



Austin Independent School District (AISD), Austin, Texas

- 78,000 students in the capital city of Texas
- 54.3 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Words of wisdom

“We share in the community’s concern about nutrition education awareness, responsible eating habits, and childhood obesity.”

—*Dr. Pat Forgione, AISD Superintendent*

Key changes and results

Reported by Carey Dabney, Parent Volunteer and AISD SHAC Vice Chair

- Texas Senate Bill 19 (SB19), signed into law in 2001, mandated that all Texas schools create a school health advisory council (SHAC). Since it was established in March 2002, the Austin SHAC has been a national leader in promoting healthy school nutrition environments.
- During spring 2003, the AISD’s Initiative for Healthy Children recommended that the district and SHAC work together to create a plan to address student health by focusing on nutrition in the cafeterias, as well as the stocking of and access to snack and soft drink machines.
- In May 2003, AISD adopted a 5-year multi-strategy plan, developed by the SHAC nutrition sub-committee, to help schools create healthy school nutrition environments. The vision for the plan was based on guidance provided in the USDA’s *Changing the Scene* and NASBE’s *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*. [See Plan, page 191.]
- At a meeting of principals in June 2003, SHAC leaders asked for volunteer schools to pilot the multi-year plan. They had hoped for five schools to step forward—but

instead got 26 volunteers (20 elementary, 3 middle, and 3 high schools), nearly 25 percent of AISD's 103 schools! Staff in the pilot schools received orientation to the program by trained volunteers (including SHAC parents, a school board member, and American Cancer Society leaders).

- In summer 2003, the AISD Board of Trustees voted to make student health one of its top priorities.
- In July 2003, AISD Food Services implemented multiple changes on à la carte lines, including limiting chips sold in secondary schools to reduced-fat and baked chips, eliminating some high-fat entrées, and making fruits and vegetables available on each serving line. [See Food Services Memo, page 201.]
- In July 2003, with input from the SHAC, AISD hired a school health coordinator.
- In July 2003, the Texas Department of Agriculture directed all elementary schools to end student access to foods of minimal nutrition value (FMNV) during the school day and middle schools to do so during meal service. AISD chose to go beyond this directive and, in August 2003, the superintendent instructed all schools, including high schools, to end student access to FMNV during the school day [See summary of AISD regulations, page 203]. The superintendent also directed the contracted vendor to restock middle and high school machines with healthier beverages (water, sports drinks, juice, and milk). The snack vendor was directed to remove FMNV and principals were encouraged to select snacks from a list of healthier alternatives. On opening day 2003 (less than 2 weeks after the new policies), soft drinks and all other FMNV were gone from all 103 AISD schools during the school day.
- AISD policy also prohibits the sale of FMNV, including carbonated beverages, as a fundraising activity on school premises during the instructional day.

Keys to success

- **LAWS:** Texas Senate Bill 19 (SB19) led to the creation of the Austin SHAC. It also allowed the State board of education to mandate minutes for physical activity in all elementary schools, and required all elementary schools to have a coordinated health program in place by 2007. Senate Bill 1357 (2003) broadened the scope of SHACs to include all eight components of the CDC Coordinated School Health model.
- **CHAMPIONS:** A number of champions have contributed to change in Texas. State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr., is co-chair of a committee designed to guide

future state nutrition policy. Texas Secretary of Agriculture Susan Combs facilitated the move of staff from the Texas Child Nutrition Program to the Department of Agriculture, enhanced and enforced the rule regarding FMNV in Texas schools, and announced a Texas Public School Nutrition Policy in 2004. Dr. Edouardo Sanchez, Commissioner of Public Health, has assisted both Senator Lucio and Commissioner Combs. Dr. Pat Forgione, Superintendent of AISD, with the backing of the AISD Board of Trustees, extended the FMNV policy to cover grades K-12 in order to support the AISD Initiative for Healthy Children.

- **EDUCATION:** The SHAC educated decision-makers and parents about the need to improve nutrition and fitness at home—and at school.
- **PERSISTENCE:** There were, and are, many obstacles to improving the nutrition environments in Austin schools. Concerned parents, AISD administrative staff, and SHAC members will continue to advocate for improvements.
- **COLLABORATION:** Parents, schools, and communities worked together for change.

