

healthy learning News

**SUPERINTENDENT
SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD**

WINTER | 2009

A healthy school environment is important to the well-being, development and achievement of students. Schools have the potential to influence children's food choices and daily activity levels, and present a wonderful opportunity to introduce and encourage healthy habits. The following school districts are implementing innovative programs, policies and practices that are creating healthier school environments for students and staff.

Beyond the Schoolhouse Doors: Using External Resources To Build and Sustain Innovative Physical Education and Nutrition Programs

Across the United States, there is growing concern about the high rates of childhood obesity. Children's and teens' access to healthy food and physical activity is of utmost importance in preventing obesity-related diseases. Schools, naturally, can play a crucial role in fighting childhood obesity. Indeed, schools can have more influence on youths' lives than any other societal institution. Because children and teens spend so much time in school, healthy habits established early on may have the potential to last a lifetime.

In this era of diminishing resources, many school administrators are faced with the question of how to balance the budget and ensure that children are well-nourished, physically active and

ready to succeed academically. This issue of *Healthy Learning News* provides some ideas about how to fund and sustain innovative programs.

For the past two years, the American Association of School Administrators has been visiting public school superintendents, staff, students, parents and the broader community to learn about successes in healthy eating and physical activity in schools. We have also shared lessons learned with educators, health professionals and child advocates across the country.

Congress allocates the funds for the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, and physical education is often supported by state funding. Yet in many school systems, these funding sources only cover the basics. This is

certainly true for the two districts highlighted here. So, how do school systems get more to do more?

This issue will shed light on two school systems that wanted to do more for children despite their basic budgets. These school systems are the Los Angeles Unified School District and Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Although both districts are urban and incredibly diverse, their thinking and actions can be applied to districts of every size. Also, despite their seemingly large operating budgets, these districts use basic state and federal funding for physical and nutritional activities. In Miami-Dade, PE allotments come directly from each principal's budget, while LA Unified benefits from the state adopting PE standards and state legislation appropriating one-time funds for physical education

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- ◆ Policy To Improve the Food Environment in Low-Income Communities

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States.

This profile was produced with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Beyond the Schoolhouse Doors: Continued from cover



equipment/supplies and professional development. Additionally, LA Unified received 55 Physical Education Teacher Incentive Program grants from the state of California that added several million dollars to the district's commitment to hire and train physical education instructors in grades K–8.

These school systems have taken the next step, establishing innovative activities through external sources: federal cooperative agreements; foundation and corporation grants; reimbursement programs; individual donors; and community partnerships. Through their grant-seeking efforts, they are providing more opportunities for children and teens to become fit and healthy.

In addition, Miami-Dade and LA Unified are ahead of the curve in their thinking about sustaining these efforts after external support is gone. Activities for sustainability include leaning toward the use of coordinated models that build the infrastructure, community

engagement and school system leadership. LA Unified, for example, uses a coordinated school health approach to bring together a diverse team of people — school administrators, teachers, staff, students, families and community members — to assess health needs and implement and evaluate school health program activities. A school health coordinator leads this effort and is guided by a school health council. The focus is on integrating efforts across eight components recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This coordinated infrastructure maximizes the district's potential to sustain district health activities.

In Miami-Dade, schools have wellness councils as a result of the Federal Reauthorization Act. In addition, 220 schools in Miami-Dade participate in the Healthy Schools Program through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton

Foundation. In 2007 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided a \$20 million grant to expand the Healthy Schools Program nationally. In addition, the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation provided a four-year, \$2 million grant so the Healthy Schools Program could be implemented districtwide. The Health Foundation of South Florida and the Peacock Foundation also provided funding to help build capacity to maintain the program once the initial grant has ended.

Both districts built state-of-the-art fitness centers in middle and high schools with external funding. Miami-Dade received support from Apple Computer Inc. and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program. PEP grants, disseminated by the U.S. Department

has also received support from PEP grants, the Weingart Foundation and nearly \$3 million in private funds.

LA Unified takes full advantage of the staffing and support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to help low-income students and their families. Similarly, through partnerships with health plans and hospitals, Kaiser Permanente physicians examine students in health clinics, and staff at Northridge Hospital teaches students and parents about healthy cooking.

Miami-Dade has taken the concept of individual donors and community partnerships to a new level. When budget cuts eliminated several of the swimming instructors, the physical education



of Education, can be used to purchase equipment and provide staff training in conjunction with state standards. In a strategic move, Miami-Dade applied for a PEP grant and also worked with other community agencies to apply for additional PEP funding, all benefitting students in the school system.

