



PROMOTING HEALTHY
FOOD CHOICES

Part of a series on Growing Healthy Readers:
Taking Action to Support the Health
Determinants of Early School Success



Growing Healthy Readers

TAKING ACTION TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH DETERMINANTS OF EARLY SCHOOL SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

When children are healthy and developing on track, they are more likely to be successful in school. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recognizes the important interconnections of health and learning, known as *the health determinants of early school success*.

Children from low-income families have more frequent challenges that affect their health and well-being than more affluent children. The Campaign's Healthy Readers Team has identified five Children's Health and Learning Priorities: health-related issues with a demonstrated relationship to one or more of the Campaign's community solutions. They include prenatal care and infant development; comprehensive screenings, follow-up and early intervention; oral health; asthma management; and nutrition and physical activity. The team has developed materials to help community stakeholders incorporate strategies that can strengthen positive impact on children's health and learning. *Growing Healthy Readers: Taking Action to Support the Health Determinants of Early School Success* is a set of seven guides to assist Sponsoring Coalitions in incorporating the Children's Health and Learning Priorities into Community Solutions Action Plans (CSAPs) to achieve the Campaign's community solutions and improve grade-level reading.

These Healthy Readers Resource Guides will help community- and state-level Sponsoring Coalitions

identify priority issues that affect children's health and determine how to take action. The priority issues and corresponding guides — each with a research-based connection to success in learning — include:

Prenatal Care and Infant Development

Resource Guide: Supporting Healthy Births and Infancy

Comprehensive Screenings, Follow-Up and Early Intervention

Resource Guide: Ensuring Early and Appropriate Screenings and Intervention

Resource Guide: Supporting Children's Healthy Social-Emotional Development

Oral Health

Resource Guide: Ensuring Oral Health

Asthma Management

Resource Guide: Controlling Environments and Managing Asthma

Nutrition and Physical Activity

Resource Guide: Promoting Healthy Food Choices

Resource Guide: Increasing Physical Activity

Sponsoring Coalitions will want to consult available local data and gather information to help determine which priorities to address to improve children’s health and learning. The Resource Guides include valuable resources and recommendations about how to proceed. Each guide is organized to:

- Address the important link between health and learning
- Identify evidence-based and promising models and strategies
- Help coalitions understand how to begin to take action
- Identify content and funding resources specific to that topic

Improving health and learning for children from low-income families is important work, but it need not be daunting. No matter which strategies a Sponsoring

Coalition undertakes, it is useful to include representatives from Head Start, physician offices, the Health Department and a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) if there is one in your community. These individuals can help Sponsoring Coalition members understand the context for children’s health in the community and reach out to others who can support the work.

The Campaign’s Healthy Readers Team and state and regional Campaign leads can provide support as well. In the coming months, we expect to establish state-level pilot projects to link communities that are working in the same focus area, support peer learning, and provide additional information and support.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Becky Miles-Polka, Healthy Readers Team Leader: bmilespolka@gradelevelreading.net.

Reading Success by the End of Third Grade



PROMOTING HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

<p align="center">Children’s Health and Learning Priority</p> <p align="center">Nutrition and Physical Activity</p>	<p align="center">Which community solution(s) does it support?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 60px;">SCHOOL READINESS</div> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 60px;">SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</div> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 60px;">SUMMER LEARNING</div> </div>
<p>DEVELOPING AWARENESS</p>	
<p>What are healthy food choices?</p>	<p>Food that provides adequate nutrients and sufficient energy, beginning with a mother’s well-being before and during pregnancy, is important for children’s brain development and for their physical health and vitality. Families and children can choose foods that support their health and learning.</p> <p>The Dietary Guidelines for Americans describe a healthy diet as one that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts; and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.</p>
<p>Why is it important for communities to implement this solution?</p>	<p>There is abundant evidence linking nutrition to learning and to the challenges facing children from low-income families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2012, more than 47 million Americans lived in households that had difficulty putting food on the table. (www.usda.gov) • Children who suffer from poor nutrition during the brain’s most formative years score much lower on tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension and general knowledge than those who are adequately nourished. (Brown and Pollitt, 1996) • Iron deficiency anemia leads to a shortened attention span, irritability, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Anemic children tend to do poorly on vocabulary, reading and other tests. (Parker, 1989) • Children who skip breakfast are less able to differentiate among visual images, show increased errors and have slower memory recall. (FRAC, 2011) • Low-income children tend to gain weight during the summer months, because they lack access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity.

