

What PTAs Can Do to Promote Healthy Schools



Why Promote School Wellness?

Our country has educated parents and students on the detrimental effects of smoking on child and adult health. Now it is imperative that we do the same to address US eating and physical activity habits - habits that are contributing to the rise in obesity and health-related problems of millions of America's children.

- Over the past 20 years, the prevalence of childhood obesity has risen to epidemic proportions. Today, 1 in 3 kids (33.6%) is at an unhealthy weight. 16.5% of kids are overweight and 17.1% are obese.
- Being overweight increases a child's risk of health-related problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. Additionally, it can have a detrimental effect on a child's academic performance, emotional health, and self-esteem.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates a third of children born in 2000 will develop diabetes unless serious nutrition and exercise changes are made.
- In order to combat our national childhood obesity epidemic, we need to get kids moving more and eating better!

Tips to Improve School Health

1. **Join your school's wellness team** to find out what your school can do to further support student nutrition, physical activity, and wellness.
2. **Assess your school's health.** Make sure you know how healthy your school's environment is and what needs to be improved. Use the "How Does Your School Rate" assessment tool in the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit to guide your group.
3. **Advocate for physical education, physical activity, and recess.** Talk to the principal and other school leaders about the importance of incorporating at least 30 minutes (elementary) or 45 minutes (middle and high school) of PE run by accredited professional instructors into every school day. Talk about the importance of integrating physical activity into the curriculum, having adequate recess time, and promoting physically active play during recess.
4. **Advocate for nutrition education and healthy food and beverage offerings** at all school functions and events, in vending machines, in the school store, and in classrooms.

PTAs, parents, and schools are key in helping achieve this goal!

5. **Find creative ways to make PTA fundraising activities active:** Organize a walk-a-thon or jump rope-a-thon, sell services like raking leaves and shoveling snow. See the "Healthy School Fundraisers" handout in the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit.
6. **Take a look at your school's playgrounds and athletic facilities.** Test the equipment. Does your school do a good job of providing students with an environment that promotes physical activity?
7. **Raise funds** for physical education and playground equipment.
8. **Provide pedometers** for a "steps" contest - give an award to the parent, teacher, student and staff member who takes the most steps in a given month.
9. **Bring teachers, parents and students together** in an after-school walking, biking, running or skating club.
10. **Encourage parents to volunteer** to walk or bike groups of students to school on a rotating basis. For more information go to www.fcgov.org/saferoutes/schoolpool.php.

Did You Know?

- Despite expert recommendations that kids get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, less than 25% of kids get at least 30 minutes of any type of daily physical activity.
- Even though experts recommend that all schools provide a quality daily PE program for all students, only 6% to 8% of schools nationally (depending on grade level) actually do so.
- **Colorado elementary students, on average, have PE only one time a week** (about 30 minutes vs the recommended 150 minutes per week). Secondary students are required to take only one semester of PE in middle and high school – a far cry from the recommended 225 minutes per week all year long.
- Many elementary schools have reduced or cut out recess. Only 4% of states require recess and only 22% of states recommend that elementary schools provide students with regular recess.
- Interestingly, 77% of parents support requiring daily PE that lasts at least 48 minutes for all kids, and 62% think their child's school is doing an "excellent" or "good" job in this area.
- Less than 25% of adolescents eat enough fruits and vegetables each day.
- 56 to 85% of children in school drink at least 1 soft drink daily.
- American children average nearly 3 hours of TV per day.



Tips to Improve School Health (cont'd)

11. **Help educate parents** about the importance of physical education, physical activity, healthy eating, and provide community physical activity resources. Use the handouts provided in the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit.
12. **Partner with local organizations** to provide after-school activities in your school's athletic facilities.
13. **Eat with the kids.** Go in one day and join kids at lunch (ask your school for permission first). Pack a healthy lunch or eat what the kids eat. Find out what choices are available at your school, and what they taste like. What do kids pick from the menus? How long do they have to wait in line? How much time do they have to eat? Do they have recess before lunch?
14. **Plan group activities** for your PTA that involves fitness. Try a walking meeting with the principal.
15. **Help make school dining facilities appealing to students.** Take a look at your cafeteria. Is it a nice place to eat? Ask your kids what they think of the room. Is it dark or sunny? Are the seats comfortable? If the walls are drab, ask your school's art teachers to have students create artwork (featuring healthy foods) for the walls. Or ask your principal for permission to have a PTA painting party, and paint murals on the walls.
16. **Make sure your school participates** in the National School Meal Programs – including breakfast, lunch, and after school snack programs. If your school does not participate in these programs, encourage school leaders to do so.
17. **Meet with the food service staff** at your school and learn about their daily challenges in preparing healthy meals and their suggestions for healthy improvements.
18. **Talk to students about the food at school.** Listen to kids' opinions about the time they eat lunch, whether they are rushed, what the food is like, and what they would like to see changed. It's important to get students' support for healthy changes in the school environment.
19. **Armed with all the information you have gathered, speak up about what changes are needed.** Enlist the help and support of your principal, the physical education teacher, the school food service staff, other teachers, and parents for making improvements in your school's nutrition, physical education, and physical activity environment. With the strength of the PTA, you can make a big difference and change your school for the better!

Source: National Parent Teacher Association (www.pta.org)

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