

Classroom Snacks



Objective

Increase availability and consumption of healthy snacks and reduce availability and consumption of unhealthy snacks.



Key Messages

Healthy snacks protect against chronic disease and other health issues.

- Eating fruits and vegetables, especially non-starchy leafy green vegetables, is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, cancer, and high blood pressure.⁴⁻⁵
- Reducing consumption of sugary snacks or drinks can help reduce childhood cavities.⁶

Children's snack choices often do not contribute to a healthy, balanced diet.

- Children are snacking more than in the past and these snacks contribute about one quarter of their total caloric intake for the day.¹
- Most children and adolescents do not eat the recommended 1.5-2 cups of fruit per day and 1.5-3 cups of vegetables per day.²
- Desserts and salty snacks are the main contributors to snacking calories for children, followed by sweetened beverages. Candy, fruit drinks and high-fat salty snack consumption increased between the 1970's and 2006, with the largest leap taking place in salty snacks with over a 7% increase.¹
- Among children ages 2-19 years old, 70% of males and 60% of females consume at least one sugar sweetened beverage on a daily basis (such as fruit drinks, soda pop, energy drinks, etc.).³
- Fruit, 100% juice and low-fat milk or dairy products were the lowest contributors to snacking calories in 2006.¹

Healthy snacks during the school day contribute to academic success.

- Teachers at schools where students receive free fruit and vegetable snacks have reported improved student attention and concentration during class, while school nurses reported fewer visits from children after the snack program started.⁷

Fruits and vegetables can be affordable snacks.

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average cost of a serving of fruit or vegetable (all types- fresh, frozen, canned) is 31 cents per serving. By comparison, the average cost of a Danish is 47 cents, a single serving of pudding is 38 cents and a muffin is 83 cents.⁸
- When elementary school students eligible for the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program were offered produce-based snacks at school, they consumed 15% more fruits and vegetables than students not participating in the FFVP.⁹



Key Strategies

- **Provide a snack cart during the school day.** Contact public health staff to learn how to start a snack cart program that offers elementary school students the choice of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.
- **Establish and implement a school or district-wide healthy snack policy for elementary schools.** A school or district-wide policy that specifies healthy snacks sets a strong foundation and set of expectations that can be more effectively communicated and implemented by all staff members.
- **Establish and implement a healthy-snack policy for before- and after-school programs.** A district-wide policy for before- and after-school programs sets a strong foundation and set of expectations that can be more effectively communicated and implemented by all staff members.
- **Work with someone with nutrition expertise to develop a healthy snack list.** Seek out opportunities to make the list available to students, parents, teachers and program coordinators.



Success Stories

Farmington Area Elementary Schools, ISD 192, Farmington, MN **Smart snacking initiatives and “Soda-Free” zone**

As part of ongoing efforts to ensure students are healthy and perform well academically, staff at Akin Road Elementary in the Farmington Area Public School District collaborated with a dietitian consultant to develop a list of acceptable, healthy classroom snacks for students. Parents received the healthy snack list, which included fresh fruits and vegetables without dips, dried fruits, whole wheat crackers and cereals, and graham crackers. Another wonderful snack option for students at all five of the district’s elementary schools is the healthy snack cart. Parents pay a small fee (\$30 per semester or \$60 for the whole school year) for their child to receive a daily classroom snack from the snack cart. Over four years the district has seen an increase in student participation, with 57% of 1st-5th graders participating in the program at one school, and no negative impact on the school lunch program. Students who have difficulty paying the fee benefit from a guardian angel fund that helps cover the cost. The principal at Akin Elementary is pleased with the number of families that take advantage of this snack opportunity and have shared positive comments. Parents are pleased with the low cost of the snacks - for as little as 35 cents per day their student can have a fresh fruit or vegetable snack, making it less expensive than most produce at the grocery store! The low cost of the produce snacks is made possible by the purchasing power of food service when they buy these foods in bulk. Parents have jokingly shared that at home it can take their child 5-10 minutes to make a decision, but at school their child walks up to a snack cart, quickly chooses a healthy snack and says a polite “thank you” to the student volunteer! Another parent shared that she was tempted to grab a candy bar from her child’s Halloween bag for his snack but then remembered the snack cart and was relieved to have a healthy option. In addition to these successful changes, Akin Elementary has also declared the school a “soda-free” zone, prohibiting soda pop in classrooms and lunchrooms.

Randolph Elementary School, ISD 195, Randolph, MN **Elementary Snack Cart Program**

Several years ago, Randolph Elementary established its popular, healthy snack cart program for students in grades 1-6. Seventy-five percent of the students participate in the healthy snack cart program. Parents pay a small fee each semester which gives their children access to a healthy, fresh snack each day. Parents have commented that they like the convenience of not packing a snack each day and that they value the healthy snack options. The school district is committed to continuing to provide healthy snacks for its elementary students.



Sample Policy Language

“The district wellness committee will disseminate to parents and teachers a list of foods and beverages that are acceptable for snacks in the classroom. This list will only include foods and beverages that are consistent with the Institute of Medicine’s nutrition guidelines.”

“Snacks served during the school day or in after-school care or enrichment programs shall make a positive contribution to children’s diets and health.”

“The District and buildings will promote fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products for healthy meals and snacks.”



Resources for Implementation

- **Guidance for Healthy Snacks in Schools– Healthy snack toolkit**
<http://www.dakmed.org/uploads/resources/169/healthy-snack-implementation-guide.pdf>
- **USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** – A fruit and vegetable program available to eligible elementary schools: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp>
- **Harvest of the Month** – Fruit and vegetable information and activities for teachers, children and their families.
<http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download.asp>
- **Healthy School Snacks** - This resource provides ideas for teachers, parents, afterschool program directors and others for serving healthy snacks and beverages to children:
http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/healthy_school_snacks.pdf

Sources:

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Smart Choices is a partnership of the Dakota County Public Health Department and school districts in Dakota County committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity before, during and after school.

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Dakota County
Public Health Department
1 Mendota Road West, Suite 410
West St. Paul, MN 55118-4771
651.554.6100
www.dakotacounty.us



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