Description

There were the usual bumps in the road as Austin parents tried to make changes in what their kids were eating. The vending machine and booster club candy sales in front of the cafeteria were of particular concern to many. When parent Carey Dabney tried to enlist support for changes to the nutrition environment of her daughter's school, she was told that "no one was breaking any rules," and things just stayed the same.

When neither the principal nor the PTA was able to address her concerns, Ms. Dabney looked for support elsewhere and found it at the local chapter of the American Cancer Society (ACS). The ACS in Texas is a leader in promoting comprehensive school health education and in helping schools to develop SHACs.

Ms. Dabney received training and logistical support for her efforts from the ACS. She met others who had been working on the same issue for years—and became part of a collaborative effort in which people from different schools, health organizations, and State agencies worked together to make change. This process led to the passage of SB19 and the establishment of the AISD SHAC in March 2002.

The SHAC initially made recommendations on the district's physical education (PE) program. These were met with considerable negativity from the community and the district. It became apparent that, because of scheduling conflicts and budgetary considerations, changes to the PE program were going to have to evolve over time.

However, responses from the community and the school board to the SHAC indicated that nutrition was a primary concern. The district also expressed interest in improving the nutrition environment and made a commitment to work with the SHAC. The SHAC nutrition subcommittee began to review existing nutrition policies and interventions. The subcommittee chose USDA's *Changing the Scene* as the initial intervention.

Nutrition interventions were received more positively. A survey conducted by the food service department during the 2003-2004 school year indicated excellent compliance with the new AISD policy on foods and beverages. These changes, as well as a series of PTA newsletter articles on school nutrition, have helped position AISD to implement the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy.

The AISD "Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn" program has led to a variety of changes in schools, including: school gardens, school public service announcements on health and nutrition prepared by students, and improvements to the nutritional quality of food in school cafeterias. For the program, the SHAC received The Texas Department of Health Award for Excellence in Texas School Health.

Future plans

- Continue to implement the SHAC's 5-year strategic plan *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*.
- Partner with community groups and educational institutions to implement the Steps to a *HealthierUS* grant received in 2003 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to address diabetes, overweight, obesity, and asthma.

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Grand Forks Public Schools, Grand Forks, North Dakota

- 7,853 students in North Dakota's third largest city
- 27 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Limit student access to competitive foods
- Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Words of wisdom

“We take a common sense approach to issues, and everyone understands that. How can you argue with good nutrition when it makes good sense and it's the right thing to do?”

—*Dr. Jeff Schatz, Principal, Central High School*

Key changes and results

Reported by the district's Team Nutrition group

- On January 27, 2003, the Grand Forks School Board passed board policy 6175 on Nutrition Education Practices. The goal of the policy, first introduced to the board in 2000, is to assure that school nutrition environments in Grand Forks are in line with health messages being taught in classrooms. It calls on school administrators to monitor fundraising activities and for school personnel to serve as role models for healthy lifestyles. [See Nutrition Education Practices Policy, page 207]
- In March 2003, the first annual community Nutrition Fair was held at South Middle School. Vendors supplied products for tasting that followed nutrition guidelines set by the child nutrition staff. During the fair, cook managers held focus group discussions on school menu items. Educational and wellness booths were set up by area educators and health providers. About 250 people attended the fair, including school staff, families, and students. The Nutrition Fair is now an annual event.

- In fall 2003, 10 soft drink machines were removed from the district's two large high schools. Only two machines remain on each high school campus.
- The nutrition policy helped inspire the principal at Central High School, Dr. Jeff Schatz, to make substantial improvements in his school's nutrition environment. He removed all the school's candy machines. The School Store underwent a "snack makeover," based on research and presentations by its high school marketing class. The store removed all candy and added peanuts, gum, breath mints, and baked chips.
- Dr. Schatz challenged staff and students to find creative ways to fundraise without selling candy bars and other non-nutritive foods, which they did.
- Dr. Schatz reported that he had no negative response from staff or students on these changes.
- Mr. Jim Stenehjem, Principal of Red River High School, removed 50% of the school's vending machines.
- The Child Nutrition Program purchased milk and deli machines, offering healthy options for both high schools.
- Wellness classes for district staff also began in the fall 2003, offering college credits for teachers. The child nutrition director, health department dietitian, and staff from the University of North Dakota coordinated a series of classes in physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Class attendance has exceeded the expectations of the coordinators.
- Ben Franklin Elementary School adopted an all-school classroom snack policy of "fruits or vegetables" only. Implementing the policy included: an all-staff in-service, an all student in-service with fruit and vegetable taste-testing, and parent letters orienting all parties to the rationale and importance of the policy. This policy has been well received by all involved and is now accepted school practice.
- Ben Franklin's student Team Nutrition group, the *Sunny Side Ups*, promoted the selling of milk, bottled water, and baby carrots at extra-curricular school events. Since only soft drinks were sold previously, this effort helped make healthful choices the norm, and it also increased revenue from the fundraising events.

