

Lessons from the Field: Promoting Healthy Eating in Schools



**HEALTHY EATING
BY DESIGN**

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The Childhood Obesity Issue



Childhood obesity rates have increased dramatically over the past four decades and have reached an unprecedented level. Today, obesity is one of the most pressing health concerns for our children. One-third of American children and adolescents—about 25 million kids—are overweight or obese, and unhealthy eating is a leading contributor to the epidemic.

Unfortunately, a healthy diet is out of reach for many American children. Too many schools offer easy access to junk foods and sugary drinks, while providing few options for healthy appealing foods and beverages. In underserved communities, there is a lack of grocery stores that stock affordable fresh produce, and many families are not able to provide nutritious meals for their children. African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander children living in low-income communities are especially vulnerable to obesity.

The Healthy Eating by Design Approach

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic

by 2015. The Foundation is working to improve access to affordable healthy foods and opportunities for safe physical activity among children in schools and communities nationwide. In 2005, Healthy Eating by Design was one of RWJF's investments in this area.

The Healthy Eating by Design pilot project was established as part of Active Living by Design—a national program funded by RWJF that supports 25 community partnerships across the country that aim to increase physical activity and healthy eating by changing community design. In June 2005, 12 Active Living by Design community partnerships each received \$50,000 to help identify and implement promising healthy eating strategies during an 18-month period.

The overarching goals of the Healthy Eating by Design pilot project were to:

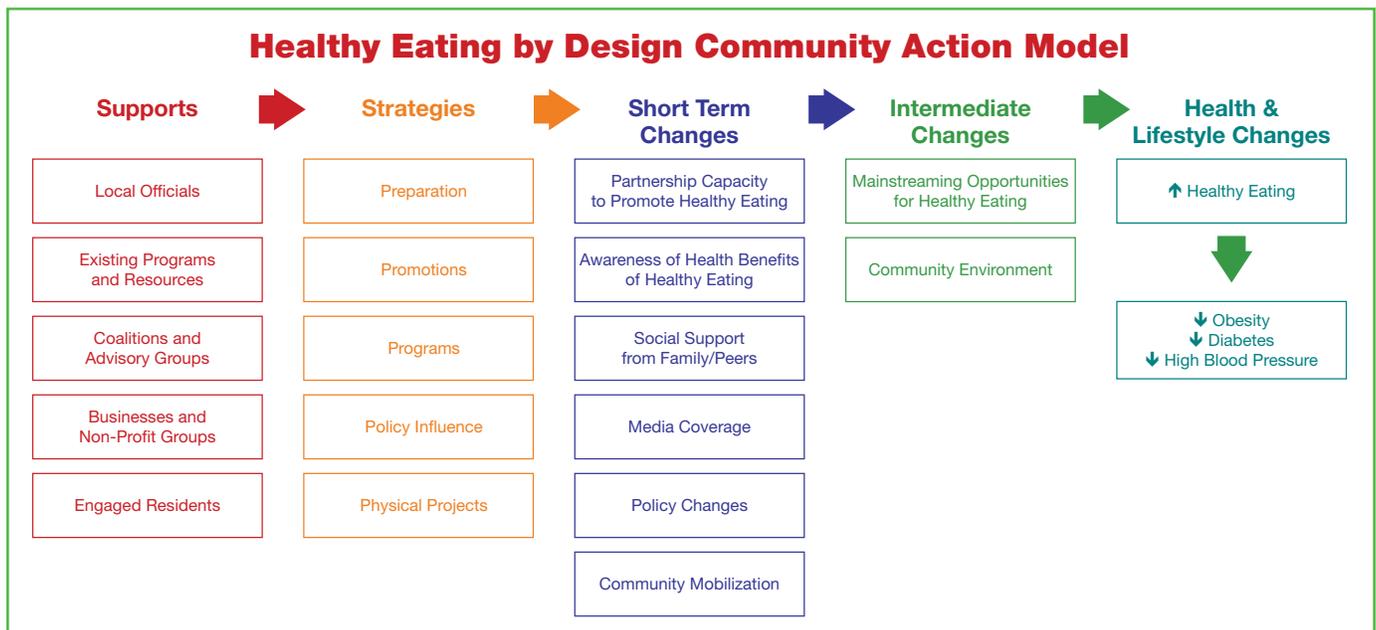
- improve access to affordable, healthy and appealing foods in schools and neighborhoods;

- demonstrate promising policy and environmental solutions for healthy eating that could be replicated in other communities;
- identify how integrated active living and healthy eating strategies could improve the health of our nation's children; and
- contribute to the emerging knowledge base for the prevention of obesity among children living in low-income communities.

