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The support of the leadership within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and St. Joseph Public Schools is evident in the work being done to address childhood obesity through program and policy changes. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the issue has been raised to a high-priority status and is overseen by the assistant superintendent of student, family and community services. In St. Joseph Public Schools, this effort began with a concerned board member and a motivated superintendent. Today, the superintendent, director of operations and assistant superintendent of curriculum have all been involved in mapping out a wellness policy that is realistic and addresses the needs of students and staff in the district.

Commenting on childhood obesity and the need for action in schools, Gary Sharpe, executive director of the Missouri Association of School Administrators, says “It takes leadership … it takes people who understand the importance of this issue to fight the battle.” Both Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and St. Joseph Public Schools have leaders who understand what’s at stake as they fight to improve the health of their students.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools – Continued from inside

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Healthy Staff = Healthy Children: The Role of Staff Wellness

Setting a good example can have a profound impact on the way young people view physical activity and healthy eating. Many school districts incorporate staff into their wellness policies and encourage them to become positive role models for the students. In both Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and St. Joseph Public Schools, staff wellness is a priority. The St. Joseph Employee Wellness Program was created to encourage healthier lifestyles, lower health-care costs, decrease hospitalizations, improve quality of life and increase productivity. The program provides opportunities for behavior change, including seat belt use, daily exercise, and eliminating tobacco use. It also offers staff incentives such as gift certificates to local restaurants or the option to take a “wellness day” off.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the staff wellness efforts include a walking program, health risk assessments, benefits fairs and discounted rates at local fitness centers. Through these staff-focused initiatives, both Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and St. Joseph Public Schools demonstrate the belief that healthier adults in schools can encourage healthier students.

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The development of a school wellness policy in St. Joseph Public Schools has been under way for some time. The federal requirement that all school districts accepting funds for school lunches have a wellness policy in place by July 1, 2006, has strengthened their resolve. Under the leadership of the superintendent, school board and director of operations, the district has created a wellness program that includes a 12-member wellness committee, policies and processes addressing all aspects of food and beverage services in the district, nutrition education, physical activity and discussions on related fundraising, rewards and celebrations.

The healthy changes in St. Joseph were effected through a joint decision between the superintendent and school board, who then sanctioned a review of the district's long range plan around this issue. By developing policies based on science, especially around nutrition guidelines, St. Joseph laid the foundation for their wellness policy. They realized that all of the changes did not have to happen immediately and that implementation of the policies required a thoughtful, long-term process in order to sustain lasting results.

The charter schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have been a model of management raises issues or practice to the highest level of district priority, never including more than a baker's dozen of charters. The Project Charter process also allows senior staff to meet with people in the field, including many school-based employees within the coordinated school health team, like food service directors and after-school program planners, in order to keep abreast of developments. There is a Project Charter for coordinated school health, and through this Charter, it is relatively simple to assess progress on healthy eating and physical activity in the district.

In May 2006, The Alliance for a Healthier Generation — a joint initiative of the William J. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association — worked with the nations three major beverage companies and the American Beverage Association to establish new guidelines to limit portion sizes and reduce the number of calories available to children during the school day. Under these guidelines, only lower-calorie and nutritious beverages will be sold to schools. This announcement should herald discussions in schools on what healthy choices should be available to students in vending machines. For more information on the guidelines, visit www.healthiergeneration.org.

Continued on back page

Tips To Make the Development of a School Wellness Policy in Work

◆ Rely on the experts for guidance regarding nutrition

◆ Do what you know is right for the health of students, even if it is not the easiest option

◆ Examine your vending contracts closely to see what changes can be made; work closely with local vendors

◆ Develop creative ways to incorporate physical activity into the school day, as well as before and after school

◆ Review school food purchase plans to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into school meals

◆ Joint-use agreements between communities and school districts for recreational areas, gymnasiums, fitness centers, etc.

◆ Safe Routes to School; a program that expands opportunities to walk or bike to school

◆ The development of community gardens where local food grown is incorporated into school meals

◆ The involvement of community or local elected officials on school wellness councils and in the implementation of school wellness policies

◆ The development of community gardens where local food grown is incorporated into school meals

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, partnering with the community is how they do business. From partnerships with the Mecklenburg County Health Department, to the local YMCA, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools reach out to make connections that will support the coordinated school health model and improve the health, and ultimately the achievement of children in their district.
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools journey to a coordinated school health program began with committed internal leadership and strong community partnerships. The eight components of coordinated school health include: health services, school nutrition, health education, physical education, counseling, staff wellness, school environment, and family/community involvement. A service integration team addresses coordinated school health at monthly meetings where program goals, strengths and weaknesses are assessed. This dynamic team includes assistant superintendents, principals, school administrators, health educators, public health department leaders, school nurses, and others. They are successful because of their commitment, focus, and teamwork.

Accountability for school health, however, goes beyond the coordinated school health team. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has Project Charters, which assigns program goals on a more regular basis than would strategic plans. The Project Charter model of management raises issues or practice to the highest level of district priority, never including more than a baker’s dozen of charters. The Project Charter process also allows senior staff to meet with people in the field, including many school-based employees within the coordinated school health team, like food service directors and afterschool program planners, in order to keep abreast of deliverables. There is a Project Charter for coordinated school health and, through this Charter, it is relatively simple to assess progress on healthy eating and physical activity in the district.

The healthy changes in St. Joseph Public Schools to take away recess as an acceptable form of punishment and to expand physical activity, and avoiding tobacco and drugs. At Ashley Park Elementary, the principal credits their two-year wellness initiative and coordinated school health for significant improvements in the healthy behaviors of staff and students, as well as for higher test scores. On NC End-of-Grade tests, reading scores rose 22 percentage points in the past two years.

Tips To Make

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New Beverage Guidelines

In May 2006, The Alliance for a Healthier Generation – a joint initiative of the William J. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association – worked with the nation’s three major beverage companies and the American Beverage Association to establish new guidelines to limit portion sizes and reduce the number of calories available to children during the school day. Under these guidelines, only lower-calorie and nutritious beverages can be available to students in vending machines. For more information on the guidelines, visit www.healthiergeneration.org.

Tip: To Make Positive Policy Changes in Your District

◆ Rely on the experts for guidance regarding nutrition

◆ Do what you know is right for the health of students, even if it is not the easiest option

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◆ Develop creative ways to incorporate physical activity into the school day, as well as before and after school

◆ Review school food purchase plans to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into school meals

Districts who have been successful in making policy changes involve their communities. Community partnerships that address childhood obesity and increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living benefit students, staff, families and communities. Opportunities for collaboration in a community model include:

◆ Joint-use agreements between communities and school districts for recreational areas, gymnasiums, fitness centers, etc.

◆ Safe Routes to School; a program that expands opportunities to walk or bike to school.

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Click on “For Schools” at the top, then “School Beverage Guidelines” at the left.
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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools – Continued from inside

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What’s inside:
◆ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools – A Coordinated School Health Model
◆ Policy Development at Work – St. Joseph Public Schools
◆ Community Partnerships: A Key to Success

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