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**The Food Trust, Philadelphia, Pa.**

**Comprehensive School Nutrition Policy  
for the School District of Philadelphia**

**June 2001**

**Comprehensive School Nutrition Policy Task Force**

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<http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps1/CERU/Articles/CERU-0106-35-OWI.doc>

See appendices at [www.philanuted.net](http://www.philanuted.net) under School Nutrition Policy

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Healthy eating patterns in childhood and adolescence promote optimal childhood health, growth and intellectual development; prevent immediate health problems, such as childhood obesity, non-insulin dependent diabetes, elevated serum cholesterol, iron deficiency anemia, eating disorders, dental caries; and may prevent long-term health problems, such as coronary heart disease, cancer, and stroke, adult obesity, hypertension and osteoporosis<sup>1</sup>.

A comprehensive school nutrition policy for the School District of Philadelphia can help children and adolescents attain full educational potential and good health by providing them with the skills, social support, and environmental reinforcement they need to adopt long-term, healthy eating behaviors.

A coordinated school nutrition policy provides the framework for ensuring that students attending schools in Philadelphia receive nutrition education messages that are reinforced throughout the school environment.

**I. Nutrition Education**

- Goal: to implement nutrition education from preschool through secondary school in all Philadelphia schools.

Nutrition education shall be part of a comprehensive integrative, interdisciplinary nutrition education curriculum that focuses on understanding the relationship between personal behavior, individual health and the environmental impact of food choices. This integrative, interdisciplinary approach is important to nutrition education because:

- • unhealthy eating behaviors may be interrelated with other health risk factors (e.g. cigarette smoking, sedentary lifestyle and substance abuse) See Appendix I.
- • nutrition education shares many of the key goals of other health education content areas (e.g., raising the value placed on health, taking responsibility for one's health, and increasing confidence in one's ability to make health-enhancing behavioral changes), and
- • nutrition education is an integral component of food system education, incorporating information on where food comes from, how it is grown and how food production affects our environment.

Linking nutrition and physical activity is particularly important because of the rising proportion of overweight youths in Philadelphia. Nutrition education lessons shall stress the importance of combining regular physical activity with sound nutrition as part of an overall healthy lifestyle. Physical education classes, in turn, shall include guidance in food selection.

Students who receive more lessons on nutrition have been shown to experience more positive behavioral changes than students with fewer lessons. To achieve stable, positive changes in students' eating behaviors, 50 hours per year of nutrition education shall be allocated for nutrition education lessons. To maximize classroom time, nutrition education shall be integrated into the lesson plans of other school subjects like math, reading, science, history, social studies and foreign languages. For example, math lessons could analyze nutrient intake or reading lessons could feature texts on nutrition. By embedding information on nutrition in other courses, the goals of nutrition are reinforced. Nutrition education shall also be part of a sequential nutrition education curriculum within a comprehensive school health education curriculum.

There is great value to having organizations and agencies partner with schools to offer nutrition education curricula, materials and support. The PA Department of Education's (DOE) Child and Adult Care Food Program provides funding for food used for educational purposes. DOE also has grade-appropriate nutrition education curriculum. Penn State University's PA Nutrition Education Plan (NEP) provides funding for nutrition education in schools. The Food Services Division of the School District of Philadelphia provides staff and nutrition education materials for schools. Local colleges and universities also have resources to support nutrition education in the schools. Recommended curriculum and contact information are shown in Appendix II. Funding information is shown in Appendix III. Local organizations that can assist in conducting nutrition education are listed in Appendix IV.

Philadelphia schools shall also conduct a campaign to raise teacher's awareness concerning the importance of integrating nutrition education into their classroom lessons, the availability of nutrition education curriculum, how to access these materials and opportunities for nutrition education training. Funding for professional development and nutrition education materials is described in Appendix III.

## II. Food Service

Goal: To coordinate school food service with school nutrition policy to reinforce messages about healthy eating and to insure that foods offered at Philadelphia schools promote good nutrition.

Philadelphia schools provide a place for students to learn about and practice healthy eating. Foods sold in school shall be healthy. They shall also be coordinated with nutrition education to allow students to apply critical thinking skills to food choices. The Division of Food Services in coordination with local school food service personnel will visit classrooms and explain how all foods sold in the schools meet the standards of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These activities will include:

- • inviting classes to visit the cafeteria kitchen and learn how to prepare healthy foods,
- • offering foods that reinforce nutrition education lessons,
- • conducting promotional campaigns to encourage healthy eating including posters and fliers on nutrition; and
- • displaying nutrition information about available foods and give students opportunities to practice food analysis and selection skills learned in the classrooms,
- • establishing nutrition advisory councils in schools comprised of administrators, teachers, food service personnel, students and parents.

