

Executive Summary

Poor eating habits, along with physical inactivity, contribute to obesity and other serious health problems. In the past 20 years, the prevalence of overweight has more than doubled among American children and tripled among adolescents. Concern has been raised about the nutritional quality of foods and beverages sold in schools outside of federally regulated meal programs. The good news is that many schools are making changes that make healthy choices the easy choice for students.

Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories tells the stories of 32 such schools and school districts from across the United States. K-12 schools, reflecting broad diversity in geographical location and demographics of the communities served, have implemented innovative strategies to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages sold outside of Federal meal programs. *Making It Happen!* is a joint project of the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture the Division of Adolescent and School Health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Education.

A key insight from *Making It Happen!* is that **students will buy and consume healthful foods and beverages—and schools can make money from selling healthful options.** Of the 17 schools and school districts that reported income data, 12 increased their revenue as a

result of the changes and four reported no change.

Themes from *Making It Happen!* include:

1. One champion, such as a parent, foodservice manager, or school principal, is usually the driving force behind the change.
2. Improving school nutrition involves multiple steps; teams with diverse skills and backgrounds are well-positioned to undertake such change.
3. A useful starting point is to assess the current nutrition environment of the school to identify strengths and weaknesses.
4. Attention to the change process is important in order to help sustain the change.
5. Improvements are occurring, but more data are needed to document their impact.
6. Change is occurring at **all** levels: school, school district, State, and national.

Making It Happen! begins by describing the importance of healthy eating for young people and how schools can support good nutrition, and provides information on the change process and school nutrition policies. The success stories are divided into six chapters based on the primary approach used to promote healthy eating, although in most cases schools and school districts used more than one of the following approaches:

1. Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods.

2. Influence food and beverage contracts.
3. Make more healthful foods and beverages available.
4. Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices.
5. Limit student access to competitive foods.
6. Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health.

Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods

Nutrition standards list criteria that determine which foods and beverages can and cannot be offered on a school campus.

Schools and districts featured in *Making It Happen!* established nutrition standards to:

- Ensure that foods available adhere to healthful nutrient and portion size specifications.
- Prohibit the use of “foods of minimal nutritional value” (e.g., soft drinks, gum, and some types of candy) in schools or as fundraisers.
- Adopt a “fruits and vegetables only” snack policy for snacks brought from home.

In a number of cases, nutrition standards were instituted as part of a comprehensive nutrition policy. Such policies addressed nutrition education, healthy school nutrition environments, staff development on nutrition, parent and community involvement, and school-based screening, counseling, and referrals for nutrition.

Influence food and beverage contracts

Food and beverage contracts give vendors selling rights in return for cash and non-cash benefits to the school or district. Schools and school districts can influence vending contracts by canceling them, not signing them, not renewing them, or negotiating contracts that promote healthful eating.

Examples of approaches used to influence food and beverage contracts in *Making It Happen!* include:

- Transfer the management of vending machines to the school foodservice program, giving it the opportunity to improve the nutritional quality and increase revenue without external contracts.
- Improve the nutritional quality of beverages available under an existing contract.
- Write a request for proposals for vending that pays a higher commission to the district for healthful beverages, increases the percentage of healthful items available, charges a lower price for the healthier beverages, and uses machines with fronts that depict children being physically active.

Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Making more healthful foods and beverages available makes it easier for students to make healthful food choices. *Making It Happen!* shows that healthful foods and beverages can be added wherever food is available, including à la carte lines, vending machines,

snack bars, student stores, concession stands at extra-curricular events, and school parties.

Making It Happen! is filled with examples of schools and school districts that made more healthful foods and beverages available, including:

- water
- 100% fruit juices
- milk
- cheese
- yogurt
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- vegetables and dip
- vegetable salads
- fruit salads
- whole grain breads
- bagels
- trail mix
- granola bars
- air-popped popcorn

At the same time they removed items such as candy, soft drinks, sweetened drinks, fried chips, deep-fried foods, and snack cakes.

Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices

Schools can promote the consumption of healthful foods and beverages by using the following marketing principles: (1) identify and offer healthful **products** that are appealing and meet student needs, (2) use product **placement** to make healthful products easy to choose, (3) use **promotion** strategies so that students know about these products and are motivated to try them, and (4) set their **price** at a level that encourages students to purchase them.

Making It Happen! schools and school districts adopted a variety of marketing techniques, such as:

- Conduct surveys to determine student opinions about healthful products.
- Offer samples of potential items to assess student response.
- Install state of the art vending machines and place them in high traffic locations.
- Place healthier items in vending machines at eye level and less healthful items on the bottom row.
- Involve students and staff in promotional activities using signs, contests, games, health fairs, advertisements, flyers, banners, and other means.
- Price healthful foods lower than the less healthful items.

Limit student access to competitive foods

Limiting access means making it more difficult for students to obtain competitive foods or beverages sold outside of Federal meal programs. Schools can limit access by reducing the number of places where students can obtain the foods, changing the location where food is sold so it is less accessible, or prohibiting the sale of foods and beverages at certain times during the school day.

Currently, Federal regulations only require that a school prohibit access to “foods of minimal nutritional value” in foodservice areas during meal times. Approximately 23 states have adopted more stringent regulations.

The *Making It Happen!* schools and school districts limited access in a number of ways, such as:

- Limit the number of snacks that elementary students can purchase.
- Reduce the portion size of dessert items.
- Reduce the number of soft drink vending machines.
- End student access to “foods of minimal nutritional value” in all school locations throughout the school day.
- Have vending machine-free elementary schools.

Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Fundraising supports student health when it involves selling nutritious foods and beverages or selling non-food items. Reward programs support student health when they use non-food items or activities to recognize students for their achievements or good behavior.

Making It Happen! schools and school districts implemented alternatives such as:

- Reward students by organizing walks with the principal rather than holding pizza parties.
- Sell fruit and gift wrap rather than candy or non-nutritious items as a fundraiser.

- Add juice, water, cheese trays, and fresh fruit and vegetable trays to classroom parties, and remove soft drinks and chips.
- Switch from selling items from a candy cart to selling items from a breakfast cart to raise money for a school student council.

The *Making It Happen!* stories are supported by examples of actual policies, regulations, letters to parents, nutrition standards, nutrition resources, and contact information from the schools and districts. All the information is designed to establish healthy school nutrition environments as a normal expectation of schools. *Making It Happen!* includes a form that invites readers to send in their success stories as a source of inspiration and motivation to others.

Improving the school nutrition environment is critically important because, as one principal said, “You cannot put a price on the benefits of good nutrition.” While initiating and implementing change may seem challenging, *Making It Happen!* shows that it can be done, with positive results. A student from one of the *Making It Happen!* schools captured the spirit when she said, “We can do anything! If we have a goal, we can meet it.”