- In fall 2003, Public Health Department dietitians used a Midwest Dairy Council grant to begin a parent-teacher organization (PTO) campaign encouraging schools to serve milk at extracurricular school events. The effort also included presentations of nutrient-rich event “menus” to the PTOs at individual schools. Now, instead of offering only soft drinks, two schools adopted the “milk on the menu” program.
- In March 2004, information packets on the School Nutrition Policy were prepared for school staff. As each school receives orientation to the policy, more improvements to the school nutrition environment are expected (See page 209).

Keys to success

- **Team approach** to creating the school board policy
- **Attention to the process** in implementing an all-school fruits and vegetables classroom snack policy
- **Reference materials** such as CDC’s *School Health Index*; NASBE’s *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*; and USDA’s *Changing the Scene* kit
- **Collaborative atmosphere** created by establishing and maintaining positive relationships among school administration, staff, students, and community groups

Description

As a first step in developing the school nutrition policy, the Team Nutrition group brought together educators (from elementary, secondary, and university levels), school nurses, school administrators, foodservice personnel, health care providers, parents, and students. They used *CDC’s School Health Index* as a tool to conduct an in-depth assessment of the status of health policies and programs in the school district. The process helped the district target nutrition and fitness priorities.

At Ben Franklin Elementary School, the fruits and vegetables only policy sprang from a newsletter article written by a dietitian from the Grand Forks Public Health Department. The idea was embraced at Ben Franklin Elementary School, where it was presented at a staff in-service and as an all-school in-service to children (including a skit and taste-testing). All parents received letters orienting them to the changes. [See Snack Guideline materials and skit, page 225.] All staff received in-service on the guideline and all students have the opportunity to taste-test fruits and vegetables.

Future plans

- With passage of Nutrition Education Practices Policy 6175, the Team Nutrition committee will continue efforts to improve the nutritional quality of competitive foods throughout the Grand Forks School District.
- The Public Health Department will continue to promote the “fruits and veggie classroom snack policy” to be adopted on a school-wide basis.
- Foodservice will be involved with the committee deciding on vending contracts.

For more information on Nutrition Education Practices Policy and other school district changes, contact:

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Mercedes Independent School District Mercedes, Texas

- 5,000 total students in the southern tip of Texas
- 90 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Limit student access to competitive foods
- Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Words of wisdom

“As one of our committee members stated last year, ‘[I]t has taken a long time for us to have dug ourselves into this deep hole. It will also take time to crawl out of it.’ As I become impatient with our progress, I try to remember his words, and they calm me. We have been successful by taking baby steps toward achieving our goal, rather than bombarding our way through and creating a lot of opposition.”

—Donna Fryar, RD, SFNS, Assistant Director, Child Nutrition Services

Key changes and results

Reported by Donna Fryar, RD, SFNS, Assistant Director, Child Nutrition Services

- The district adopted a comprehensive nutrition policy—the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan—effective April 15, 2003. [See Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan, page 235.] The policy includes clear directions for action in each of the six components of a healthy school nutrition environment as defined by USDA’s *Changing the Scene*.

- The nutrition policy calls upon the School Health Advisory Committee to develop nutrition standards for foods and beverages offered at school functions; strictly limits the times when students can have access to foods of minimal nutritional value; limits the use of food as a reward for student accomplishment; and prohibits the use of candy as a fundraiser.
- In conjunction with the policy, all soft drinks have been removed from campuses and replaced with water, sport drinks, juice, and juice drinks. Some new options, such as fat-free ice cream bars, yogurt, and string cheese, have been added to the à la carte choices, and sales of these items have been strong.
- During the 2003-2004 school year, there was no significant change in foodservice revenue.
- State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr., presented the district with a Senate Proclamation in April 2004 to recognize district efforts to create a healthy school environment.
- Nutrition has become a topic of conversation throughout the district, with principals becoming much more aware of the items sold in their schools. Organizations are searching for other sources of income to replace candy sales.

