Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services
Is Taking Action for Healthy Kids

"Our best hope is to prevent children from becoming overweight in the first place. We need to help children develop healthy eating and activity patterns that will last a lifetime. Children who are well nourished and engage in regular physical activity have been shown to have higher test scores, better concentration, and less disruptive behavior than those with poorer nutrition and more sedentary lifestyles. We need to help schools provide children with the opportunities for more physical activity and healthful food options throughout the entire school campus. Students will be more prepared to learn, and better prepared for life."

--David Satcher, MD, former US Surgeon General, Founding Chair “Action for Healthy Kids"

Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services has been taking steps to promote healthy food choices through school meals and nutrition education for over twenty years. Our department has a national reputation for being a leader in implementing nutritional changes such as switching to 1% and nonfat milk, adding self-serve salad bars to increase fruit and vegetable intake, increasing whole grain products, and limiting fried foods. Our department’s nutrition education efforts, which began in 1979, have supported classroom teachers in helping children learn to make healthy choices that will last a lifetime.

As the issue of child obesity has become more serious each year, we have taken steps to implement higher standards in A la Carte selections (items sold in addition to school meals) at elementary and middle schools. Elementary students are offered ONLY milk, soymilk, and 100% juice in addition to school meals. Elementary students do NOT have access to vending machines. New PPS Middle School A la Carte guidelines were established in fall 2003 based on recommendations from a National Consensus Panel on School Foods. Changes included switching to baked chips and eliminating sports drinks so that Middle School vending machines would feature only water and 100% juice. Soda, sports drinks, and fruit drinks with less than 100% juice are not allowed in Middle School vending machines. Every decision that we make about changes in meal service or menu items or additional A la Carte items is done in the context of our knowledge of the changing state of children's health and our responsibility to create a healthy school nutrition environment.

Over the past seven years, our department has worked with classroom teachers, administrators, school nurses, school counselors, school health clinics, physical education teachers and health specialists throughout the district to coordinate health messages directed to students and families. We hope that the School Board and district leadership will review other PPS activities that are critical to preventing the child obesity epidemic. What is the current state of health education in our schools? Do teachers at all grade levels have up-to-date curriculum and training in health and nutrition education? What is the status of physical education at all grade levels in ALL Portland Public Schools? Is physical education being adequately funded? Are school counselors and school nurses available to work with the students who are experiencing the social and emotional effects of being overweight? Are there resources to help educate their families?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has taken a leadership role in studying promising approaches for increasing physical activity and healthy eating in schools. Recommended actions include strengthening district nutrition policies. Many large school districts such as Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago are placing new restrictions on food and beverage sales in schools. Is PPS willing to implement and enforce stricter policies on fundraising in schools, foods sold in student stores and vending machines to support a Healthy School Environment throughout the entire school setting? The existing Board policies are a good start, but the policies are not consistently followed district-wide.

There are many National efforts by government and nonprofit organizations to address the issue of child obesity in schools. We are fortunate in Oregon to have a state-of-the-art ODE/ODHHS/CDC funded Healthy Kids Learn Better (HKLB) model of coordinated school health services. PPS Nutrition Services participated in creating the state’s Blueprint for Action to improve nutrition services in schools. What can PPS do at the district level to support more schools in adopting a coordinated school health approach and
establishing Healthy Kids Learn Better teams? Benson High School was the first Portland school to apply for a HKLB grant in spring 2003. Unfortunately, there are few resources at the local school level for the initial planning needed to form a strong team. The district could do more to support these efforts. Information about the research-based coordinated school health model is available at http://www.hklb.org.

