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What Is Being Done To Promote Healthy Eating In Schools?

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A weekly question/answer column

What Is Being Done To Promote Healthy Eating In Schools?

Georgia Lauritzen answers:*

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman has announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is joining a new national partnership to promote healthy eating by children in schools. The link between good nutrition and good education is clearly demonstrated by higher test scores, better attendance and fewer behavior problems in school.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dietetic Association, the National Medical Association and the National Hispanic Medical Association have committed their memberships to work with schools and communities to recognize the health and educational benefits of balanced eating and the importance of making it a priority in every school.

Ten key principles are outlined to assist each school community in writing its own prescription for change. The Ten Keys address the challenges that children increasingly face in school, such as not having enough time to eat; meals that are not scheduled in the middle of the school day; and, food choices that do not meet nutritional standards. *Students, parents, food service staff, educators and community leaders will be involved in assessing the school's eating environment, developing a shared vision and an action plan to achieve it.

- Adequate funds will be provided by local, state and federal sources to ensure that the total school environment supports the development of healthy eating patterns.
- Behavior focused nutrition education will be integrated into the curriculum from preK through grade 12. Staff who provide nutrition education will have appropriate training.
- School meals will meet the USDA nutrition standards as well as provide sufficient choices, including new foods and foods prepared in new ways, to meet the taste preferences of diverse student populations.
- All students will have designated lunch periods of sufficient length to enjoy eating healthy foods with friends. These lunch periods will be scheduled as near the middle of the school day as possible.
- Schools will provide enough serving areas to ensure student access to school meals with a minimum of wait time.
- Space that is adequate to accommodate all students and pleasant surroundings that reflect the value of the social aspects of eating will be provided.
- Students, teachers and community volunteers who practice healthy eating will be encouraged to serve as role models in the school dining areas.
- If foods are sold in addition to National School Lunch Program meals, they will be from

the five major food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid. This practice will foster healthy eating patterns.

- Decisions about the sale of foods in addition to the National School Lunch Program meals will be based on nutrition goals, not on profit making.

Recent research indicates that students across the country are flunking healthy eating. Some of the most troubling indicators reveal that:

- Only 2 percent of youths meet all the recommendations of the Food Guide Pyramid; 16 percent do not meet any recommendations.
- Less than 15 percent of school children eat the recommended servings of fruit; less than 20 percent eat the recommended servings of vegetables; about 25 percent eat the recommended servings of grains, and only 30 percent consume the recommended milk group servings on any given day.
- Only 16 percent of school children meet the guideline for saturated fat on any given day.
- Teenagers today drink twice as much carbonated soda as milk, and only 19 percent of girls ages 9-19 meet the recommended intakes for calcium.

The partnership is one of the steps USDA is undertaking to promote nutrition and good health and follows the release of the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans at the National Nutrition Summit. Additional information can be found on Web site: www.fns.usda.gov/fns/

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