DEVELOPING AWARENESS (CONT.)

How can communities improve access to healthy foods for children and families?

Ensure that your community is taking full advantage of the programs that help provide a nutrition safety net for parents and children, including:

- The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program supports low-income pregnant and post-partum women, infants and children up to age 5 with nutritious foods, information on healthy eating and referrals to health care.
- The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides nutritious meals and snacks in child care programs serving children from low-income families to improve the overall quality of child care and make care more affordable.
- Head Start and Early Head Start include nutritious meals and snacks for participating children.
- School lunch and breakfast programs serve children in families with incomes up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level with free or reduced-price meals. New federal guidelines significantly strengthen the healthy food choices offered through the program.
- Summer Food Service Programs ensure that children from low-income areas can continue to receive nutritious meals during the long summer vacations, when they do not have access to school lunch or breakfast. Only 1 child in 7 who receives free meals at school is served by the federally funded Summer Nutrition program.
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly called Food Stamps, provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income families for the purchase of food.

Communities can also develop and support local initiatives to improve access to healthy foods. Local Sponsoring Coalitions may want to join with other groups who are working to:

- Help to ensure that farmers' markets accept WIC vouchers and Electronic Benefit Transfers so that low-income families can shop there for fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Create community gardens and engage experienced gardeners in mentoring new families.
- Provide information in food stores to help families choose more nutritious foods.
- Provide "start up" funding, for investment in items such as shelves and refrigeration equipment, to help neighborhood stores stock fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Connect families with food insecurity to community-based sources of food, including Food Banks and their affiliate organizations.
- Provide professional development and supports for child care providers to implement state-developed standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Child Care.

DEVELOPING AWARENESS (CONT.)

How can communities improve access to healthy foods for children and families? (cont.)

- Provide healthy, easy-to-prepare foods for children in preschool programs and share both food and the recipes with families. Include cooking classes so families get hands-on experience in preparing the foods.
- Encourage families to share healthful foods at community, school, preschool and sports-related events and potluck meals.

What are some strategies for promoting healthy food choices?

Strategies with Results

More than 84 percent of children enrolled in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) qualify for free or reduced-price meals. To stem the summer learning slide and ensure children receive adequate nutrition during the summer months, city agencies worked with BCPS to extend the district’s **Summer Reading Academies** from a 4-hour intensive literacy camp administered by the District to an 8-hour all-day program that included literacy programming as well as a wrap-around enrichment program provided by the city. A key objective in designing the camp was to ensure each participating child received three meals a day, since many children do not have access to healthy meals outside of the school year. Because federal guidelines specify that any single meal provider can offer only two meals a day, BCPS provided breakfast and lunch and the Family League of Baltimore City, a quasi-governmental agency that administers funding for the Summer Food Program, supported dinner for all children who participated.

Results

- Students made age-appropriate gains in reading at all levels
- 49 percent of the students attended 75 percent of the school days
- 89 percent of parents rated the program as “Very Good” or “Excellent”

Breakfast in the Classroom programs — an extension of the federal school breakfast program — bring the crucial first meal of the day into the classroom so all children can have the benefit of a healthy breakfast. The meal is served at the beginning of the school day and teachers use the time for instruction or review so children do not lose valuable learning time. In schools that serve high concentrations of children from low-income families, all students can eat breakfast in the classroom without charge.

Results

Children who participate in the Breakfast in the Classroom program show increases in daily attendance, class participation and academic test scores, and decreases in tardiness.

DEVELOPING AWARENESS (CONT.)

What are some strategies for promoting healthy food choices? (cont.)

Promising Strategies

The Healthy Out-of-School Time Coalition, which includes the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), the University of Massachusetts Boston and the YMCA of the USA, has developed comprehensive national nutrition and physical activity standards for out-of-school programs for children in grades K–12.

Among the recommended standards outlined for out-of-school programs — which include before- and after-school programs, day camps and overnight camps — are:

- Serving fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen or canned) as options instead of cake, cookies, candy and chips;
- Offering water as the preferred drink option during snack times instead of juices, punch boxes or soda;
- Dedicating at least 20 percent or at least 30 minutes of morning or after-school program time to physical activity (60 minutes for a full-day program); and
- Ensuring that daily physical activity time includes aerobic and age-appropriate muscle- and bone-strengthening and cardio-respiratory fitness activities.