The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships received technical assistance from the Active Living by Design national program office to support their efforts. Technical assistance included coaching, education, training, resources and facilitation in relevant content areas and program development, implementation and evaluation. Healthy Eating by Design partnerships also followed Active Living by Design's Community Action Model, which identifies key strategies and desired short- and long-term changes that are likely to create healthier communities. The model

was adapted by Active Living by Design and used as a framework for the Healthy Eating by Design pilot project (pictured below). Multi-disciplinary partnerships are the cornerstone of the model, and many of the existing Active Living by Design partnerships engaged new partners as they began their work on healthy eating initiatives. Thus, the communities had experience developing and implementing policy and environmental change strategies and were well positioned to develop initiatives that facilitate healthy eating.

The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships focused their efforts in either the school or community setting. They also implemented strategies to impact the home environments of children and families living in low-income communities. This report includes case studies that profile each of the seven school-based Healthy Eating by Design partnerships. It also highlights keys to success and lessons learned from the partnerships and pilot project, as well as a description of resources for communities interested in healthy eating initiatives.



The community action model shows how healthy eating strategies can be integrated into a community or school setting to increase access to healthy foods. Each of the 5P strategies is comprised of specific tactics. Preparation involves partnership development, assessment and sustainability planning. Promotions tactics involve targeted communications with project audiences and policy-makers. Programs are organized, on-going activities that encourage healthy eating. Policy changes aim to inform, influence and implement policies that support healthy eating. Physical projects directly improve the local environment and/or remove existing barriers to accessing healthy foods and healthy eating opportunities.

Case Studies

Albuquerque: Introducing Fresh Snacks to Students

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:
94% Latino

Median household income:
\$29,768

**Population living below
federal poverty line:**
23%

**Children qualifying for
free-/reduced-lunch:**
100%



Albuquerque, New Mexico

Lead Agency: 1000 Friends of New Mexico

Agency Type: Community development

Project Area: Public school outside downtown Albuquerque
in the Atrisco neighborhood

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Principal, teachers and cafeteria staff at local school
- School district food and nutrition staff
- Local Farm to Table program
- Neighborhood association

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

To encourage the 530 students at Valle Vista Elementary to try new healthy foods and eat more fruits and vegetables, the Fresh Snacks program provided more than 9,000 pounds of locally-grown produce during the school year. The food was procured from the Farm to Table/Farm to School program and delivered to students twice per week for mid-morning snacks. The Healthy Eating by Design partnership involved the school staff in the development of the program and paid for additional cafeteria staff time and kitchen equipment. The program was so successful that it served as a model for a summer snack program at Valle Vista and two other local elementary schools. Albuquerque Public Schools also included the Fresh Snacks protocol as part of its Wellness Policy Resource Guidebook, designed to help schools district-wide meet the wellness policy.

The Albuquerque Healthy Eating by Design project not only increased school staff and parents' awareness of the students' interest in healthy eating, their principal also created a guideline suggesting that teachers and staff avoid eating unhealthy foods in the presence of students and in the school's common areas. The principal, whose daughter attends the school, has been a role model in other ways. Instead of sending the traditional cake for her daughter's birthday party, she sent some of her daughter's favorite healthy foods such as bananas, cantaloupe and string cheese.

The program also had a positive effect at home. One student asked, **“Can I take my snack home for my brother? He's never tasted a pear.”** Families received healthy eating tips and resources through tastings at neighborhood events, newsletters and classes at the school's family resource center. The partnership also developed a healthy eating refrigerator magnet through a collaborative process that involved generating a list of potential slogans and voting by parents to select the slogan **“Snack Smart! Choose fruits and veggies!”** Student photos appeared on each magnet.

The Healthy Eating by Design project helped the partnership strengthen its existing networks and form new ones. For example, the project director joined the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council and led efforts to track statewide legislation with potential impact on access to healthy foods. The New Mexico state legislature passed seven priority bills related to healthy foods during its 2007 session. One of them, the New Mexico Grown Produce in School Lunches bill, is similar to the Healthy Eating by Design Fresh Snacks program and provides two additional servings of fruits and vegetables each week to schoolchildren. The Council's tracking efforts later served as a model in a policy panel presentation at the 2007 Southwest Marketing Conference.

More details about the Albuquerque community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/albuquerque.

School staff and parents became more aware of the students' interest in healthy eating—and the principal also asked teachers and staff to practice healthy eating behaviors in the presence of students and in the school's common areas.



Buffalo: Engaging Cafeteria Staff in Food and Fun

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:

58% African American,
34% White, 6% Latino

Median household income:

\$24,536

Population living below federal poverty line:

37%

Children qualifying for free-/reduced-lunch:

75%



Buffalo, New York

Lead Agency: Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus

Agency Type: Health, university-affiliated

Project Area: Public Montessori school in the Fruitbelt and Allentown neighborhoods adjacent to an urban medical campus

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Youth peer trainers
- Principal, teachers, cafeteria staff at local school
- School district food and nutrition staff
- Local food systems community organization
- Planning department faculty of local university

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

It takes a community to create a healthy school environment. This philosophy guided the work of the Buffalo Healthy Eating by Design partnership to their goal of improving access to healthy foods for students at Bennett-Park Montessori Center (BPM), a public school serving economically-disadvantaged children.

