

healthy learning News

SUPERINTENDENT
SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD

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A healthy school environment is important to the well-being, development and achievement of students. School leaders have the potential to help improve children's food choices and activity levels by presenting opportunities to encourage and practice healthy habits. The following school districts are implementing innovative programs, policies and practices that are creating healthier school environments for students and staff.

Making Strategic Connections to Improve Schools and Communities

The health of our nation's school children is on the minds of millions of Americans, including school district leaders. While the message of "eat right and exercise regularly" has been heard for decades, this message, for far too many, is insufficient on its own. There is a need to encourage programs, policies and multi-level collaborations that address not just what we eat, but how we live. Removing barriers to healthy eating and active living and making it easier for families to make healthy choices are key elements of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's initiative to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.

Everyone — families, school districts and elected officials from city, state and national levels — has a role to play in promoting healthy behaviors, implementing programs and enacting policies that create environments that facilitate good nutrition and regular physical activity.

The two school districts featured in this issue of *Healthy Learning News* — Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, Ky.) and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools (Savannah, Ga.) — have taken this issue to heart and are addressing student nutrition and physical activity in their schools. Each school district understands its role in promoting healthy communities and values

collaboration with other parties to increase its ability to make a positive difference in the lives of children. That's why these schools are working with families, communities and state and national stakeholders to coordinate and amplify their efforts.

As you read these two district profiles, you will note intentional connections between state and community actions, linkages of families in meaningful ways as advocates and school districts that make healthy foods accessible and physical activity fun. ♦

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The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across America and in many other countries.

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Promoting Health Throughout the District and State

Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Ky.

Superintendent: Stephen Daeschner • Total number of schools: 152
Total number of students: 98,000 • Free and reduced lunch: 56%

Health Promotion Schools of Excellence

The Health Promotion Schools of Excellence (HPSE) program was created in 1991 to help reduce health risks among children in Jefferson County, Ky. Formed from a pre-existing county subcommittee that included members of the local health department, local medical society, Jefferson County Public Schools and other community stakeholders, the HPSE team created a program based on the goals of Healthy People 2000 (now Healthy People 2010). Using outcome-based goals, the program was implemented in 1992 in 15 schools within the district. Now in its 15th year, the program serves over 59 schools, including both public and private schools. Schools apply to become HPSE schools and are selected by a committee each spring. Program sponsors include national organizations such as the American Heart Association and Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield, as well as local organizations such as the Greater Louisville Medical Society, the Louisville Metro Health Department and local hospitals.

Participating schools are required to meet certain benchmarks, including the completion of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention School Health Index, to have an on-site coordinator who manages the activities of HPSE within the building, and to host a school site committee. The application requires the design of a school-based action plan that includes programs and activities to increase health knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior related to cardiovascular disease, cancer prevention and early detection, injury prevention and physical fitness. Goals of the program include reaching more children within the Jefferson County Public School system and serving as a model for statewide and nationwide change. An important feature of the program is that each school can choose activities, programs and policies that fit its unique needs and the community it serves. Some of the HPSE programs complement other opportunities in the school system, including Family Resource Centers, which were established as a component of the historic Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. The HPSE program has served as a model for schools in 27 districts in Kentucky and one in Oklahoma. The Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky gave the HPSE their top award as a "Model That Works."

Making Movement Fun – HPSE in Action

Each school that participates in HPSE creates programs to engage students and staff, and involve the larger community when possible. Programs are broad and focus on a range of activities, including physical activity, after-school activities, nutrition, or community involvement. Many schools also include a staff wellness component.

For example, some programs at HPSE schools include after-school cross country teams and golf programs, food-tasting assemblies, and family fitness nights. An exceptionally creative example is the archery program operated by the Wilkerson Elementary School. The program is available to students during gym classes and during after-school hours. Before the students can use the equipment — purchased with grant money — they are given safety lessons and thorough instructions on proper use of the archery equipment. For students who may not excel at team or contact sports, archery may be an enjoyable alternative. Teachers also encourage students to participate in archery because it requires concentration and focus. Because of its novelty, the archery program is one of the most

requested after-school programs offered at Wilkerson.

"Game Bikes in Action" is a wildly popular program with the students at Gutermuth Elementary School because it incorporates something that so many students love to play with — video games. The games offered at Gutermuth focus on bike or car racing and are connected to stationary bicycles that students ride. In order to make the bike or car in the video game move, the student must pedal the "game bike." These game bikes are incorporated into physical education classes in the school and are a hit with girls and boys in all grades.

The physical education teacher and the local PTA at Bates Elementary School worked together to purchase equipment to set up physical activity stations around the outdoor walking track behind the school. Students wear pedometers while using stations that focus on strength building and while walking on the track during recess and physical education classes. Fortunately, many stations can be adapted for small children or students with special needs.

