



Illinois Nutrition Education
and Training Program



Illinois Schools **Rise to the Challenge!** HealthierUS School Challenge Success Stories



The vision of the HealthierUS School Challenge is to improve the health of the nation's children by promoting healthier school environments. Many schools in Illinois have risen to the Challenge to improve school meals and provide students with nutrition education, physical education and additional activity opportunities.

Illinois schools meeting the Challenge have benefited in many ways:

- Earned national and community recognition
- Gained a monetary award to help the foodservice budget
- Created a school environment that encourages healthy choices
- Improved student health and achievement
- Received assistance in creating healthier meals
- Strengthened and implemented required school wellness policies



Illinois School Success Stories

The following stories describe successful strategies and tips used by some Illinois HealthierUS School Challenge schools.

Community Unit School District 300 Elementary Schools Carpentersville, Illinois

Community Unit School District (CUSD) 300's fifteen elementary schools earned HealthierUS School Challenge certifications ranging from a HUSSC Bronze Award to the HUSSC Gold Award of Distinction. CUSD 300 worked diligently with their food management company, ARAMARK, to create a gold standard menu, which included a variety of healthful food choices. Foods incorporated into the menus included whole grain foods like pizza, wraps and pancakes and a cold bar featuring a rotation of cucumber coins, baby carrots, broccoli florets, Romaine lettuce salad and celery sticks.

Students discovered the secrets to healthy eating in the classroom, thanks in part to the MyPyramid for Kids materials. Parents also learned about nutrition from the Health Services Coordinator at the PTO Wellness Fairs.

CUSD 300 knows that promotion is the key to success. Jill Jayne, the Rockstar Nutritionist, helped excite both the students and community about making healthy choices by performing her rock-and-roll nutrition show, Jump with Jill, at the elementary schools in the district. CUSD 300 worked with Jill Jayne to produce a series of "Going Gold" videos to build excitement for making all the elementary schools in the district award winning. Check out the videos at:

KidsEatWell.org/team-nutrition.htm

Staff at CUSD 300 strongly supported the HealthierUS School Challenge initiative, which can be heard at the end of the first "Going Gold" video. Sarah Cossidente, Assistant Foodservice Director with ARAMARK at CUSD 300, expressed her support for the Challenge – "We are very proud to offer students these healthy options." Lianne Tompkins, physical education teacher at Golfview Elementary CUSD 300, also voiced her endorsement for the Challenge – "I'm really proud of what we're doing here at Golfview. Being physically active helps students with their school work."

Francisco Madero Middle School Chicago, Illinois

Madero Middle School staff used a team approach to achieve their HUSSC Gold Award. Initially, when changes like offering whole pieces of fruit were made to the menus, students were hesitant. Staff discovered that students found eating whole fruit more challenging. To help increase consumption of the whole fruit, teachers walked around during the lunch period to cut up the whole fruit for students.

Many action steps added up to Madero's success. Nutrition is taught through a variety of avenues including an afterschool cooking class and health classes. Students can stay active after school by participating in such activities as dance, cheerleading,

volleyball, flag football, soccer and basketball. Teachers have instituted the no food as a reward policy. Instead, thanks to some fundraising, nonfood rewards are now given to students "caught being good". The support for student wellness also extends outside the school walls. Parent involvement is strong at Madero Middle School. Parents have the opportunity to learn about nutrition through free nutrition and cooking classes presented by a local hospital. In addition, parents have started to ask local convenience stores to refrain from selling junk food and sweetened beverages to children before and after school.

Academy for Global Citizenship Chicago, Illinois

Academy for Global Citizenship (AGC) earned Illinois' first HUSSC Gold Award of Distinction. Thanks to a Team Nutrition grant, AGC provided training to their kitchen staff and offered parent outreach programs. An expert chef worked with the kitchen staff on healthy and creative vegetable, whole grain and legume preparation. Students at AGC were wonderful risk takers and enjoyed trying new foods on the menu. Healthy menu options included baked sweet potatoes, veggie tacos and couscous with black beans.

For five weeks, parents were provided a sample and recipe for quick and healthy snacks prepared by a local chef. The recipe card contained nutrition information about the snack. AGC partnered with Purple Asparagus, a non-profit group dedicated to bringing families back to the table. They taught parents during an afterschool workshop how to prepare healthy, kid-friendly snacks and how to involve their children in the preparation. These outreach activities opened parents' eyes to fun and creative ways to get their kids to eat healthy.

AGC's curriculum has a rich health and wellness focus. The school garden and field trips to local farms provide unique opportunities for the students to learn about nutrition. Daily structured yoga and a Walking Bus Challenge help the students stay active each day.



Ridgeview Elementary School Colfax, Illinois

Thanks to the overwhelming support of the entire staff, Ridgeview Elementary School earned its second HUSSC Silver Award in April 2011. They won their first certification in 2008. Monica Van Note, School Nutrition Director, stated that the students quickly learned to like the new whole grain options on the menu. New whole grain food options included whole grain graham crackers, pizza crust and corn dogs. Ms. Van Note tried several different types of legume recipes to find which one the kids liked the best. Baked beans are still the students' favorite bean option.

When asked if she had any useful tips for other schools going for the Challenge, Monica offered these words of wisdom – “First, have a good attitude about it. Get others at the school on board to make it easier for everyone. Two or three hands are better than one. Use online references and contact other award winners for good pointers. My best ideas have been given to me by other cooks.”

Ridgeview Elementary staff truly value nutrition education. Emily Watterson, the school counselor, collaborated with a local family and consumer science teacher to develop Ridgeview's K-5 nutrition curriculum, Wellness Pillars. This sequential curriculum ties into their character development program and addresses such nutrition topics as trying new foods, portion sizes and food labels. Resources such as an action board and free Dairy Council materials help supplement the curriculum.