Students ages 11 to 13 participated in a variety of healthy eating activities, including a weekly salad bar in the school cafeteria, Food & Fun after-school workshops and special projects such as designing a “healthwalk” between the school and neighborhood, painting a healthy eating mural in the school and producing a healthy eating video. Students also exercised their creativity to develop a project slogan: **“You are what you eat—don’t be a Twinkie!”**

Every part of the project engaged partners who provided the expertise and resources necessary for success. The Food & Fun workshops, conducted by the Massachusetts Avenue Project, used a mentoring model in which older youth served as primary educators, and special projects were co-led by professionals from the Buffalo community. These activities provided BPM students with positive role models to reinforce what they learned through the program and encourage healthy eating behaviors.

The cafeteria staff played another essential role in creating the healthy school environment at BPM. In early conversations with cafeteria staff, the partnership discovered that the staff understandably wanted to feel as if they were an integral part of the project. The partnership responded, asking for input and participation in implementing the weekly salad bar, responding to the staff’s requests to brighten up the cafeteria with student art, providing Healthy Eating by Design logo t-shirts for them to wear when the salad bar was offered, and publicly recognizing the cafeteria staff as part of the partnership at media and promotional events. With these efforts, the cafeteria staff became champions for the project, encouraging students to make healthy food choices during school meals. According to a first-grader—who filled her plate with broccoli, cucumbers, sunflower seeds, cheese, a fresh apple, a roll and low-fat milk—**“They said to enjoy the food and take whatever you want!”**

It was this type of collaborative effort that helped the Buffalo Healthy Eating by Design project achieve real successes, many of which will be sustained. For example, the Buffalo School District took ownership of the salad bar and now offers it once a week to all BPM students. Additionally, the Food & Fun workshops are now included on the BPM after-school program roster, and the Massachusetts Avenue Project is poised to provide similar programs at other schools in the city. The future for larger-scale replication resulting from the Buffalo Healthy Eating by Design project is promising, as parents and staff from other schools have approached the partnership to learn how they can implement similar projects for their children.

More details about the Buffalo community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/buffalo.

The cafeteria staff became champions for the project, encouraging students to make healthy food choices during school meals.



Chicago: Student Adventures in Healthy Eating

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:
67% Latino, 25% White

Median household income:
\$35,456

**Population living below
federal poverty line:**
22%

**Children qualifying for
free-/reduced-lunch:**
93%



Chicago, Illinois

Lead Agency: Illinois Health Education Consortium

Agency Type: Health, university-affiliated

Project Area: Public school in the Logan Square neighborhood near downtown Chicago

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Local school council, principal, teachers and cafeteria staff
- AmeriCorps volunteer
- District food and nutrition director
- Neighborhood association
- Regional urban conservation organization
- Local ecological sustainability organization

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

With a spirit of adventure characterized by the school's namesake, teacher and astronaut Christa McAuliffe, first graders at McAuliffe Elementary School tried new foods and participated in healthy eating activities as part of the Healthy Eating by Design project. Each day, they sampled mid-afternoon fresh fruit or vegetable snacks and learned about healthy eating by visiting local farms and growing backyard and home container gardens with their families. Curricula integrating nutrition and gardening education into other subjects and visits by local farmers further reinforced healthy eating messages. Parents and families received newsletters and healthy recipes and participated in healthy eating adventures through after-school and evening healthy cooking demonstrations and gardening workshops.

These activities were a hit with students and families, and they led to noticeable healthy changes over the course of the Healthy Eating by Design project. More students tried new fruits and vegetables and increased their intake of the healthy snacks. More parents began participating in the cooking demonstrations, and many reported that their children were now asking them to purchase fruits and vegetables. Teachers and staff members also reported that students seemed to have more energy, greater concentration and improved readiness to learn after eating their mid-afternoon snacks. School records even showed a decrease in the number of first graders' afternoon disciplinary trips to the office—down from 16 in the year before the project to just two in the year it was implemented.

Central to the success of the Chicago Healthy Eating by Design project was the partnership's continuous efforts to communicate with school partners at all levels. For example, teachers initially had concerns about the snack program infringing on teaching time, making it difficult to keep classrooms clean and affecting the children's appetites before lunch. The partnership listened to the teachers and responded by changing the timing of the snack, delivering snacks in individual portions and providing hand wipes and garbage bags for trash. As a result, the teachers happily embraced the new snack program.

