or at home—and 39 percent do not eat a substantial breakfast.

Parents like school breakfast programs because they are more consistent with their children's natural sleeping and eating routines. When children first get up they are sleepy and don't really want to eat right away. "It really relieves stress in the mornings when my child doesn't have to eat breakfast so early," says parent Debbie Bartlett. If a school does not offer breakfast, Rhodes school foodservice manager Arleen Goode recommends that parents work to get a school breakfast program started.



# Sample Feature Article 2

*(Promotes Component 2: Quality School Meals)*

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*Use official  
letterhead*

For more information, contact  
Lucy Brentano  
(312) 880-4343

## Farrish Schools Make Meals Kids LIKE

**S**tudents in the Farrish School District are getting a treat this year—healthy food choices that are fast becoming favorites. School lunches featuring rice bowls, wraps, gourmet tacos, and chocolate cake are on the menu in schools throughout the district. How did school foodservice staff create these menus? By asking their customers—the students—what they want!

“We have made major changes in our school lunch program and it has really paid off for us,” said Dr. Louise Murray, district superintendent. “Students enjoy these meals and more of them stay on campus at lunch time which helps ensure their safety.”

Farrish is among school districts across the country that are trying to meet national nutrition standards in innovative ways that are appealing to their students. They are creating healthy meal choices that are tasty, attractive, and reflect the students’ cultural preferences.

Since 1996, all U.S. schools participating in the National School Lunch Program must comply with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans—scientifically-based nutrition advice that stresses modifying consumption of fat, sugar, and sodium for people more than two years old.

Farrish foodservice staff not only asked students for menu ideas, they also borrowed some nutritious—and popular—ideas from many other schools. And Farrish students gave these a thumbs up:

“Variety bars” featuring eight to ten fresh fruits and vegetables that students choose themselves. (Oregon)

Pizza from scratch with whole-wheat crusts and low-fat cheese. And, for dessert? juice bars. (Mount Diablo schools in Concord, California)

Daily pasta bar with a different noodle-and-sauce dish each day. (Southwestern High School in Hanover, Pennsylvania)

“Unhealthy eating habits tend to be established early in life,” said Murray. “And at a time when 68 percent of 6- to 17-year-olds eat too much saturated fat and only two percent of school children meet all the dietary recommendations, our school lunchrooms are meeting the challenge of providing healthier meals that students want to eat.”

# Sample Feature Article 3

*(Promotes Component 5: Nutrition Education)*

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*Use official  
letterhead*

For more information, contact:  
Rodney Moore  
(323) 770-4244

## Forest Glen Helps Kids Make the Nutrition Connection

**W**hen Donna Barnes works on colors with her kindergarten class at Forest Glen Elementary School, she brings in a fruit basket. What better example for red than an apple? Orange for an orange? Or yellow for a banana? And, while she teaches her class about colors, she also teaches a valuable lesson about good nutrition. She lets the young students know it is important for them to eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day.

Barnes is doing what many of her counterparts are doing in classrooms all over town—they're teaching nutrition along with regular classroom subjects and making it fun for students.

Knowing that children form eating habits early in life, administrators and teachers want to positively influence students' eating behaviors starting in kindergarten.

Nutrition education is moving into classrooms throughout the Ramsey Unified School District. Teachers are encouraging students to look into the social and cultural influences on the foods they choose to eat. "Lessons are much more effective when they have some personal meaning for students," says Barnes.

Everyone at Forest Glen is working together to connect nutrition education from the dining room to the classroom. In social studies students learn about food from different countries. Food also has an interesting place in history and science classes. And in math, students practice nutrient calculations to check their own diets.

Dr. Delroy Brownell, Superintendent of Ramsey schools, says teachers need preparation to adequately teach nutrition skills. "They should not be expected to simply open a textbook and begin shaping student behavior," he says.

A national survey found that in 1992-1994, only 14 percent of secondary school health education teachers had in-service nutrition education training. And less than half of them taught students about how to follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, with which all U.S. schools enrolled in the National School Lunch Program must comply.

At Forest Glen, nutrition education doesn't stop at the school door either. Students are encouraged to help with family menu planning, food shopping, and meal preparation.

# Sample Letter to the Editor

## *(Promotes Component 1: A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity)*

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Each fall, many local newspapers run “back-to-school” stories. The following sample letter to the editor is written in response to such a hypothetical article. A parent, foodservice director, school administrator, community leader, or any other supporter of your message can sign this kind of letter. It should focus on one or more of the components of a healthy school nutrition environment.