Through collaboration with the Cynthia L. and William E. Simon Jr. Foundation, LA Unified has created fitness centers in 51 high schools in Los Angeles. And there are plans to open more fitness centers in 50 middle schools over the next three years. The program

department appealed to the community to "buy a teacher" — and the call was answered. One local partner donated enough to pay the salary for one staff member to teach swimming and physical education for an entire school year. The district partners with the Aventura Marketing Council and individual donors purchase boats for the water sports program. The program, called Anchors Away, names each boat after its benefactor. Additionally, the Miami Yacht Club and the Coconut Grove Sailing Club donate storage and provide the venue for these activities at no cost to the school district. ◆

Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles, Calif.

Superintendent: David Brewer • Total Number of Schools: 982 • Total Number of Students: 708,700
• Free and Reduced Lunch: 78% • Demographics: 11% African American, 73% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 9% White

Prioritizing PE and Using Space Creatively

Miami-Dade encourages students to be physically active by providing state-of-the-art fitness equipment and offering a variety of courses, including yoga, Pilates, swimming, boating and other water sports. And the district's efforts are paying off for its students. On the FitnessGram, an instrument used to assess student fitness, the district met all six health-related fitness standards in grades 6 to 12. In a University of Miami-led five-year evaluation of their PEP-funded activities, overweight students lost an average of 8 pounds per semester while gaining other fitness benefits.

PE classes in Miami-Dade take advantage of the outdoors and many natural resources, especially the water. Water sports programs operate through long-standing partnerships with the Coconut Grove Sailing Club, the Miami Yacht Club and Oleta River State Park. Students can explore sites in the park and experience deep-sea fishing, kayaking and boating. Students also learn about the water sports industry, which may lead to a lifelong active hobby and even career opportunities.

Miami-Dade water sports programs, taught by the district's certified

physical education teachers, were created to help all students feel comfortable and safe in and around the water. The programs provide lessons to students with limited swimming experience, as well as those who have physical or cognitive disabilities. The programs provide all-terrain wheelchairs, specially-adapted boats, access dinghies and other equipment to ensure that all students can participate. Through grants, local partners and individual donors, the district has purchased individual sail boats, kayaks and portable pools. The pools are taken to each elementary school for nine weeks at a time to provide swimming lessons to approximately 10,000 students per year. Miami-Dade has also created an extensive water safety manual, and all students must pass a swimming test before being allowed to participate in water sports.

LA Unified School Board unanimously adopted the school board resolution "Physical Education is a Priority." This resolution mandates elementary credentialed multi-subject teachers to teach physical education to their class each school day to meet the state-level requirements of minimum minutes for PE for students and has a strong focus on PE standards. To creatively address professional development while minimizing disruption of the

multi-subject teacher's instructional class time, the district utilizes the single-subject physical education teachers to visit classes once a week to provide demonstration lessons. The benefit of this approach is that the multi-subject teacher observes quality physical education instruction and develops a deeper understanding of the content knowledge. The district is also making every effort to keep PE class size comparable to core classes.

Fitness Centers

In LA Unified, many school buildings are located in neighborhoods where students can walk and bike to school. In high-poverty high schools, funding from the local Simon Foundation helped create fitness centers for PE classes and general physical activity by students, staff and families during and after the school day. They are so popular that the district decided that all new high schools will have fitness centers included as part of their design. Again, with foundation support, plans are under way for fitness centers in several middle schools.

Miami-Dade has fitness centers in 19 of 63 middle schools and 38 of 41 high schools. All future middle and high school construction will include them. Traverse climbing walls, "Dance Dance Revolution" stations, game bikes, stretching stations and traditional equipment such as elliptical machines, treadmills and stationary bikes are all part of the fitness centers. Using iPods, students can monitor their heart rate, learn nutrition information and track exercise or eating habits. The iPods are synched with academic lessons for integrated curriculum. Students listen and watch on video monitors built into the treadmills while exercising, enabling those who need extra help in an academic subject to receive it without losing time from

physical education. Use of the iPods is also proving critical to increasing health literacy.

Engaging Students and Family in Nutrition and Healthy Meals

The LA Unified Food Services Branch serves approximately 550,000 student meals daily. The food services branch is embarking on a strategic plan to revolutionize almost every facet of its Café L.A. meal-service program by revitalizing the taste of student and faculty meals, enhancing meal presentation, and creating an environment that will make students feel invited and welcomed into cafeterias. The district expanded the food services branch management to include an executive chef whose main focus is to work on new menu strategies and presentation techniques.

