

American Heart Association Nutrition Policy Recommendations

The school environment should promote healthy lifestyles including healthy nutrition, adequate physical activity, and not smoking. Thus, schools should model healthy behavior by offering quality physical education, health education, safe recess, staff wellness programs, a healthy nutrition environment., and a tobacco-free campus. The purpose of these policy recommendations is to help guide advocates in developing and in evaluating policies that impact the school nutrition environment. Advocates, legislatures, and school administrators, are encouraged to use this tool to help guide legislation, regulation, and other policies that impact nutrition practices in schools. This document is based on the American Heart Association's Dietary Recommendations for Children and Adolescents – a consensus statement from the American Heart Association. Thus, the scientific reasoning behind the principals of healthy school nutrition policies can be found in that background document.

The American Heart Association has joined with the William J Clinton Foundation to form the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Among the Alliance's initiatives is a Healthy Schools Program that aims to recognize schools for their health promoting policies and practices. The beverage, snack, and reimbursable meal guidelines for the Healthy Schools Program serve as an excellent example of the application of the principles outlined below and are attached at the end of the document.

General Policy Recommendations

- Schools should participate in the School Lunch and School Breakfast Program
- United States Congress should increase reimbursement rates for school meals. In lieu of reimbursement rate increases, states and localities should work to subsidize and/or supplement school meal program budgets.
- School building plans should include adequate storage, preparation, and eating facilities.
- School nutrition policy should encourage adequate nutrition without excessive intake.

In order to promote a healthy school nutrition environment, schools should participate in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast program, and they should conduct a School Meals Initiative review at least every five years in order to assure compliance with USDA nutrition guidelines and to correct any discrepancies. The school meal program should be appealing and accessible to all students such that students participating in the free and reduced meal program have equivalent access to food options without stigmatization that could otherwise be associated with subsidized meal participation. The school meal program should also include nutrition education for students and their parents regarding making healthy choices in school and at home.

The current USDA reimbursement rates are too low and should be increased. In lieu of that congressional action, states and school districts should consider subsidizing school food service operations in order to help compensate for the low USDA reimbursement rate for each meal sold. School cafeterias can not be expected to be cost neutral and can certainly not be expected to turn

a profit and to put student health and wellbeing as their highest priority. Thus, school food service directors should be supported in improving the quality of the nutrition environment by having access to additional funding that does not require the sale of competitive foods. In addition, school planners and school boards should prioritize the importance of building a healthy campus when designing new or remodeling old school buildings. Adequate space for recreation as well as for healthy meal preparation and consumption should be included in building designs. Finally, food service directors and school food service personnel should be credentialed nutrition professionals or receive adequate training to maximize resources to promote healthy, appealing food offerings.

In general, the following nutrition principles should guide school policies. Under each principle are examples of policies and practices that would support each principle. The examples are not intended to be an exhaustive list nor are they intended to be prescriptive or implemented in every school. In order to choose which specific policies and practices are appropriate in a specific state, district, or school; drafters should seek guidance from a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders including nutrition professionals, pediatric professionals, parents, teachers, school food service administrators, and students.

In adapting these policy recommendations to individual schools, they should be developmentally appropriate for the students to whom they will be applied. Thus, the specific policy implications in regards to calorie cut offs and serving sizes within ranges provided should be chosen based on the age group being served by the policy.

Principles of Healthy School Nutrition Policies

School nutrition policies and practices should

- Lead to decreased consumption of saturated and transfat.
- Encourage consumption of non-fat or low-fat milk.
- Encourage adequate hydration without excess caloric consumption from beverages
- Encourage increased consumption of fruits and vegetables without excessive fruit juice consumption.
- Encourage increased consumption of whole grains and reduced consumption of refined grains and sugar-sweetened beverages and foods.
- Encourage consumption of more non-fried fish, especially oily fish.
- Lead to reduction in sodium intake, including salt from processed foods
- Support healthy behavior environments.
- Support nutrition education for all students in all grade levels.