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***Use official  
letterhead***

Roland R. Kelly, Editor  
Daleview Journal  
237 Burton Avenue  
Fair Lakes, NJ 32505

Dear Mr. Kelly:

This letter is in response to your article headlined “Let’s Keep Our Focus on the Classroom” that ran on August 5. As the school year begins, I would like to stress the importance of linking the classroom to the school dining room and the gymnasium.

There is no question that food and fitness affect how children learn. Yet we have seen an alarming trend away from physical education requirements in public schools across the country. We are becoming a sedentary people—at home and at work, as well as at school. After we drive them home from school, our kids watch television and use computers. And fewer schools require them to be physically active during the day. Only one state requires students in grades K-12 to take physical education every day.

Lack of exercise, combined with a diet too high in fat and too low in fruits and vegetables, has caused obesity among the young to skyrocket. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled since 1970—5.3 million children are now seriously overweight. Obesity is associated with a variety of risk factors for heart disease as well as cancer and other diseases. There has been a dramatic increase of children with Type 2 diabetes, which used to be called adult-onset diabetes. This, too, is linked to diet. The total cost of diseases associated with poor eating habits has been estimated at almost \$71 billion per year.

To address these problems, we need to create environments where healthy lifestyles are as easy to adopt as unhealthy ones. The place to start is in our schools, which are responsible for introducing our children to knowledge and behaviors that will help them today and throughout their lives. In a healthy school environment, the dining room and gymnasium—as well as the classroom—teach important lessons for a healthy and productive life.

Sincerely,

Frank Harkin  
Coach, Sunrise High School  
2370 Pleasant Street 32507  
Newton Grove, NJ  
(327) 447-9210

# Sample Op-Ed Piece

## *(Promotes Component 3: Other Healthy Food Options)*

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Opposite-Editorial pieces run opposite a newspaper's editorial page and are clearly labeled opinion pieces. You can use one to try to shape public opinion—or urge the public to take action—on your issue.

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### Taking Issue With Pop Culture

Here's a question for *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Given these options, a child will choose: A. Milk B. Water C. Natural Fruit Juice or D. Soda Pop. If you said D you are probably either a parent or work in a school.

Vending machines filled with sodas and snacks are now as common in school buildings as lockers filled with textbooks. But unlike lockers, they earn their keep. Vending machines have taken on a new function in local schools—paying for thousands of dollars worth of student/administrative activities or equipment.

Right now Jackson School District is considering a district-wide exclusive contract with Bubbling Beverages, Inc. Through exclusive contracts with soft drink suppliers, schools here and across the country are taking in thousands, and in some cases tens of thousands, of dollars in exchange for providing a captive audience to whom they market their products. There is no doubt the schools need the money. They can turn it into books, computer labs, high-tech scoreboards, field trips, or proms.

But, at what cost? Don't these contracts undermine our efforts to teach students to make healthier food choices?

Soda is not commonly viewed as a healthy food. USDA defines it as having “minimal nutritional value.” And it may even have negative health consequences if children load up on its empty calories and caffeine instead of eating nutritious meals. At a time when an alarming number of children are overweight and out of shape, the last thing they need is easy access to sodas.

Childhood obesity has become a national epidemic according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years—5.3 million U.S. children are now seriously overweight.

Obesity in the young is linked to elevated blood cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, psychological stress, and increased adult mortality.

Health advocates say that 20 years ago, teens drank almost twice as much milk as soda. Today the numbers are switched. And doctors say soda has been pushing milk out of teenage diets and putting girls at risk of osteoporosis. Some in the medical community now consider osteoporosis a pediatric disease because it begins early but doesn't show up until later in life.

There is compelling evidence that poor nutrition affects behavior, school performance, and overall cognitive development. Studies show that chronically undernourished children score lower on standardized achievement tests, are more likely to be sick, miss school, and fall behind in class. They also are found to be more irritable, have more difficulty concentrating, and have low levels of energy.

*continued on next page*

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The two critical places to effect behavior change are at home and at school. In both places we should practice what we preach. Students should be offered a wide variety of healthy foods—both inside and outside the cafeteria.

When soda machines are all over our school campuses, kids will drink more soda. We need to put more effort into marketing milk, juice, or water and see what kinds of results we get. Parents, teachers, and the community must take action now. Contact your School Board member and let him or her know that you oppose the proposed exclusive soft drink contract. We can't let profit considerations distract us from our goal—healthy, well-educated children.

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