



Pinellas County's Steps Program

Helping schools offer more lunchtime fruit and vegetable choices

What is the public health problem?

Overweight and obesity among the county's school students is an important public health issue.

- In 2005, Pinellas County school officials reported that 27% of elementary school students were overweight, according to body mass index measurements taken on students enrolled in physical education classes.
- According to 2005* Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System data, more than 27% of Pinellas County high school students were either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

How Steps is responding

The Steps Program implemented a salad program that offers convenient, nutritious prepackaged fruit and vegetable salads in school cafeterias.

- School administrators and cafeteria managers are educated about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, and the food service staff receives recipes and training on how to prepare nutritious salads.
- At the beginning of each school year, local vegetable distributors set up a farmer's market display at area schools to let students touch and taste different fruits and vegetables.

What is the impact?

- 84% of the schools participate in the salad program and 90% of the students and staff participate in the farmer's markets.
- Fruit and vegetable consumption has increased among elementary school students and staff. More than 3,750 students and staff members increased their intake of fruits and vegetables during the third year of the program.
- The Pinellas County School District ranked first in the state and was tied for second in the nation by the 2006 Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine's School Lunch Report Card. The district was recognized for encouraging the consumption of healthy foods and educating students about nutrition.
- The salad program has become so popular that it has expanded to include schools in other parts of the county.
- The school district also adopted a policy to provide physical education 5 days a week for all elementary school students.

Why this program is working

Offering healthier food items in schools may lead to increased consumption of healthier foods in a student population. Healthy eating in childhood and adolescence is important for proper growth and development and can help prevent health problems such as obesity and diabetes.[†]

* Most recent data available

[†] <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>