Let's Move! Child Care (LMCC) was launched by First Lady Michelle Obama and public and private partners in 2011 and is a nationwide call-to-action to empower early education and child care providers to create healthy environments in their programs to benefit the children (ages 0-5) and families served. LMCC goals focus on physical activity, screen time, food, beverages and infant feeding. The initiative website, www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org, hosted and maintained by Nemours, provides quizzes and action planning tools, resources, materials and information to support child care providers' continued success.

Strategies to Build Public Awareness

National Nutrition Month is a nutrition education and information campaign held annually in March, and led by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

MOVING TO ACTION

How would a Sponsoring Coalition begin to implement this strategy?

Determine what actions the team could take now to strengthen children's health and development to support improved grade-level reading outcomes. Often simple no-cost or low-cost actions are a way to build momentum and gain early enthusiasm and support for the work.

1. **Gather information** about how many children from low-income families participate in federally subsidized food programs:
 - Do WIC programs adequately reach low-income women who are pregnant and breast-feeding and serve children up to age 5? Are they providing useful nutrition education to participating mothers?
 - Is the Child and Adult Care Food Program serving child care programs that enroll children from low-income families?
 - Are the new guidelines for nutritious meals being implemented in these programs?
 - Are school-based programs shifting toward meals cooked on site, not just reheated, so food is fresh, flavorful and nutritious?
 - Are schools serving Breakfast in the Classroom so all can benefit?
 - Are Summer Meals programs reaching children from low-income families in their neighborhoods?
2. **Contact** parents to understand how well the programs are working.
 - For example, are WIC program sites accessible to low-income neighborhoods, or do they require a long ride across town?
 - Are staff representative of the languages and cultures of the parents?
 - Do schools make an effort to serve meals that are familiar to children from different cultural backgrounds?
 - What do parents know about healthy eating? What do they want to learn?
3. **Reach out** to others working on these issues in your community or state.
 - Does your state have a Hunger Free organization that is working on these issues?
 - Is there a faith-based organization that is working on hunger issues?

It is easier — and often produces better results — to work with others than to start from the beginning.

4. **Engage** public agencies that administer these programs in your community. You may have to talk with several. For example, the Maternal and Children's Health Department may administer WIC, while SNAP benefits may be operated by the Social Services Department. You will want to understand how these programs can be effective in improving nutrition for more families.

MOVING TO ACTION (CONT.)

How would a Sponsoring Coalition begin to implement this strategy? (cont.)

5. **Learn** about effective programs in other communities. For example:
- How can local farmers' markets become eligible to accept vouchers for the WIC program?
 - Can the local food bank increase its nutrition education activities and outreach through local programs serving low-income children?
 - Can the school district use more locally grown foods, which are fresher and more appealing, in the meals it serves to students?
6. **Determine** what financing strategies are available in your community. Although much of the core funding in this area comes from government agencies, local investment can make nutrition programs more effective and nutritious foods more likely to be consumed.

What funding sources may be available to support this strategy in your community?

Federal funding for nutrition programs is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but it comes to communities in different ways.

Opportunities for grant-funded programs can be found at:

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant opportunities: www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/childhoodobesityafri.cfm
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) state-level grant opportunities: www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/

Local funders, including hospitals, may be interested in providing funding for nutrition programs that support learning and reduce childhood obesity. For example, summer learning programs in Fort Wayne, Indiana, include meals provided by a local hospital that partners with the local United Way supporting the community's grade-level reading goals.

RESOURCES

- Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation: www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13275
- For information on Breakfast in the Classroom, see <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-progm/breakfast-in-the-classroom>
- The Food Research and Action Research Council (FRAC): www.frac.org
- Let's Move: www.letsmove.gov/eat-healthy
- Let's Move! Child Care: www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org
- Nemours, Best Practices for Healthy Eating: A Guide to Help Children Grow Up Healthy: www.nemours.org/content/dam/nemours/www/filebox/service/preventive/nhps/heguide.pdf
- For an overview of recommended nutritional standards, see www.ChooseMyPlate.gov
- KidsHealth (from Nemours) Nutrition & Fitness Center: http://kidshealth.org/parent/centers/fitness_nutrition_center.html
- Healthy Habits for Life Resource Kit (developed by Sesame Workshop, Nemours and KidsHealth): <http://kidshealth.org/classroom/index.jsp?Grade=cc&Section=hhfl>
- Share Our Strength: www.nokidhungry.org
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) website includes links to programs that provide a nutrition safety net for children, see www.fns.usda.gov/child-nutrition-programs
- Information about National Nutrition Month: www.eatright.org/NNM
- State Agencies Managing Child Nutrition Programs: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm

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