

REPORT TO THE BOARDS OF HEALTH

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Mid-Michigan District Health Department, Wednesday, September 23, 2015
Central Michigan District Health Department, Wednesday, September 23, 2015
District Health Department 10, Friday, September 25, 2015



• *Improving Nutrition in Schools*

Optimal nutrition for people over 2 years of age was defined by the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs). Until recently, school nutrition programs were based on outdated 1995 dietary guidelines (1). Children attending school receive 35-40% of their daily calories while at school (2). The new USDA Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program started with the 2012-2013 school year. It was spurred by a report from the Institute of Medicine that commented on the poor nutritional value of most school food programs. These standards increased the portion sizes of fruits and vegetables and required that a serving of fruits or vegetables be taken with each meal. Grade specific limits were placed on calories, fat and sodium. Any food sold on campus during the school day must be rich in whole grains OR have a first ingredient of fruit, vegetable, dairy or protein OR be a combination food with at least ¼ cup of fruit or vegetable OR contain 10% of the daily value of calcium, potassium, vitamin or fiber. They may provide plain water, unflavored low-fat milk, unflavored or flavored fat free milk, or 100% fruit or vegetable juice. These guidelines must be followed in order to receive federal funding to help cover the costs of school breakfast and lunch programs. Initially there were concerns how this program would be accepted by students and if there would be increased food waste. It has been accepted better than expected, depending mainly on the type of menu the school provides. Milk consumption has decreased some since the milk fat decreased but previous studies have found that with time, as tastes adjust, this rebounds. Fruit intake has increased as has vegetable consumption (3).

Competitive foods are less nutritious options (or empty calories) that vie with more nutritious options. Students are exposed to competitive foods via à la carte lines at mealtimes, classroom snack time, vending machines, school stores, classroom parties, fundraisers, and other school event. During the federally-funded meal period, schools are not allowed to sell foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) such as chewing gum, soft drinks or certain candies. Congress enacted the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which required the development of federal nutrition standards for all competitive foods sold in-schools during class time hours. It does not regulate any donated foods that are not for sale, such as parent donated class snacks, foods contributed for birthdays or parties or teachers using food or candy as a reward. It does not address foods available during sporting events or other after school activities. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has provided recommendations for all competitive foods, including those not for sale from the school. The states can enforce policies that are stricter than the federal policies (3). Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have laws addressing competitive foods in schools (4). Michigan has policies that recommend but do not require schools to implement nutrition standards for competitive foods. Healthy Schools Action Tools (HSAT) (<http://mihealthtools.org>), provided by the state of Michigan, are comprehensive tools designed to help Michigan schools and districts create a culture that supports health of school environments, and then planning and implementing improvements based on best practices. It addresses:

- Healthy Eating
- Tobacco/Nicotine-Free Lifestyles
- Social & Emotional Health
- Health Education
- Physical Activity & Physical Education
- Safe School Environment
- Staff Wellness

Suggested Recommendations to the Boards of Health:

1. Encourage school districts in your counties to register their schools with Healthy Schools Action Tools, develop a team for healthy school assessment and action planning and complete an assessment as guided by HSAT.
2. Encourage the schools to use the assessments to guide change toward healthier schools to promote healthier children and improve learning and health. Use the numerous tools and resources provided by HSAT to help with these changes.

- (1) Ervin RB, Kit BK, Carroll MD, Ogden CL. *Consumption of added sugar among U.S. children and adolescents, 2005–2008*. NCHS data brief no 87. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 201
- (2) Cohen et al. *Impact of the New U.S. Department of Agriculture School Meal Standards on Food Selection, Consumption, and Waste*. 2014;46(4):388–394
- (3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Competitive Foods and Beverages in U.S. Schools: A State Policy Analysis*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.
- (4) <http://stateofobesity.org/state-school-food-laws/>