At the district level, strong communication was also important—and ongoing discussions with the Chicago Public Schools director of logistics for food service proved to be mutually beneficial. The partnership helped the director envision how the Healthy Eating by Design program could be replicated across the district. She responded with a commitment to continue funding the snack program through the students' first- and second-grade years. The director also purchased a salad bar at McAuliffe Elementary School to make fruits, vegetables, yogurt and other healthy foods available to students for breakfast and lunch. **“We are all taking this very seriously,”** said the director. **“We want to introduce more fresh fruits and vegetables and use more low-fat meats to help kids improve their eating habits.”**

More details about the Chicago community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/chicago.

Teachers and staff members reported that students seemed to have more energy, greater concentration and improved readiness to learn after eating their mid-afternoon snacks.



Cleveland: A Neighborhood Invests in Healthy Learning and Healthy Eating

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:

39% White, 38% African American, 24% Latino

Median household income:

\$26,090

Population living below federal poverty line:

62%

Children qualifying for free-/reduced-lunch:

95%



Cleveland, Ohio

Lead Agency: Slavic Village Development

Agency Type: Community development

Project Area: Public schools and a nonprofit community center located in Slavic Village, a post-industrial neighborhood

Healthy Eating Partners:

- School wellness teams at three local schools
- Nutritionist with city department of health
- Neighborhood Boys and Girls Club
- Local food system organization

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

Transforming what was once a low-income steel mill neighborhood into a more vibrant, family-friendly and healthy place is the mission of Slavic Village Development. To make this vision a reality, leaders of this community development corporation partnered with schools and neighborhood institutions to create better access to healthy and affordable foods for children and their families.

The Cleveland Healthy Eating by Design partnership worked intensively with three neighborhood schools, providing resources and support to help them form wellness teams and complete School Health Index assessments to meet the district-wide wellness policy. As a result, Healthy Ohioans recognized these schools for their health and nutrition policies and practices. Through the partnership's efforts, teachers at five neighborhood schools received the Healthy Learning, Healthy Eating: Integrating Nutrition into the Classroom toolkit developed by the Healthy Eating by Design partnership. The toolkit contains numerous ready-to-use, reproducible teaching materials, educational posters and DVDs.

During the course of the Healthy Eating by Design project, the partnership built and strengthened relationships with neighborhood schools and the Cleveland Municipal School District. The project director served on the district's wellness policy committee, and the partnership worked carefully to balance the needs of the schools with their own goals. As a result, the Healthy Eating by Design partners are now highly regarded by the school system as dedicated allies who will continue to provide assistance to five neighborhood schools.

The Healthy Eating by Design partnership also worked with the Broadway Boys and Girls Club to improve access to healthy foods for neighborhood children outside of school through Healthy Habits classes, daily healthy snacks, Kids Café healthy meals and healthy vending options. The Club plans to maintain their commitment to healthy eating by distributing fresh produce provided by the Cleveland Foodbank, continuing the Healthy Habits curriculum, and supporting the Kids Café program which trains older members to prepare and serve healthy foods to younger members. Creating healthier environments in schools and in the Boys and Girls Club inspired Slavic Village Development to identify opportunities for healthy eating within their own organization. The group collaborated with City Fresh to establish Slavic Village City Fresh Stop, a weekly farmers' market that offers locally grown, reasonably priced produce at a local park, and helps revitalize the neighborhood.

More details about the Cleveland community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/cleveland.

The Healthy Eating by Design partners are now highly regarded by the school system as dedicated allies who will continue to provide assistance to five neighborhood schools.



Columbia: Parents and Students Show Support for Healthy Changes

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:

61% African American,
31% White

Median household income:

\$8,359 – \$29,127

Population living below federal poverty line:

56%

Children qualifying for free-/reduced-lunch:

82%



Columbia, Missouri

Lead Agency: PedNet Coalition

Agency Type: Bike/Pedestrian advocacy

Project Area: Public school in a mid-size university town

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Principal, teachers and cafeteria staff at local school
- School district food and nutrition director
- Local Cooperative Extension Program
- County health department staff
- City cable access television director
- Local artist

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

A revolution against food advertising began with fifth-grade students at West Boulevard Elementary School. The Healthy Eating by Design project integrated a 12-week media literacy curriculum into the classroom to teach students about healthy eating and the impact of the media on food and health behaviors.

Guided by the director of Columbia Access Television, a registered dietitian and their teacher, the students' experience culminated in the production of

healthy eating video messages that were publicly screened at a local theater. After learning about how the media can influence their choices, students committed to adopting healthy behaviors, such as eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer fast foods and high-sugar foods and choosing more reasonable portion sizes.

Many of those behaviors have become healthy habits, as one student explained, **“I’ve been reading nutrition facts nonstop. It is a total hobby right now. Every time I pick something up, I read the facts.”** The students’ commitment to healthy eating extended beyond school—they became role models for healthy eating to their parents and peers. Even more students in Columbia will benefit from the media literacy curriculum and cooking program, as they will be replicated in four schools where more than half of the students are eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch.