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Healthy Minds and Bodies — School Strategies to Foster Mental Health and Emotional Development

Efforts to promote student wellness and create a healthy learning environment can include a variety of elements. A comprehensive program may even go beyond offering healthy foods at an after-school program and providing opportunities for physical activity. For example, West Chatham Middle School, in Savannah, Ga., has a student advisory program now in its second year. Meetings are held twice a month and are designed to help students connect with caring staff

in the school. The groups, which are moderated by school district staff, focus on bolstering students' self-esteem, respect for fellow students and respect for teachers and other authority figures. The groups also help students brainstorm strategies on how to manage and deflect peer pressure. Should questions or problems arise for students, they will already have a connection with staff members and know they have an advocate that they can trust to help them.

The HPSE program at the Jefferson County School District focuses on providing counseling and addressing the psychological and social issues that students face. Several of the Jefferson County middle and high schools that participate in the HPSE program tackle truancy, violence prevention and other character-development education programs.

Realizing that healthy students are healthy in both body and mind is an important step toward creating a school community where all children can reach their potential. ♦

Making the Most of Resources — National, State & Local

Both school districts highlighted in this issue of *Healthy Learning News* have utilized resources and made connections at the national, state and local levels to enhance their districts' programs and resources offered to students and families. The leadership of both districts realized that through strategic partnerships and collaborations, and the use of national and state tools and resources, they could make positive and sustainable changes for the benefit of their respective communities.

The following are examples of national, state and local resources used by Savannah-Chatham Public County Schools and Jefferson County Public Schools.

NATIONAL — Healthy People 2000 and 2010; Youth Risk Behavior Survey; School Health Index; Local Wellness Policy Guidelines

STATE — State of Kentucky Family Resource Centers; Georgia Coalition for Physical Activity and Nutrition; Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

LOCAL — Savannah-Chatham Youth Futures Authority; collaborations between the school district and the city; local health departments, hospitals and medical society

You too can find resources, agencies and tools at the local, state and national levels to help your district create a healthier school environment. ♦

Community Connections Make the Grade

Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools, Savannah, Ga.

Superintendent: Thomas Lockamy • Total number of schools: 65

Total number of students: 33,600 • Free and reduced lunch: 60%

Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools (Savannah, Ga.) have developed many ways to collaborate with organizations outside of the school district. The longest running and most successful collaboration is with the county health department. Since 1934, the county health department has assigned public health nurses to school buildings. Today, nurses are hired by the Board of Education and are in every school building. These nurses provide dental, hearing and vision screenings, as well as immunizations.

Nurses promote the concepts of wellness and healthy living to the students. Administration recognizes

that the school nurses are vital to the district and have an impact on student success. Healthy students are more likely to do well in school, and having a school nurse in every building allows them access to professional healthcare should the need arise. Nurses are represented on the district's wellness team, which helped develop and pass their local wellness policy in April 2006. The wellness team expanded in May 2006 and is currently charged with creating a healthy school environment across the district.

City, County and Community Collaboration

By constructing a broader local wellness policy that unifies the

goals and initiatives of the city of Savannah and Chatham County, Savannah-Chatham Public Schools are collaborating to help stem local problems relating to childhood obesity. City and school district personnel participated in a two-day meeting held in January 2007 that was hosted by the American Association of School Administrators and the National League of Cities. The meeting focused on building and fostering city/school district teams with the intent of moving local wellness policies forward. The district has also been selected to participate in an on-going technical assistance initiative with the city of Savannah that focuses on

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For more information on additional AASA efforts and resources addressing healthy eating and active living in schools, or if you are interested in sharing your own district's success story, contact Rebecca Roberts, project director, at rroberts@aasa.org.

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Outcomes of HPSE

The HPSE program requires participating schools to assess student progress each year to measure the effectiveness of the initiatives. The assessments include the School Health Education Survey and the Healthy Kids Survey (for 4th and 5th graders), the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (for middle and high school students) and the Physical Best, which measures knowledge and skills in physical education and health

related courses in all grades. The Physical Best assessment pre-tests students in the fall, with a follow-up post-test at the end of the school year in the spring. Assessments include a timed walk/run and sit-ups, sit-n-reach exercises (to measure flexibility) and pull-ups, also timed. Many participating students increase the number of sit-ups they can perform and/or improve their performance on the walk or run. Between 2004 and 2005, the

participating HPSE schools also saw increases in the number of vegetables and fruits students ate, the amount of time spent in physical activity outside of PE class and increased knowledge about healthy habits and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. ♦

Community Connections Make the Grade –

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wellness policy collaboration. In addition, many county and city facilities are shared with the school district in an effort to encourage activity within the community. The efforts are made stronger by the direct involvement of the superintendent, Thomas Lockamy, and the Mayor of Savannah, Otis Johnson. By increasing the number of community stakeholders involved, momentum to make physical activity and healthy nutrition choices a regular part of Savannah residents' lives is growing. Increasing the number of community stakeholders working on this topic and finding ways to work together are next steps for the school district and city team. ♦

801 North Quincy Street, Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22203

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