In addition to the Oregon Healthy Kids Learn Better Nutrition in Schools group, PPS Nutrition Services has welcomed partnership opportunities and participated in meetings with local, state and national organizations such as the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, Oregon Department of Health and Human Services, Oregon Department of Education Child Nutrition Department, the African American Health Coalition, Community Health Partnerships, Oregon Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, Multnomah Commission on Children and Families and the Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council. The seriousness of the child obesity epidemic has brought many organizations together to work on the goal of improving school nutrition and physical activity. PPS Nutrition Services is optimistic that the current opportunities to create partnerships both inside and outside the district will result in significant ACTION for healthy kids. With support from the School Board and the administration, Portland Public Schools can become a model district where healthy kids learn better.

**PPS School Breakfast and Lunch Program Highlights**

PPS school meals have been meeting the US Dietary Guidelines goals of increasing fruits and vegetables and whole grains and reducing fat content for over 20 years. The following actions have been taken to improve students’ access to healthy choices:

- Implemented “Offer vs. Serve” method of meal service allowing students to take only the amount of food that they will eat.
- Offer appropriate serving sizes that meet children's calorie needs ensuring that meals meet Recommended Dietary Allowances and the 1995 School Meals Initiative.
- Serve higher fat items such as French Fries in 3 oz portions ONLY and limit sales of fried foods to high schools only (other school districts across the country commonly offer French Fries in all grades).
- Feature self-serve salad bars in over 60 elementary and middle schools (Grant funding supported the original purchase of salad bar equipment)
- Promoted eating 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables consistently since 1997 and sponsored 5 A Day Challenge Activities in over 24 elementary schools.
- Provide low fat dressings and vegetable dips made from scratch with yogurt base.
- Being among the first districts in the country to switch to 1% and nonfat milk, which helped to lower the overall fat content of the meal to the recommended 30% of calories.
- Producing higher fiber bakery products with 20 to 30% whole wheat and serving whole-wheat tortillas and brown rice.
- Placed restrictions on added fats such as butter or margarine for rolls, bread items.
- Limiting desserts with school meals to once per week and limiting cookie portion size to 1.25 ounces.

**PPS Food Safety Standards**

- Designed and implemented first local HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) program in cooperation with the Multnomah County Environmental Health Department.
- Employ Quality Assurance Manager to train employees and monitor compliance with HACCP recording of all critical control points in distribution, storage, production and service.
- Have outstanding district record of zero claims of food borne illness.
- Pass annual health inspections by Multnomah County Sanitarians with rate of only 0.9% critical violations and 4% total violations (126 violations out of a possible 3,008 violations).
- Review Food Handling Certification status of all new and current employees.
- Implement new FDA food code standards annually.
- Comply with all United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines regulating school meal operations.
- Ensure purchases are from reputable companies following district procurement practices.
• Inspect processing plants and audit operations of vendors/suppliers.

**PPS Menu Choices and Student Preferences**

• Provide students with a minimum of two and preferably four entrée choices daily except when served in the classroom or break carts.
• Select menu items based on district-wide participation data, student surveys, nutrition standards and food cost parameters.
• Test new products weekly with student groups touring the Central Kitchen facility.
• Offer a vegetarian entrée option daily.
• Utilize Recipe and Menu Development team for continuous improvement in menu items.
• Use department school operations check list to evaluate food quality and food safety.
• Developing “student secret shopper” program to evaluate service and food quality.

**PPS School Breakfast Innovations**

• Among the first districts in the nation to utilize USDA’s Provision 2 regulations to expand breakfast service at NO charge to all students at the highest need schools.
• Among the first districts to pilot breakfast in the classroom and breakfast breaks to ensure that ALL students at schools with high percentage of free and reduced meal eligibility had access to breakfast at school at no charge.
• Promoted eating an adequate breakfast to help protect against overeating later in the day - breakfast is now recognized as an important habit among adults who are successful with weight management.