First- and second-grade students at West Boulevard Elementary School also participated in the Tasty Bites program, which highlighted a different fruit or vegetable each month and provided samples twice weekly. The program helped expose students to new healthy foods, which were prepared and presented in various ways, to change students’ eating behaviors and attitudes. The Tasty Bites program also reached out to parents with fact sheets, recipes and opportunities to sample the fruit or vegetable of the month during family evening events at the school. At each evening event, parents also were eligible to win cooking equipment, ingredients and recipes for the fruit or vegetable of the month. The Columbia/Boone County Health Department will continue to support these activities in the future, which will allow more students and families to benefit from Tasty Bites lunch samples and newsletters.

These programs were further strengthened through policy and environmental changes at West Boulevard Elementary School. A local artist enlisted students to redecorate the cafeteria with bright murals that portray a variety of foods and illustrate the growing process from farm to table. The cafeteria murals also incorporate the philosophy of the school’s 5 STARR Points of Behavior: I am Safe, I Try Hard, I Achieve, I am Respectful, I am Responsible. This model for environmental change will be replicated through cafeteria redecoration projects at four other schools in the district.

Additional policy successes included updating the snack policy listed in the parent handbook to include healthy options and providing teachers with a list of healthy snack, party and fundraising ideas. The impact of the Columbia Healthy Eating by Design project led to the formation of a new Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids committee, which will address the needs of the Columbia Public Schools Nutrition Services and academic departments. The committee also will tackle pressing issues such as providing adequate time and a supportive environment for students to eat healthy meals at school.

More details about the Columbia community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/columbia.

The students’ commitment to healthy eating extended beyond school—they became role models for healthy eating to their parents and peers.



Denver: HEALing Students Through Healthy Eating and Active Living

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:
73% African American,
18% Latino

Median household income:
\$32,600

Population living below federal poverty line:
13%

Children qualifying for free-/reduced-lunch:
84%



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Denver, Colorado

Lead Agency: Friends of the Center for Human Nutrition

Agency Type: Health, university-affiliated

Project Area: Public school in a suburban new-urbanist Denver neighborhood

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Principal and teachers at local elementary school
- School district food and nutrition staff
- Culinary and dietetic students
- Local USDA Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program

Chefs-in-training from Johnson & Wales University taught Philips Elementary School students and their families to prepare recipes in ways that are healthy, affordable and—of course—delicious. With the culinary school located just a few blocks away from the elementary school, the Denver Healthy Eating by Design project provided an opportunity to bring neighborhood resources to the school and develop mutually-beneficial connections within the community.

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

Children and parents worked together to prepare healthy recipes and learn about nutritious foods, and the culinary students sharpened their skills in ways that were both practical and meaningful. Babysitting services for younger siblings were provided at the cooking classes to make it easier for families to participate. Families also received free produce each week as part of the fruit and vegetable distribution program. Snow peas, clementines, purple fingerling potatoes, avocados and other fruits and vegetables were given to students to take home along with nutrition information and recipes for the produce of the week. The distribution program also was an effective way to engage parents, as many volunteered to help.

A healthy eating environment also was created at Philips Elementary School. “Seedie Babies” (fruit and vegetable bean bag characters), colorful promotional signs and encouragement from cafeteria staff helped increase students’ consumption of fruits and vegetables at lunch. In the classroom, teachers delivered the Integrated Nutrition Education Program, which included nutrition lessons and simple food preparation activities. They also reinforced healthy eating with fun and colorful non-food rewards and fundraising such as school supplies and books, instead of candy and sweets.

The principal, Chuck Babb, was another invested partner who took action to implement a recess before lunch policy, after witnessing students rushing to eat lunch so they would have more time for recess. The policy was a hit with both students and staff. In addition, the principal reported fewer disciplinary problems in the afternoon as well as increased test scores, which he attributes to students spending more time eating a nutritious lunch. **“Collectively, these (healthy eating) programs were instrumental in changing the eating culture of students and parents, and I am also convinced that they contributed to our Colorado State Assessment Program test in reading success,”** said Mr. Babb.

With these and other changes that include a student walking club (which logged enough steps to walk across the United States), free healthy breakfasts on walk-to-school days and easy access to healthy foods at all school events, Philips Elementary School has truly changed its culture to heal its students through healthy eating and active living.

More details about the Denver community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/denver.

The school’s principal reported fewer disciplinary problems in the afternoon as well as increased test scores, which he attributes to students spending more time eating a nutritious lunch.