In addition, new modern serving lines that have a customer-friendly, self-service merchandized look are being installed to improve student access to meals at 55 secondary schools over the next six months. The district is simulating a food court or café experience to attract teens back to eating lunch in the cafeteria. The outdated service lines are being replaced with multiple, mobile serving lines, which include hot and cold merchandisers for fruits, vegetables and pre-packaged meals, as well as hot servicing tables and point-of-sale stands.

With the Café L.A. concept, the district estimates an increase in student access to healthy meals by an average of 22 percent each day at district schools.

The Network for a Healthy California-LAUSD is a collaborative effort among Los Angeles students, parents, administrators, teachers, school nurses, food service staff and community members. The network is funded by the U.S. Department of



Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Fla.

Superintendent: Rudy Crew • Total Number of Schools: 412 • Total Number of Students: 336,400
• Free and Reduced Lunch: 62% • Demographics: 28% African American, 61% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 10% White



Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Over 300 high-poverty schools in LA Unified participate. These schools receive technical assistance and access to a variety of nutrition education programs for students, parents and the community.

The Harvest of the Month program teaches students about specific fruits and vegetables in the classroom that are then incorporated into school lunch menus. A resource handout is provided to teachers to use with their students in the classroom. In addition, a parent insert is also provided for the purpose of extending the nutrition education to the home. Some schools opt to design murals that beautify school campuses and share important health messages, while others bring in theatrical productions to make health lessons entertaining. Through the network, teachers can bring chefs into the classroom for hands-on healthy cooking demonstrations that introduce new foods while teaching food safety and preparation skills. The network also provides teacher resources, professional development and parent and family education.

Family is also the focus of LA Unified's partnership with Northridge Hospital. The hospital

offers parent outreach classes, which include the creating of healthy recipe books, potluck dinners with healthy meals, and outreach programs that update parents on the district's health programs. As a result, parents feel connected to their local schools and understand the types of services are available to families.

Connecting Physical Education, Nutrition and Academic Instruction

Miami-Dade exposes students to new physical activity opportunities while incorporating academic concepts. PE-certified teachers play a role in preparing students to take the FCAT, Florida's statewide standardized test, by creating practice test questions. The questions are geared toward PE topics that incorporate the skills and knowledge needed for the test's math or reading sections. This cross-department effort ensures that the questions are relevant to the FCAT and address physical education concepts, and that students have adequate practice time. Nutrition is linked to curricular areas such as social studies (food customs, foods around the world), math (measuring ingredients, body weight calculations, reading food labels) and the arts (music, puppetry, nutrition songs), again linking healthy behaviors to core academic subjects

that students must learn. Nutrition education is a state mandate taught in physical education.

LA Unified incorporates the academic curriculum into PE classes by having students use math to calculate their heart rates and keep journals or logs describing how activities make them feel or what skills they have learned. Behaviors like cooperating, partnering and people skills are reinforced through PE, especially at the middle school level. Through the Network for a Healthy California-LAUSD, the planning, preparation and enjoyment of food in the classroom transitions into an educational experience that can be woven into many curricular areas, even math and history.

Health Clinics

Wellness centers and clinics have been created in several LA neighborhoods. For example, Local District 1 has three wellness clinics designed to serve under- or uninsured students and families. A partnership with Kaiser Permanente and El Proyecto Del Barrio enables the clinic at Kennedy High School to have on-site physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners. Individual and family therapy is available through a social worker, and students in need of ongoing support are assigned a case manager to track outcomes and health interventions.

The Healthy Kids Clinic at Kennedy focuses on providing care for issues related to overweight and obesity as well as mental health. Students can refer themselves to the Healthy Kids Clinic for advice and counseling about nutrition, physical activity and body image, or they can be referred by a school nurse or physician after a routine physical. Clinic staff completes an assessment to determine the areas in which students may need assistance.

Students set their own physical activity and/or nutrition goals and are seen on a routine basis. To assist students in managing their weight, there is a registered dietician on site. The mental health component of the clinic, as supported by Northridge Hospital, is available to support students who are experiencing mental health issues related to obesity and may be connected to the physical activity and healthy lifestyles programs.

Coordination

In a school system as large as LA Unified, the large numbers of possible community partners and the ability to purchase food for school lunches in bulk gives the district greater bargaining power. This leverage can help the district negotiate lower prices for healthier foods. On the other hand, a district of this size also faces major challenges in coordinating programs and services among departments and its eight local districts. With an emphasis on CDC's Coordinated School Health model, the district ensures that each of the departments that address health communicate with one other, share resources and address issues and challenges as a team. For example, the asthma program coordinates with the physical education department so that students with asthma are able to fully participate in PE classes and have access to their inhalers and other asthma medications, when needed.

