

Keeping up with your child's nutrition even outside your own home

As the summer months slowly drift into the past, central Ohio children are settling back at their desks for another school year. Although they'll now be spending the majority of their days away from home, your healthy influence need not end with the changing season.

With nearly 40 percent of Ohio's third graders overweight or at risk of becoming overweight, many schools are introducing new programs and strategies to promote health and wellness. In 2006, a federal mandate required all schools to create a wellness policy to help promote good nutrition and physical activity.

"Implementing a school wellness policy helps to establish an environment that supports good health," said Jan Ritter, a registered dietitian and school nutrition specialist for the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "The most effective policies engage parents and local partners, allowing the community to become involved with keeping children healthy and active, both in and out of the classroom."

Although many parents stress the importance of school nutrition and physical activity policies, a survey conducted by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) indicated that only one in five parents is likely to become involved in developing and implementing a school wellness policy. Ritter explained, "As we transition into the fall, parents may think they have less control over their child's nutrition and physical activity. However, with the creation of school wellness policies, parents have the opportunity to become involved in implementing activities that support good nutrition and physical activity at school."

Here are a few ways both parents and teachers can take an active role in improving their schools' wellness policies:

Parents

1.) Be an advocate.

Join your child's school wellness team and share your thoughts and ideas to promote good nutrition and physical activity. Be sure to know your subject matter and approach the school wellness team with workable solutions to problems.

2.) Engage others.

Share your experiences about your wellness team. Word of mouth travels a lot faster than a flier that is thrown into your child's backpack.

3.) Send your child to school with a healthy breakfast and lunch.

Start the day with a quick healthy breakfast. A piece of fresh fruit, low-fat yogurt and a healthy breakfast bar can be packed to eat on the go. Parents also can pack a healthy lunch for their children or talk to them about making healthy choices at school. Encourage your child to choose a healthy school lunch. Many schools have a point of purchase system and parents can indicate that their child should not purchase a la carte.

Teachers

1.) Be an advocate.

Be a role model to your kids. Join the wellness team and take an active role in initiating new programs. By working with your students directly, you know first-hand what they're interested in.

2.) Initiate and take action.

Share your thoughts and ideas with administration and work to implement ideas around school. You can act as the liaison between families and administrators to help encourage good nutrition.

3.) Incorporate physical activity in the classroom.

Get the kids up and moving with an interactive game that works their minds and bodies at the same time. Take time during the day for a quick break to get their blood pumping.



Through her role at Nationwide Children's Hospital, Ritter also supports Ohio Action for Healthy Kids, a statewide initiative committed to creating positive change in schools through better nutrition and physical activity. For more great ideas on ways to create healthier schools, visit www.ohioactionforhealthykids.org.