Seattle: Changes at School Teach Students and Families Healthy Habits

Project Population Quick Facts*

Race/Ethnicity:
80% African American

Median household income:
\$13,057 - \$47,431

Population living below federal poverty line:
15.5% - 49.6%

Children qualifying for free-/reduced-lunch:
87%



Seattle, Washington

Lead Agency: Feet First

Agency Type: Pedestrian advocacy

Project Area: Public school in a multi-cultural urban neighborhood

Healthy Eating Partners:

- Principal, teachers and cafeteria staff at local school
- School district food and nutrition staff
- Regional nutrition coalition
- Local USDA Basic Food Nutrition Education Program
- Public health nutrition faculty at local university

With dozens of countries represented by the diverse student body at TT Minor Elementary School, many students have traded the foods of their homelands for the fast food and other unhealthy choices that are, all too often, popular among American children. To address this issue, the Seattle Healthy Eating by Design partnership introduced traditional and ethnic cuisine into the school lunch menu. Recipes were solicited from students, parents, school staff, community members and local ethnic restaurants for dishes such as

* Project population quick facts for each case study are based on best available data provided in grant proposals, which were submitted April 2005.

Somali Spaghetti, Vietnamese sandwiches, Phat Prik Gai (Thai spicy green beans and chicken) and Louisiana Gumbo. Each month, students were served a different ethnic lunch meal with a menu card describing the meal, its cultural significance, and recipe and nutrition information. Parents also had opportunities to taste the ethnic meals at monthly family night events.

The healthy ethnic menu was one of many strategies intended to improve the overall nutritional environment at TT Minor Elementary School so that healthy eating habits would become the norm. Other programs included establishing the BullPup Marketplace to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to students throughout the school day, introducing a salad bar to the school lunch menu and redecorating the cafeteria with healthy eating artwork and photos.

These changes in the school environment were complemented by infusing nutrition education into non-core subject areas, such as library science, art and even family nights. This approach allowed students to learn about healthy eating without competing with classroom time and helped to ease teachers' concerns about the burden associated with adding nutrition education curricula. Another hands-on learning opportunity was created by making a healthy eating map that highlighted venues with healthy and affordable choices in the neighborhood, as well as taste testing, cooking and gardening classes.

A hallmark of the Seattle Healthy Eating by Design project was its ability to implement innovative strategies to increase healthy eating opportunities and coordinate with community partners to leverage resources and ensure that their work will be sustained as a model for other schools. The project used a staffing model which positioned a nutritionist within the school to serve as a liaison between staff and the Seattle School District. The model is based on a creative cost-share strategy that uses Food Stamp Nutrition Education funds and was instrumental to the project's success. The partnership plans to disseminate their best practices within their state and across the country to help others improve school nutrition policies and create healthier environments without significant cost to schools.

The successes of the Seattle Healthy Eating by Design project have already received significant attention, as the partnership was invited to host site visits for state legislators and lawmakers and for members of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. Plans are underway to replicate the project at several other schools in Seattle and potentially in other states so that more students will truly “Eat Better, Feel Better.”

More details about the Seattle community partnership are online at: www.activelivingbydesign.org/seattle.

Incorporating nutrition education into non-core subject areas helped students learn about healthy eating without competing with classroom time.



Keys to Success

How and why did these seven projects work? What did they accomplish collectively? Below are the innovative strategies behind the successful tactics and accomplishments shared by the portfolio of school-based Healthy Eating by Design partnerships.

The Partnerships Leveraged Resources and Ensured Sustainability

- The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships garnered more than a quarter of a million dollars in additional funding. In communities and schools, these funds were instrumental in supplementing staff time to coordinate and implement healthy eating strategies.
- They generated a wealth of resources, including time from volunteers, student interns and parents; nutritional education and gardening materials; and healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Several of the partnerships received post-grant funding and resources that will enable them to continue their work and disseminate best practices.

The Partnerships Evolved and Developed Community Capacity

- The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships created relationships with new partners and strengthened existing networks. Although the lead agencies already were engaged in policy and environmental work related to physical activity, the Healthy Eating by Design grants required them to identify and engage new partners with expertise in nutrition, food and school systems, gardening and other areas related to healthy eating.
- All of the school-based partnerships recognized the need to engage representatives at all levels of the school system, from teachers, administrators and cafeteria staff at the local schools to district-level school nutrition directors and board members. These partnerships have created tighter networks within the communities that will have a lasting impact.
- The partnerships leveraged the timing of the federal school wellness policy mandate with the start of the Healthy Eating by Design projects to engage in significant policy actions. Healthy Eating by Design partners became integral members of school

policy groups in their communities, influencing the development and implementation of district- and local-level school nutrition policies, including offering salad as a school meal program option, providing free school breakfasts, increasing the amount of time students have to eat lunch and making healthy foods available at after-school events and classroom celebrations.