Principles with explanation and examples for development and implementation:

- **Lead to decreased consumption of saturated and transfat.** Schools should avoid serving fried foods, use healthy vegetable oils and other fats low in saturated and trans-fats in food preparation, and eliminate competitive food options that do not meet low-fat standards. (Total fat at <35% of calories. Saturated fat at <10% with goal to reduce to <7% of calories, and *trans* fat at <1% of calories).

Examples:

- Schools reduce or eliminate fried foods including pre-fried and reheated foods such as fish sticks and chicken nuggets with >35% of calories from fat and/or >10% from saturated fat and/or >1% from transfat.
- Schools reduce the number of times that high fat meats and other foods rich in saturated fats are available to students.
- At least one reimbursable meal served each day meets lowfat (<35% of calories from fat, <10% of calories from saturated fat, and <1% of calories from transfat) standards.
- All competitive foods (vending, a la carte, school store, etc.) meet lowfat standards (contain less than 35% of calories from fat, 10% of calories from saturated and <1% of calories transfat)
- High-fat toppings - particularly those high in saturated fat such as butter and cheese sauces – are minimized.
- Dressings are limited to those with healthy oils.
- Only lowfat and fat free milk and dairy products and reduced fat cheese are included in lunches and sold independently during the school day.

- **Encourage consumption of non-fat or low-fat milk.** Schools should make a variety of low-fat and non-fat milk and dairy products available while reducing the availability of full-fat or whole milk products.

Examples:

- If snacks or competitive foods are served or sold, lowfat and fat free milk and/or reduced fat dairy products are included as options.
 - Flavored low fat or fat free milk is offered in lieu of higher fat milks.
 - Low fat and fat free dairy alternatives are made available when medically warranted. Dairy alternatives should have equivalent levels of protein, carbohydrate, fat, calcium, and vitamins A and D.
 - Milk is served cold and in containers that are appealing to children and youth such as bottles versus traditional cardboard cartons or plastic bladders.
 - 2% or lower fat cheese is offered in 1-2 oz servings in lieu of higher fat and larger portion sizes.
 - Low fat and fat free yogurt is offered in lieu of higher fat yogurts.
- **Encourage adequate hydration without excess caloric consumption from beverages.** Schools should encourage adequate water consumption without encouraging sugar sweetened beverage consumption.

Examples:

- Water at no additional cost is readily available to students during meal and other appropriate times.
- Water is made available in a manner (such as cups or other serving containers) equivalent to other beverages and suitable for drinking throughout meal times.
- 100% juice is served in age appropriate portion sizes.
- If beverages are sold via school stores, vending machines, or other means water should be always included among the options available.
- Lower calorie beverages in containers no larger than 8-12 oz sizes depending on grade level are available in lieu of higher calorie alternatives and larger portion sizes.

- **Encourage increased consumption of fruits and vegetables without excessive fruit juice consumption.** A wider variety of non-fried fresh, dried, and canned fruits and vegetables should be available to students to encourage greater consumption.

Examples:

- Schools offer multiple fruits and vegetables at all meals (2-3/meal)
- If snacks are sold or served, the options include fruit and/or vegetable options.
- Salad bars with a range of fresh vegetable and fruit options are made available in as a lunch option for students.
- School breakfast includes whole fruit in addition to or instead of juice.
- Juice is served in portions equivalent to a serving (4-6 oz)
- Fruit and vegetable options include potassium rich varieties such as citrus, bananas, and berries.

- **Encourage increased consumption of whole grains and reduced consumption of refined grains and sugar-sweetened beverages and foods.** The majority of grains available to students should be whole grains, and access to and/or portions of sugar-sweetened beverages and foods should be greatly reduced.