Keys to success

- **RESOURCES:** Use of USDA's *Changing the Scene* to assess the environment and NASBE's *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn* to develop the initial plan
- **SUPPORT:** Backing from central administration and campus principals for the development of a plan focused on concerns for students' overall health
- **INVOLVEMENT:** Commitment of a diverse committee to develop the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan, including student services coordinator (chair); foodservice director and assistant director; and athletic director, as well as school staff members and three parents from each campus (all appointed by principals)
- **GRADUAL APPROACH:** Willingness to take small, gradual steps toward improving the nutrition environments in Mercedes ISD schools

Description

Mercedes nutrition policy was initiated by the district's 5-year self-improvement plan. The school foodservice director, assistant director, and student service

coordinator used USDA's *Changing the Scene* to conduct a self-assessment and NASBE's *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn* to develop a basic policy. They then organized a diverse committee to modify and fine-tune it.

The assistant superintendent provided important guidance in getting the policy adopted. Rather than a board policy requiring a lot of red tape, he suggested an administrative policy with the same effect—it had to be enforced. The policy, named the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan, was submitted to the superintendent. With his direction, the committee met with principals individually, got feedback, made revisions, and submitted a final plan for approval. This process began in June 2001, and the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan was finally approved in March 2002.

The hard work began at this point. The goal of foodservice staff was “implementation without alienation,” that is, to continue positive relationships with other staff and to avoid being perceived as the “Nutrition Patrol.” By spring 2003, however, it was clear to the superintendent that many schools were not truly implementing the plan and he asked the committee to revisit the nutrition plan and make it enforceable. The plan was tightened up and then approved by the board of trustees in April 2003.

In-service training for administrators was intensified at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. Most principals also included training for their staff on the effect of the plan's policies for their campuses. Some staff also made efforts to inform parents about how the plan affects what children can bring to school.

In spring 2004, the SHAC met and revised the district policy to make it more consistent with the new Texas Public School Nutrition Policy of the Texas Department of Agriculture. Now, schools need only refer to one document for policy guidance.

Future plans:

- Develop a specific list (e.g., name, brand, grams of fat) of healthier products for campuses to use as a reference and save time in selecting items.
- Work with curriculum specialists on appropriate nutrition education for all grades.
- Provide nutrition education in on-campus parent centers.
- Include the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan in the student-parent handbook each year.
- Implement the revised district nutrition policy.

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Mercedes, Texas Committee Members



Old Orchard Beach School Department, Old Orchard Beach, Maine

- 1,200 students in a small coastal town in southern Maine
- 28 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods
- Influence food and beverage contracts
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Words of wisdom

“Change is all about communication. We all know in our hearts that healthy children are better learners. We need to give them positive choices and a variety of options in all that we teach in our schools. If we model good nutrition in school and offer good tasty food choices, children will start making good choices at home and become involved in better health practices.”

—*Jackie Tselikis, RN, School Health Coordinator*

Key changes and results

Reported by Jackie Tselikis, RN, School Health Coordinator

- After a year and a half of planning and discussion, the Old Orchard Beach School Department gave final approval to a Vending Machine Policy in July 2003. [See Vending Machine Policy, page 245.]
- As a result of the policy, all soft drinks have been removed from vending machines and replaced by milk, water, and juices. Candy and high-fat snacks have been removed from vending machines and replaced by trail mix, pretzels, granola bars, and cereal/fruit snack mixes. Staff are changing the foods available in the staff rooms.

- In addition, the Old Orchard Beach School Department has improved school à la carte offerings, which now include homemade pretzels, bagels, salads, fruit, yogurt, and string cheese. Larger sizes of low-fat milk have been added to à la carte service and vending machines in the middle and high schools.
- Schools have maintained positive relationships with local vendors, with an agreement to purchase nutritious beverages and snacks only. Vendors did not lose contracts and they continue to supply and service school machines.
- Since the changes were made, income from vending and à la carte sales **have stayed the same at the high school and increased at the middle school.**
- School health services now measure students' height and weight in grades K, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7, from which they calculate the Body Mass Index. They use the information for statistics and health planning.
- The department has an active nutrition education program that features a variety of special activities. Theme days, such as Fifties Day and International Week, feature celebrations with special foods in the cafeteria, music, costumes, and decorations—all designed to boost the morale of staff and students while using a nutrient-rich menu. Elementary students help plan menus for class projects. High school students work with the foodservice director on menus and help teach nutrition classes for elementary students.