The Partnerships Integrated Healthy Eating Approaches and Best Practices

- Many of the strategies to increase healthy food options within the school environment enhanced the existing school lunch menu by providing salad bar options or additional snacks.
- Nutrition education strategies were designed to minimize teacher burden and maximize healthy eating through healthy food preparation and gardening classes, farm and farmers' market field trips, and other experiential learning.
- Supportive changes to the physical school environment reinforced the Healthy Eating by Design projects' policy, program and promotion strategies and yielded positive benefits that extended beyond the student body. Providing salad bar, food preparation and cooking equipment also helped to build supportive relationships with school staff. Cafeteria redecoration projects created pleasant meal-time environments and expanded Healthy Eating by Design partnerships to include local artists, art teachers and students, and parents.

The Partnerships Engaged Families

- Offering hands-on opportunities, such as taste testing and cooking demonstrations and classes at school-sponsored events, made parents more likely to support their children's increased interest in healthy eating. The partnerships found that educating and influencing children often had a big impact on parents and families. This was evident from the numerous (and often unsolicited) feedback and words of support from parents, including this comment from a fourth-grader's parent **"The cafeteria can be a classroom, as well, and teach about food—learning doesn't just take place in the classroom."**

What We've Learned

Perhaps the most valuable feature of the Healthy Eating by Design pilot project is the collection of various lessons learned. The partnerships began with knowledge of their communities' needs, challenges and opportunities—and even more importantly, they embraced the flexibility allowed by the Healthy Eating by Design grant to test innovative approaches. The following lessons are based on the collective experiences of the partnerships, and are intended to help communities interested in doing similar work to prevent childhood obesity through school-based policy and environmental changes.

Comprehensive projects utilizing the Healthy Eating by Design Community Action Model, with an emphasis on policy and environmental changes, can achieve a significant impact on children's eating attitudes and behaviors.

The model and Healthy Eating by Design's approach includes the 5P strategies: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policy and Physical Projects (see Community Action Model on page 3). These strategies guide the partnerships' work to support healthy eating within their project area. Applying these strategies to a defined population within a specific project area best positions projects for success. Implementing program and promotion strategies was easier for the school-based Healthy Eating by Design partnerships than was policy change. Although policy efforts required more time and effort, the partnerships were successful in positively influencing school nutrition policy within their communities. Environmental change efforts, particularly those related to school capital improvements such as cafeteria kitchen redesign and major kitchen equipment, proved to be more challenging.

Integration of healthy eating and active living is both valuable and challenging.

Integrating multiple active living and healthy eating strategies requires a strong commitment to collaboration and learning. It also demands a serious investment in capacity building for partnerships that are not already addressing both healthy eating and active living. Full integration of the 5P strategies across both healthy eating and active living initiatives requires a solid understanding of the target population and the available resources. Successful projects also need diverse and supportive partners and a well-timed intervention that is designed to support both healthy eating and active living behaviors over time. Lastly, the partnerships must respond to changing priorities and situations with flexibility and creativity.

The timing and duration of school-based initiatives must be considered within the context of the academic calendar.

The Healthy Eating by Design projects began in June 2005, leaving most partnerships less than three months to plan and complete the necessary activities in order to implement strategies at the beginning of the school year. The duration of the grant and the length of the academic calendar also impacted the potential to refine and re-implement promising strategies. The importance of timing and duration also relates to building strong and trusting relationships with schools, a partnership's ability to respond to staffing changes that are not uncommon in schools, and being present when schools determine they are ready for change. Though the pilot project had a fairly defined focus in terms of geographic area and population, all of the partnerships felt they could have achieved more—even with just six months of additional time.

Partnerships can evolve in ways that enable them to be continually effective in addressing school issues.

This evolution should include acknowledging gaps in a partnership's expertise, experience and capacity and forming relationships to fill them. However, a balance must be maintained so that partnering organizations do not drift from their mission. The Healthy Eating by Design grants required some of the Active Living by Design partnerships to stretch beyond their primary areas of focus. While some lead agencies whose mission did not encompass healthy eating were challenged, others created new networks which led to larger-scale opportunities and improved organizational capacity. Many of the community partnerships also learned that having partners who recognized that there may be different approaches to achieve a common vision and had a personal passion for healthy eating, helped make their work easier, more efficient and rewarding. Early identification of common missions and goals, as well as tangible, mutually beneficial outcomes helps create cohesive and committed partnerships.

School staff at all levels must be engaged in all phases of a project to ensure success.

Although the Healthy Eating by Design projects targeted local schools, all of the partnerships needed to work with district-level school staff who had responsibilities for wellness policies, food procurement and cafeteria staff supervision. Working with district school staff enabled the partnerships to inform and influence changes with the best potential for long-term, broad sustainability. Champions within the local school are also

a valuable resource. Several of the Healthy Eating by Design partnerships relied on staff members as trusted insiders who could provide practical insight to the partnerships and serve as champions for their work. These staff members also served as positive healthy eating role models for students and other school staff. While some of the Healthy Eating by Design partnerships formed allies with existing staff, other partnerships used resources to position a project staff member within the schools. Doing so minimized burden on school staff related to project implementation while providing a liaison between the school district and a resource for immediate and ongoing support.

