

SUCCESS STORIES

by: Nicole Morris

Kent County School District 'On the Move' to Improve Healthy School Environments

SUMMARY

With more than 1 in 3 children and adolescents overweight or obese in the United States, Kent County Public Schools took notice. A priority of the health department driven initiative 'Kent On the Move' was to increase healthy eating and physical activity at school. With the support of Superintendent Barbara Wheeler, all seven schools utilized the Healthy Schools Program framework by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation to create a healthier school environment for students and staff. After one year, all schools earned National Recognition



CHALLENGE

More than half of the students in Kent County Public Schools qualified for free or reduced lunch. Nationally, school breakfasts and lunches provide as many as half a child's daily calories. Further, economic constraints and outdated school policies limited opportunities for physical activity. Poor diet and physical inactivity are health risks that can lead to chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Evidence also shows that those behaviors can lead to poor educational outcomes. Knowing that healthy eating and physical activity were critical to support student health and academic success, Kent County Public Schools joined forces with Kent County Health Department to devise a plan of action, bringing together stakeholders across many sectors.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Support school efforts to create healthy environments.

As a parent, model healthy behaviors and get involved at your child's school. Pack healthy lunches and bring healthy snacks for celebrations.

As a school administrator, look to your peers when faced with challenges- there is a good chance someone else has found a solution.

As a community member, donate your time, goods or services. Organize or join a School Action Team.

"Throughout this process, we have become more aware of the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for the students and employees. We now look for creative ways to incorporate physical activity into the school day. It's fun for everyone."

- Brenda Rose, RHE Principal

SOLUTION

In 2012, the Superintendent convened a School Wellness Council comprised of Principals, Food Service Staff, PE coaches, and the Local Health Department. Knowing the success of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools' Program, the newly formed Council utilized this framework to guide focused school health improvement, taking inventory in seven key areas: Policy/Systems, Employee Wellness, School Meals, Physical Education, Competitive Foods & Beverages, Student Wellness and Health Education. Planning materials and technical assistance were provided by the local health department.

RESULTS

All seven public schools completed their annual inventories and in 2013, each was awarded Bronze National Recognition for meeting the requisite number of criteria set forth by the Alliance. As a result of this process, the district revised the School Wellness Policy and Procedure to make these improvements:

- Now includes taking responsibility to support employee health by creating an environment that supports healthy behaviors.
- Prohibits using food as a punishment or reward.
- Prohibits denying recess and physical education as a disciplinary measure.
- Encourages elementary and middle schools to schedule recess before lunch so students will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat.

Contact

Nicole Morris

Kent County Health Department
125 S. Lynchburg St.
Chestertown, MD 21620
410-778-2533 phone
www.kentonthemove.org

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Tremendous progress was made over the course of one year, yet more work remains. To keep momentum, community and school system support needs to be maintained, and success celebrated.

Moving forward towards Silver and Gold Recognition, School Action Plans include these measures:

- Students will have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities.
- School policies and practices support that all beverages and competitive foods served to students for school and classroom parties during the regular and extended school day meet the Alliance Guidelines. (Exception allowed for a total of two times per year.)
- All students at the elementary school level will participate in a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education per week (or 300 minutes of physical education per 2 weeks)