Keys to success

- **PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaboration between health services, school health personnel, and foodservices staff, along with support from the School Department administration
- **TEAMWORK:** Establishing a nutrition team
- **ATTITUDE:** Fostering a positive attitude toward health by all staff
- **COORDINATION:** Being a site for the Healthy Maine Partnerships initiative (www.healthymainepartnerships.com/about2.html), which coordinates State and local public health activities, and having a full-time school health coordinator to address issues

Description

The department's five-member nutrition team, which includes the school health coordinator, foodservices director, school nurse, a teacher, and a parent, attended a *Changing the Scene* conference in November 2001, and subsequently adopted a school nutrition plan. After the conference, the team met regularly to carry out its work plan and to educate staff, administrators, parents, and students.

The nutrition team worked closely with others who were implementing the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) curriculum in fifth grade classrooms. This curriculum focuses on nutrition, physical activity, and health education. They received several small grants to purchase supplementary nutrition education materials for the existing health curriculum. They also worked with teachers to provide lesson plans and classroom projects.

With unanimous support from administrators and the school health advisory team, the nutrition team drafted a Vending Machine Policy with the Old Orchard Beach Schools' policy committee. The policy was developed after reviewing the sample policies in NASBE's *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*. Additional guidance was obtained from CDC's *School Health Index* and USDA's *Changing the Scene*.

Future plans

- Continue to expand nutrition education curriculum.
- Add soup, sandwich, and salad options to à la carte sales at the high school.
- Publicize the new vending machine policy in the local community.

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Water Vending - Old Orchard Beach, ME
Jackie Tselikis and two high school students



School Union #106, Calais, Maine

- 842 total students in northern Maine
- 50.5 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Establish nutrition standards for competitive foods
- Influence food and beverage contracts
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Use fundraising activities and rewards that support student health

Words of wisdom

“Persistence is key when changing the nutritional environment in your school. Go into the process with energy and enthusiasm and armed with the knowledge that you are doing what's best for your students. They all deserve the right to healthier options. When making your case at school committee meetings or student meetings, bring healthy snack options to the staff and students. Let them eat while you plead your case. They'll realize that the proposed snacks and drinks can taste good and still be good for you!”

—*Heather Henry, School Health Coordinator*

Reported by Heather Henry, School Health Coordinator

In February 2003, Maine School Union #106 established a district-wide vending policy. The policy states that the only items recommended for sale in school vending machines are three types of beverages (100% fruit or vegetable juice, low-fat or non-fat milk, and water) and 12 types of snack foods. Schools can sell other items but they must be approved by a school committee assigned to this task, and they must meet the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) definition of a healthy food (namely, low in fat and saturated fat with limited amounts of cholesterol and sodium). Foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) are not allowed for sale.

The policy discourages schools from signing beverage contracts that require the sale of items not approved for sale in vending machines. It also discourages the sale of food items for fundraising except for approved items in vending machines.

Following the adoption of the policy, all six schools in the union have removed from their machines soft drinks and snacks that do not meet the definition of a healthy food. More healthful options have been added, including water, 100% fruit juices, breakfast bars, baked chips, and low-fat crackers. The change was implemented as part of a coordinated school health program, overseen by the school health advisory council (which includes parents and teachers) and supported by St. Croix Valley Healthy Communities, a Healthy Maine Partnership. The Healthy Maine Partnerships initiative (www.healthymainepartnerships.com/about2.html) coordinates State and local public health activities.

Changing the contents of vending machines in all six schools took 5 months, from the initial discussion to the replacement. Since making the change, the high school student council has reported an **increase** in revenue from some machines and **no change** in revenue from the other machines. [See Vending Policy, page 249.]

Changes in vending have encouraged gradual changes to meal options. Food service programs now serve low-sugar, whole-grain breakfast cereals instead of high-sugar cereals. Whole-wheat bread has replaced white bread. Changes to school nutrition environments are coordinated with initiatives to promote physical activity.

The changes in Calais are part of a statewide effort to improve school nutrition. One result of these efforts is that a major soft drink company agreed to remove all soft drinks and all associated labeling from all state schools. Soft drink machines are being replaced with water and juice machines.

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