**Dining Experience (time, location, ambiance, etc.)**

• Investing department resources in Marshall High School Cafeteria redesign to support High School Reform – Small School project.
• Seeking business partnerships for “adopt-a-cafeteria” projects to improve cafeteria ambiance.
• Advocate for optimum school lunch schedules that include a minimum of 15 to 20 minutes eating time after service (time is insufficient in some schools)
• Maintain standard of 10-12 students per minute through the lunch line to ensure maximum time for eating.
• Implement recess before lunch when possible to promote healthy eating.
• Coach all nutrition services employees to provide superior service in carrying out our mission of helping children learn.
• Continue training employees in student-focused customer service methods.
• Provide point –of-service translations identifying menu items in four languages.

**Nutritional Guidelines for Foods Sold in Addition to School Meals**

• Set standards to limit A la Carte food items in elementary schools so that only milk, soymilk, and 100% juice are offered to students.
• Revised standards for A la Carte food items in middle schools to be consistent with proposed national standards by a national school nutrition consensus panel.
• Evaluated the nutrition contribution of all individual foods and beverages sold to middle school students in the cafeteria against the new middle school standards.
• Eliminated sports drinks and limited beverage serving size to 12 oz or less.
• Switched to low fat baked chips with less than 30% calories from fat.
• Limited snack items to those having less than 35% sugar by weight.
• Set portion size limit for A la Carte food items to be no larger than the portion served as part of a school meal.
• Outlined new specifications for A la Carte pizza with lower fat content.
• Increased available A la Carte offerings of fruit, salads, and yogurt.
Competitive foods (vending machines, student stores, fundraisers)

- Advocate for compliance with district policies for food sales in schools with PPS administrators, staff, and student fundraising groups.
- Ask parent and student fundraising groups in all schools to consider the nutritional impact of food sales in schools (such as Krispy Kreme sales, deep-fried Elephant Ears, candy sales).
- Enforce USDA regulations prohibiting sales of minimally nutritious foods such as soft drinks and candy in the school cafeterias (including high school student stores).
- Set and enforce nutrition standards for middle school snack vending machines operated by Courtesy Vending through district contract. (Less than 30% fat by calories and less than 35% sugar by weight).

Coca Cola Pouring Rights Contract

- Lobbied successfully to prohibit elementary student access to vending machines.
- Set strict standards for beverages offered in Middle School Vending Machines.
- Offer ONLY water and 100% juice in all Middle School machines.
- Accepted $9,770 reduction in annual payment from Coca Cola in order to eliminate Powerade from Middle School vending machines.
- Set limits on advertising in middle school environment by requiring vending machines to picture water, juice, or students engaged in physical activity.

Use of Candy and Minimally Nutritious Foods as Incentives

- Engage students, teachers, administrators, families and communities in discussions to decrease the use of food as a reward for good behavior or academic achievement.
- Promote non-food rewards such as pencils, stickers, books, and activities to reward student behavior and achievement.

Nutrition Education Connects the Cafeteria and the Classroom

- Utilize Eat Smart, Play Hard messages and USDA Power Panther School Meals Mascot on printed menus, district web site, and posters in the cafeteria, gym and classroom.
- Feature student artwork on district menu and web page using themes that connect students with their local food system.
- Promote National Cancer Institute messages to eat 5 to 9 fruits and vegetables a day and initiate school-wide 5 a Day Challenge promotions.
- Serve produce from school or community gardens on school salad bars as promotion (Woodlawn).
- Facilitate Chef’s Collaborative, OSU Extension, Oregon Dairy Council Pyramid Pals food lessons in elementary classrooms.
- Provide nutrition education in-service training to Middle and High School Health Specialists.
- Researched nutrition and physical activity web resources for students, teachers and families to create extensive collection of links on department web site.

Coordinated School Health

- Participated on PEW Design Team to create PPS Health Education Common Curriculum Goals, Content Standards and Benchmarks (April 2000). (PEW Charitable Trusts Funding supported this year-long project involving health teachers and administrators).
- Collaborated on Oregon Healthy Kids Learn Better Blueprint for Action for Nutrition Services.
- Support Healthy Kids Learn Better Team activities at Benson High School.
- Promote creation of Healthy Kids Learn Better teams consisting of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members at additional Portland schools.