

Making the Wellness Grade

America's Schools Combat Obesity With Local School Wellness Policies

(NAPSA)—Today you can't miss signs that America's youth are expanding. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that "nearly one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight." According to the U.S. Surgeon General, research indicates that overweight adolescents have a 70 percent to 80 percent chance of becoming obese in adulthood. Consequences of adult obesity include diabetes, coronary heart disease and hypertension.

The nation's schools play an important role in combating problems associated with poor nutrition and inactive lifestyles. The CDC designed a coordinated school health program model which consists of eight components to aid schools and the community in working together to create healthy lifelong behaviors during adolescence. Leading the way with this program is school food-service. According to *American Journal of Public Health*, schools that implemented nutrition guidelines show lower rates of obesity, less calorie intake from fat, higher nutrition quality intake, and higher levels of physical activity.

A new food guidance system, MyPyramid, was recently unveiled by USDA. According to USDA, "MyPyramid translates principles of the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and other nutritional standards to assist consumers in making healthier food and physical activity choices." The National School



Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program utilize the food guidance system and *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* as the basis for meals. A child-friendly version of MyPyramid is being developed for children 6 to 11 years old. This version teaches children the importance of smart eating choices and physical activity.

Recognizing nutrition and wellness programs go beyond the cafeteria, Congress included a mandate to the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requiring each Local Education Authority to create a healthy environment. In addition to establishing nutrition guidelines for all foods offered on campus, schools should include goals for nutrition education and physical activity in their school wellness policy by the first day of the school year 2006/2007. Schools are also accountable for establishing a measurement plan and involving parents, students and school representatives in development of the wellness policy.

To support its members in creating and implementing their districts' local wellness policy, the School Nutrition Association (SNA), an association for school foodservice professionals, created a model policy and training seminars. Food industry partners also support foodservice directors in challenges they face. For example, Tyson Foods, Inc. creates products and solutions with foodservice directors and kids in mind. "Tyson Foods strives to provide products kids love and meet schools' nutrition guidelines," said Barbara Jirka, marketing manager, education, for Tyson Food Service Group. Tyson taste tests new items with a diverse sample of kids to gauge their reaction before the products receive Tyson's *Kid Tested, Kid Approved*[™] endorsement.

To support schools in creating and implementing a local wellness policy, Tyson created the *foodWISE*[®]—*Good for Me*[™] toolkit. "The *foodWISE*—*Good for Me*' toolkit provides solutions to help address school health and wellness issues," said Jirka. "Tools in the kit are easy to use and include a wellness policy template, menu templates, nutrition activities, and a customizable newsletter for communicating wellness efforts to parents and the community."

Schools are part of the solution in the fight against childhood obesity and improving students' health. Better nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity in schools will help ensure that America's students are healthy students.