In addition, classroom teaching can complement the goals of the school food service. For example, teachers can help food service managers by teaching students about the importance of nutritious school meals and getting feedback from students on new menu items developed to meet the goals set by USDA's School Meals Initiatives for Healthy Children.

To ensure consistent messages from the school, the Division of School Food Services, in coordination with local school food service personnel shall work closely with those responsible for other components of the interdisciplinary nutrition education curriculum. For example, the personnel will:

- • help develop and implement school policies that make healthful foods available in the cafeteria, vending machines and through school fund-raisers;
- • educate parents about the value of school meals and the importance of encouraging their children to make healthy food choices on the way to and from school and during the school day;
- • help schools access and assess community public health and nutrition services (Appendix V); and

- • keep classroom teachers, physical education teachers, coaches, counselors, healthy-service providers, and other staff informed about the importance of healthy foods at school.

Food and beverages sold or served on school grounds of Philadelphia schools shall be consistent with the Recommended Dietary Allowances and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and contribute to the development of lifelong, healthy eating habits. All foods served on school grounds shall be approved by the Division of School Food Services or the local school, in compliance with the dietary guidelines specified in this policy. The following limitations on foods sold or served at schools include:

- • no candy or soft drinks will be sold or served during the school day.
- • no foods containing 40 percent or more sugar by weight will be sold or served.
- • any juice or juice product sold or served must contain a minimum of 20 percent real juice.
- • no beverage containing 10 mg of caffeine or more will be sold or served.
- • no food containing more than 8 grams of fat per one ounce servings will be sold or served..

### **III. Training**

Goal: To provide school staff in Philadelphia schools, involved in nutrition education and in supporting a healthy school environment, with adequate pre-service and ongoing in-service training that focuses on strategies for behavioral change.

Training in nutrition and health education can increase the extent to which Philadelphia teachers, nurses, coaches and other school staff implement a curriculum and promote healthy eating practices. All elementary school teachers as well as secondary teachers in disciplines such as family and consumer sciences, language arts, physical education, math, social studies and science shall receive nutrition education training. The PA Nutrition Education Plan (NEP) can provide funding for training teachers in nutrition education.

Training shall address content, teaching strategies and the messages that are communicated through the school environment. Because classroom teachers often need more help with innovative nutrition teaching techniques than with content, training shall focus on giving teachers the skills they need to use non-lecture, active learning methods. Nurses, coaches and other school staff also play an important role in promoting healthy eating and shall participate in training to learn new ways to identify nutrition problems and seek resources to address these problems.

Teachers, nurses, coaches and other school staff in Philadelphia schools shall understand the importance of fully implementing the selected curriculum and this nutrition policy and become familiar with its underlying theory and concepts. Training shall also help

school staff assess and improve their own eating practices and make them aware of the behavioral messages they give as role models.

A master's instructor's program shall be developed, modeled after the successful food service program to train the trainers. Master instructor's shall be trained to teach nutrition in the classroom and to promote healthy eating in the schools. Linkages shall also be made between the Mayor's health promotion effort and school promotional efforts by creating an award to support excellence in nutrition education using outside funding.

Continuing education activities in nutrition education shall be offered to food service personnel through the PA Department of Education and the Division of School Food Services of the School District of Philadelphia so school staff can reinforce principles of healthy eating through the school meal program and help shape the school's nutrition policy. Administrative support is also critical to implementing comprehensive school nutrition policy. Training for school administrators can help gain their support for nutrition education and school nutrition policy. Health promotion services for all school staff can positively affect their eating behaviors and their effectiveness in teaching healthy eating behaviors.

#### **IV. Family and Community Involvement**

Goal: To involve family members and the community in supporting and reinforcing nutrition education and the promotion of healthy eating at all schools in Philadelphia.

The attitudes and behaviors of parents and caretakers directly influence children's and adolescents' choice of foods. Parents control most of the food choices available at home, so changing parents' eating behaviors may be one of the most effective ways to change their children's eating behaviors. Involving parents in a nutrition education curriculum and changes in the school nutrition environment at the elementary school level can enhance the eating behaviors of both the students and the parents. For older youths, self-assessment and peer educators might be more influential than parent involvement.