Examples:

- Accessibility to sugar sweetened beverages such as regular soda, sports drinks, and other sweet drinks are reduced by reducing portions, reducing times available, setting calorie limits, or eliminating sales.
 - Low sugar whole grain cereals are offered at breakfast.
 - Competitive foods containing processed grains and/or sugar if sold are sold only in single serving packages whose total calories are no greater than 150 for elementary, 180 for middle, and 200 for high school.
 - School lunches and breakfast incorporate products such as bread, pasta, rice, and oats that are at least 51% whole grain when grains are served.
- **Encourage consumption of more fish, especially oily fish.** Schools should offer baked, broiled, or grilled fish (not fried fish) as a regular menu item.

Examples:

- In lieu of additional food products being available from USDA, schools regularly serve chunk light tuna as it is packed in water or pouches.
 - Schools are built to accommodate the baking, broiling, grilling, or other non-fried preparation of fish and other lean protein sources.
 - Schools generally avoid serving shellfish so as to avoid allergic reactions among sensitive students.
 - Schools work with local producers to make fresh or frozen filets rather than breaded and pre-fried alternatives available to students as part of reimbursable meals.
 - Food service personnel are trained in the appropriate handling, storage, and preparation of fresh or frozen non-fried fish.
- **Lead to reduction in sodium intake, including salt from processed foods.** Given that increased salt exposure leads to an increased propensity for salt consumption, schools should set goals to reduce the sodium available in both their reimbursable meals and their competitive foods.

Examples:

- School establishes baseline sodium levels in menu and non-menu food items and sets goals for improvement.
- School plans to reduce sodium in foods served by approximately 10% per year until goal levels of <710mg/reimbursable meal and <230mg per a la carte or snack item are achieved.
- Schools begin by identifying ‘outliers’ or foods with particularly high sodium levels and bringing them into mid-range.
- Schools procure low sodium version of foods when available.
- Menus are adapted to reduce sodium used in preparation of foods.

- School foodservice personnel is trained on alternative preparation of food to add flavor without sodium.
 - Salt is not available as a condiment.
- **Lead to healthy behavior environments.** Schools should foster healthy eating behaviors by modeling appropriate nutrition and energy balance in and out of classrooms and before, during, and after school.

Examples:

- Food is not offered as a reward nor denied as a punishment
 - Fundraisers promote non-food items or foods that meet the same standards as other competitive foods.
 - Schools promote balanced energy intake and output by offering daily physical education and adequate recess time in addition to a healthy nutrition environment.
 - Neither physical activity (recess or other breaks) nor physical education is denied to nor demanded of students as a punishment.
 - School provides adequate time and space for students to eat.
 - When recess is offered, recess precedes the lunch period.
 - Meals are offered at appropriate times given the timing and length of the school's day. (i.e. breakfast is offered at the beginning of the day and lunch is offered roughly in middle of day)
 - Schools are equipped with adequate storage and preparation facilities in order to accommodate fresh foods.
 - Staff wellness programs and opportunities support faculty in making healthy eating and activity choices.
 - Marketing of unhealthy foods is discouraged on and/or eliminated from the school campus.
- **Support nutrition education for all students in all grade levels.** Schools should offer progressive, curriculum based nutrition education in the classroom as well as use less traditional methods for nutrition education throughout the school day and in after school programs.

Examples:

- Nutrition education is offered as part of a progressive, curriculum based health education at all grade levels.
- Nutrition education is incorporated into the meal program. Examples include taste tests, demonstrations, healthy tips, guest educators, etc.
- Parents are included in nutrition education via information sent home such as nutrition labeling on menus and competitive food lists, voluntary seminars or coordination with parent groups such as the PTA or PTO.
- Marketing techniques such as product placement, price reduction, packaging, and product promotion are used to encourage healthier choices.
- Staff has ample opportunity for continuing education and training on nutrition and health issues so as to promote their own health as well as to help educate students.

Attached:

- **Alliance for a Healthier Generation Beverage, Snack, and Reimbursable meal recognition criteria.**
- **American Heart Association's Dietary Recommendations for Children and Adolescents – a consensus statement from the American Heart Association.**