Leadership Matters

Miami-Dade Public Schools

Superintendent Rudy Crew made public engagement a priority. This is a necessity in a school community as large and diverse as Miami-Dade County. The five-year strategic plan he created was a collaboration among community stakeholders.

Continued



ING – Run For Something Better®

Miami-Dade partners with the ING Run For Something Better® program, which helps fund school-based running programs across the country. Community partners coordinate free local running programs for students as part of their physical education class. The program culminates with students participating in ING-sponsored running events, such as local marathons. In Miami, over 3,000 students completed the progressive 26.2-mile marathon this year. Latin music superstar Marc Anthony has partnered with ING on the program and on a series of concerts, *ING Presents Juntos en Concierto*. The concerts provided a platform to promote children’s fitness and fight childhood obesity, especially within Latino communities. For every ticket sold, \$2 was donated to the ING Run For Something Better® program. Visit www.orangelaces.com to learn more about how ING Run For Something Better® is encouraging children to lead healthier lives. ♦

Policy To Improve the Food Environment in Low-Income Communities

In April 2008, an LA County Department of Public Health study revealed that 30 percent of South Los Angeles adults are obese, compared with approximately 21 percent of adults nationwide. South Los Angeles also has the highest incidence of diabetes in the county, 11.7 percent, compared with 8.1 percent for the nation. This area of Los Angeles is predominately Latino and African American. In July 2008 the LA City Council unanimously approved an ordinance to address the lack of healthy food options available in low-income neighborhoods. The measure, which was supported by the LA Unified School Board, places a one-year moratorium on new fast-food restaurants in several neighborhoods, mostly in South Los Angeles. The moratorium will allow the city time to study the effect of fast-food restaurants on quality of life and other indicators. It also affords the city council time to actively attract grocery stores and restaurants to these areas. ♦

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The superintendent developed the “It Takes” campaign, which was approved by the school board and implemented as the district’s response to a need to improve public perception of the district. The premise of the campaign is that everyone in the community has a voice in what it takes to make children successful. The campaign allows schools to create innovative programs to meet the needs of their school community. Rather than curtail arts, music and health programs, “It Takes” encourages additional opportunities for children.

Millie Fornell, associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, believes that such an approach as “It Takes” enables and supports the district’s physical education, nutrition and other health programs.

This involves:

- ♦ the leadership of the superintendent,
- ♦ a committed school board,
- ♦ community involvement and
- ♦ people “in the trenches” (involved staff).

LA Unified School District

Strategy and alignment is the mantra among the leadership in LA Unified in order to create sustainable programs. This is evident in the district’s thinking about joint-use agreements and partnerships that create more school-based health centers and are easy on the budget.

Additionally, the district uses data maps to identify and monitor health risks and emerging student health issues in order to prioritize resources and create appropriate programs.

Also notable is the strategic integration of the system’s wellness policy into the school safety plan. Safe and orderly schools were one of Superintendent Brewer’s five goals for transformational change within the district and several tenets of safe schools are consistent with the district’s wellness policy. This integration avoids duplication and ensures a high-profile and broad understanding and usage of the wellness policy.

“Grants are wonderful, but we need sustainability, not pilots,” says assistant superintendent Rene Gonzalez. “We are talking with our community partners — businesses, local foundations and endowments, health and social service agencies — and turning to them to help us sustain district programs.”

In addition, Superintendent Brewer credits strong board support for progress on student health issues in the district. School board member Marlene Canter was a leader in the passage of policies that banned sodas in LA schools, prioritized cafeteria improvements and addressed general obesity prevention long before the federal wellness policy mandate went into effect in 2006. ♦





Do you have comments or suggestions about this issue of Healthy Learning News or need additional copies for workshops or meetings? Do you have your own success story to share? Contact Rebecca Roberts, project director, at rroberts@aasa.org. For previous issues of Healthy Learning News visit www.aasa.org/focus and click on “Childhood Obesity.”

Resources

- ◆ Alliance for a Healthier Generation: www.healthiergeneration.org
- ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coordinated School Health Components: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP/
- ◆ Developing School Site Wellness Centers by Jayne Greenberg, Ed.D. and Roberta Stokes — available through the National Association for Sport and Physical Education — www.naspeinfo.org
- ◆ LAUSD Food Services: www.cafe-la.org
- ◆ Leadership for Healthy Communities: www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org
- ◆ Network for a Healthy California at LAUSD: www.healthyla.usd.net
- ◆ Water Safety Education Guides (Grades K-12) http://pe.dadeschools.net/water_safety.asp

References

“African Americans’ Access to Healthy Food Options in South Los Angeles Restaurants,” Lewis, LaVonna Blair, et al. *American Journal of Public Health*, April 2005, vol 95., no 4.

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