To involve parents and other family members in promoting healthy eating, individuals responsible for community and family involvement and school health councils can:

- • work with home and school associations to implement nutrition policies, including raising funds using health foods.
- • provide cafeteria menus and nutrition information on nutritional meals and snacks.
- • parents and students should work together to identify stores in their communities where students can purchase healthy snacks on the way to and from school (Appendix VI).
- • work with Family Resource Network Coordinators and Parent Teacher Organizations to implement healthy eating policies.

- • Family resource networks and other school liaisons work with local organizations and agencies who provide nutrition education to youth (Appendix VII).
- • use nutrition education materials for literacy projects.
- • use healthy eating initiatives to meet service learning requirements.
- • offer nutrition education workshops and screening services, and
- • offer nutrition education activities that students can share with their families, such as reading and interpreting food labels, reading nutrition-related newsletters, and preparing healthy recipes.

Through school health advisory councils or through direct contact with community organizations, schools can engage community resources and services to respond to the nutritional needs of students. Philadelphia schools can also participate in community-based nutrition education campaigns sponsored by public health agencies or voluntary organizations. Students are most likely to adopt healthy eating behaviors if they receive consistent messages through multiple channels (e.g., home, school, community, and the media) and from multiple sources (e.g., parents, peers, teachers, health professional and the media).

## **V. Program Evaluation**

Goal: To regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the school nutrition policy in promoting healthy eating and change the program as appropriate to increase its effectiveness.

The evaluation component shall consist of:

- • a needs assessment to provide a baseline on each element of the nutrition policy,
- • a process evaluation to provide information on the extent to which the policy is being implemented, and
- • a policy analysis to examine the cost effectiveness of implementing the nutrition policy.

A school nutrition policy committee should regularly review the effectiveness of the school nutrition program. All groups affected by the program shall have the opportunity to provide input. Assessment of nutrition programs and policies should include whether:

- • the comprehensive school nutrition policy is implemented as written,
- • the nutrition education is provided in all grades through an interdisciplinary, integrated curriculum,

- • teachers deliver nutrition education through developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, fun, participatory activities,
- • teachers and school food service work together to provide a consistent message about healthy eating,
- • school food sales support healthy eating behaviors,
- • teachers have received curriculum-specific training, and
- • families and community organizations are involved in promoting healthy eating at school and in the community.

Schools and community members should participate in the assessment to evaluate the success of implementing the policy by looking at key variables. Schools and policymakers can work with evaluation specialists at universities, the school district or the PA Department of Education or Health to identify methods and materials for evaluating the effectiveness of their programs. Valid evaluations can increase parent and community support for school programs, help schools reward teachers for exceptional work, and support grant applications for enhancing school nutrition initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

To insure a healthy future for our children, school-based nutrition programs must become a national and local priority. These programs should be part of comprehensive school nutrition programs and reach students from preschool through secondary school. School leaders, community leaders, and parents must commit to implementing and sustaining nutrition education programs within the schools. An effective policy includes the involvement of all interested parties. Such support is crucial to promoting healthy eating behaviors.

## Appendix \_\_

Behaviorally based education encourages specific healthy eating behaviors (e.g. eating less fat and sodium, and eating more fruits and vegetables).

All nutrition education shall be active and participatory. Students are more likely to adopt healthy eating behaviors when they learn about behaviors through fun, participatory activities rather than through lectures:

Lessons emphasize the positive, appealing aspects of healthy eating patterns rather than the negative consequences of unhealthy eating patterns.

The benefits of healthy eating behaviors are presented in the context of what is already important to the students; and

The students have repeated opportunities to taste foods that are low in fat, sodium, and added sugars and are high in vitamin, minerals, and fiber during their lessons and in the cafeteria.

Interactive, highly entertaining, and well-designed computer programs can also be effective, especially when teacher time is limited or when student self-assessment is appropriate.

## Appendix \_\_

Training programs are most effective if they:

- • are designed to meet the specific needs of the teachers, nurses, coaches and other school staff and are based on the level of nutrition knowledge and experience with the suggested teaching strategies.
- • model behavioral change techniques and give school staff practice in using them.
- • involved multiple sessions spaced across time so that school staff can try out the newly learned techniques in their classrooms and report on their experiences to the training group, and provide post-training sessions so that school staff can share experiences with their peers.