Competing and pressing priorities of schools, particularly those serving children in low-income and culturally diverse communities, must be honored.

Although outside organizations bring needed resources and expertise, the school must be a leader and should have significant input in all phases of a project to ensure access, cooperation and lasting success.

Incremental and simple changes can have a meaningful impact. They may be the best approach when working in schools in low-income communities, where residents may face other challenges that can take priority over healthy eating.

While it is well understood that many behavior changes occur best when implemented in incremental steps over a period of time, the nature of grant-funded projects with finite durations can make this challenging. The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships had the flexibility to adjust strategies and timelines to meet their communities' needs and respond to emerging opportunities, particularly in the policy arena.

Repeated exposure to and availability of healthy foods can positively influence healthy eating habits among school children.

The Healthy Eating by Design partnerships observed that the social setting within schools seemed to play a role in encouraging students and their parents to try new foods. Positive peer pressure and an atmosphere of shared new experiences may be influencing factors.

After-school programs are best positioned for success when potential barriers affecting participation are addressed.

Issues such as limited access to facilities, lack of transportation, childcare responsibilities and competing after-school activities

can affect the success of any after-school program. Healthy Eating by Design partnerships that addressed these issues early in the program felt that they more successfully engaged parents and families. Providing childcare at cooking classes, scheduling healthy eating programs so they do not coincide with after-school sports, and collaborating with staff responsible for cleaning and locking school facilities were strategies that contributed to the success of the Healthy Eating by Design after-school programs.

Children can be the best and most influential messengers to encourage healthy eating changes for parents and their families.

Bridging to the home environment and actively engaging parents was challenging across all of the Healthy Eating by Design projects. While the partnerships recognized that it would take more than school-to-home materials to be effective, it was difficult to find times and venues to reach a significant number of parents through project activities.

Future projects should consider using appropriate evaluation tools to build the evidence for promising community-based healthy eating strategies that are not burdensome to schools and partnerships.

Evaluation was not a required component of the Healthy Eating by Design project. Some partnerships reflected that data and documentation related to their projects' impact would have helped as they sought resources to continue and disseminate their work. Yet, to their credit, all of the partnerships were successful in securing resources or identifying partners to institutionalize and continue best practices from their Healthy Eating by Design projects.

Demonstration projects led by community partnerships are sound investments in identifying promising strategies to address the childhood obesity epidemic.

Investing in the current Active Living by Design partnerships to address healthy eating was a wise and resourceful strategy, as it enabled partnerships to build upon their experience and skill in implementing policy and environmental community change, and capitalized upon their understanding of their communities. This understanding made it easier for the partnerships to serve low-income populations.

Resources

Active Living by Design:

www.activelivingbydesign.org

Active Living by Design helps communities increase routine physical activity and healthy eating through changes in policy and community design. Active Living by Design offers technical assistance and strategic consultation to communities, professionals, nonprofit agencies and philanthropic organizations across the United States.

Healthy Eating by Design:

www.activelivingbydesign.org/hebd

The Healthy Eating by Design pilot project provided 18 months of funding and technical assistance to 12 of the 25 Active Living by Design community partnerships to test approaches to provide affordable, healthy and appealing food options in lower income communities where children live, learn and play. A second phase of this initiative provides one year of funding and technical assistance to four Healthy Eating by Design community partnerships to support the development and implementation of dissemination and sustainability strategies.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: www.rwjf.org

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. Helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need—the Foundation expects to make a difference in our lifetime.

Healthy Schools – Local Wellness Policy: www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html

A law passed by Congress required local educational agencies to establish school wellness policies by school year 2006. This law recognizes that schools play a critical role in promoting student health, preventing childhood obesity and combating problems associated with poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Kids Café Program:

www.secondharvest.org/how_we_work/programs_we_support/kids_cafe.html

America's Second Harvest launched the national Kids Café program, which provides free meals and snacks to lower income children through a variety of existing community locations where children congregate, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, churches and public schools. In addition to providing hot meals to hungry kids, some Kids Café programs also offer a safe place where children can get involved in educational, recreational and social activities that draw on existing community programs and often include family members.

National School Lunch Program:

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day.

National Farm to School Network:

www.farmentoschool.org

The National Farm to School Network focuses on five key areas – policy, networking, media and marketing, information services and training, and technical assistance to support the farm to school movement in the country. The network is jointly coordinated by the Center for Food & Justice and the Community Food Security Coalition.

School Health Index:

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

The School Health Index (SHI): Self-Assessment & Planning Guide is a tool that schools can use to improve their health and safety policies and programs. The SHI was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in partnership with school administrators and staff, school health experts, parents, and national nongovernmental health and education agencies.



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