

Healthier Middle Schools

Every teacher can help.

Two changes. Countless benefits.

There are short-term and long-term advantages to making healthier foods and regular physical activity priorities at your school. These healthy changes can:

- ✓ **Help kids concentrate better in class**
- ✓ **Strengthen academic performance**
- ✓ **Reduce behavioral problems**
- ✓ **Build healthier habits for life**
- ✓ **Lower obesity rates**

It takes a community.

The USDA is reaching out not only to middle school teachers but also to principals, parents, food service managers, and students. Why? Schools that have made healthy changes report that success is most likely when the entire school community gets involved and works together. So, why not bring up this topic at your next staff meeting?

What teacher doesn't want better classroom performance?

Studies show that kids with healthy eating and physical activity patterns tend to do better academically.^{1,2,3,4,5} While you are not their parent, you are an important role model for your students. So, when you support healthier food choices and more physical activity at school, the students will get the idea that these are important.



Experience is the best teacher.

On the back of this flyer, you'll find ideas other middle schools have used to make healthier changes. It's best to start small with one or two steps that are relatively simple and inexpensive. Even small changes school-wide will help our kids get healthier habits that can serve them well in school and life.

1. Florence MD, Asbridge M, Veugelers PJ. Diet quality and academic performance. *J Sch Health*. 2008; 78:209-215.

2. Fu ML, Cheng L, Tu SH, Pan WH. Association between unhealthful eating patterns and unfavorable overall school performance in children. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2007; 107:1935-1943.

3. Sigfusdóttir ID, Kristjánsson AL, Allegrante JP. Health behaviour and academic achievement in Icelandic school children. *Health Educ Res*. 2007; 22:70-80.

4. Kim HY, Frongillo EA, Han SS, Oh SY, Kim WK, Jang YA, Won HS, Lee HS, Kim SH. Academic performance of Korean children is associated with dietary behaviours and physical status. *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr*. 2003; 12:186-192.

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.

Middle schools get healthier when **teachers** use their influence.



Build nutrition and physical activity into your curriculum.

Math, science, English, social studies, and health are all likely subjects. You may also want to take learning outside the classroom, for example, to the school garden, gym, or cafeteria.



Don't use food as incentives or rewards.

Try giving nonfood prizes or privileges, like a chance to listen to music in the classroom.



Everybody loves a little friendly competition.

Why not start one between classes, grades, or schools? See what group spends the most time being physically active or eats the most vegetables at lunch.



Walk the talk.

Let your students see you making healthy food choices and being active at school. Ask other teachers, staff, or students to join you for a walk, to shoot some hoops—whatever activity works for you.



Keep the ball rolling at TeamNutrition.usda.gov.

On the USDA's Team Nutrition Web site, you'll get ideas from other teachers, as well as ready-to-use materials such as lesson plans and talking points to use at a staff meeting or Back to School Night.

Thanks for your help.



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