Evanston/Skokie Elementary and Magnet Schools—District 65 Evanston and Skokie, Illinois

Evanston/Skokie School District 65's twelve elementary and magnet schools earned the HUSSC Bronze Award in March 2011. The district's Wellness Council and local school wellness teams collaborated to improve overall awareness of the HealthierUS School Challenge, including healthier menu choices and physical activity opportunities. Students helped to select new lunch menu items through a taste test. New lunch selections included whole grain penne and rotini, brown rice with beans, fresh Romaine tossed salad, baby carrots with dip and fresh broccoli florets.

District 65 addresses nutrition education in some creative ways. Each school has a garden, which serves as an extension to the classroom giving the students the opportunity to address healthy eating choices. Produce from the gardens serve as the base of the Cooking Up Wellness lessons. In addition to the gardens, students test their wellness knowledge in an annual Healthy Challenge Bowl during which they answer questions on nutrition and physical activity.

To help the students stay active and alert during the school day, teachers integrated stretching and short activity sessions into the lessons. Each school in District 65 offers numerous programs before and after school that support physical activity. Depending on the school and time of year, programs include a walking club, Zumba, yoga and martial arts classes, which are taught by people from the Evanston community.

The district has an active Wellness Council that strongly supports the HealthierUS School Challenge mission. In addition to school staff, the council also includes several community members. They found that networking is key to a successful program. The council collaborated with Evanston Health Department and Northwestern University on wellness projects also.

Community Unit School District 303 Elementary Schools St. Charles, Illinois

All twelve of the elementary schools in Community Unit School District (CUSD) 303 have earned a HUSSC Bronze Award. Sodexo, CUSD 303's foodservice company, enhanced the lunch menus to meet the Challenge requirements. The garden bar provides daily options of fruits and vegetables, like oranges, bananas, apples, Romaine salad and carrot sticks. Beans found their way into the Mexican entrees and are offered as a side item. Students love the cold beans on the garden bar the most. At least three times a week, the menu features whole grain foods like whole grain crackers, buns, bread and pancakes. To help ease the students into accepting the whole grain bread, sandwiches were made with a slice of white bread on top and a whole grain slice on the bottom. The students actually thought that the kitchen ran out of whole grain bread and had to use the white bread to complete the sandwich!

Teachers creatively integrated nutrition education into daily lessons using such resources as USDA Team Nutrition materials and the CATCH curriculum. At Norton Creek Elementary School, a teacher led an assembly celebrating their award with a fruit and vegetable song. Each grade level wore shirts representing the various colors of the MyPyramid and sang a tune specific to their food group. At Richmond Elementary School, students sampled new fruits and veggies during tastings held twice a week thanks to grant funding from the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Kids were active during and after school. Teachers provided activity breaks in the classroom using Jammin' Minute activities. In the fall, the PTO facilitated a fun run for teachers, students and parents. During the spring, a running club comprised of teachers and students met twice a week.

Parents were invited to eat lunch with their kids during one week in February to help celebrate Heart Healthy month where they sampled new menu items. To help show their support for wellness, all the physical education and health teachers volunteered to serve meals during this week. The school staff at Wasco Elementary School also facilitated a community-wide health fair. Parents and community partners provided wellness information and activities like the Heart Adventure Challenge that got students' hearts pumping as they learned.



Tips from the Field

Energize the Community

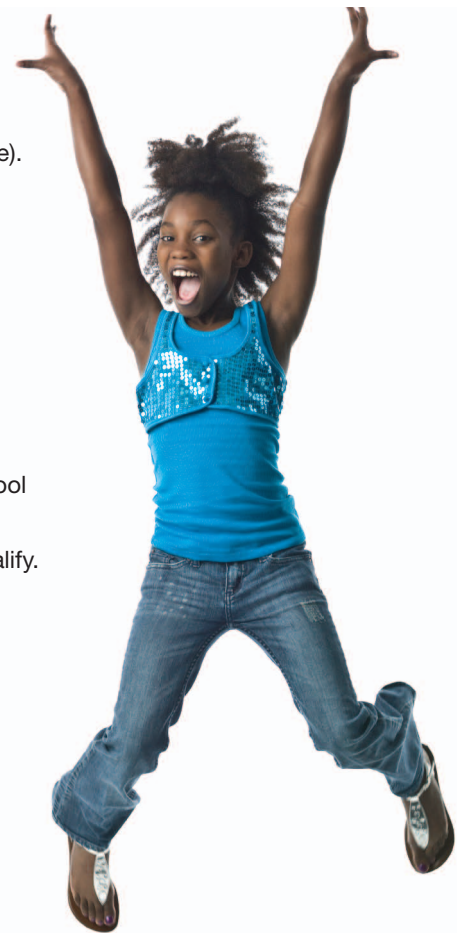
- Involve all staff (principal, classroom teachers, physical education teachers, foodservice, nurse). Many hands make light work.
- Hold a wellness fair with nutrition-focused exhibits and activity challenges.
- Publicize your participation in the HealthierUS School Challenge by talking to parents and the local media.
- Add a wellness webpage to the school's website.

Create Healthier Menus

- Get the students' input. Take a survey and offer taste tests of new healthy menu items.
- Coordinate with suppliers in advance to purchase menu items that meet the HealthierUS School Challenge criteria.
- Read the ingredient labels on grain products. The first ingredient should be whole grain to qualify. Whole wheat flour, whole corn and brown rice are examples of whole grains.
- Begin with a 50/50 Romaine and iceberg mix for salad then move toward a 70/30 blend.

Fund the Positive Changes

- Contact the Illinois NET Program to provide a free nutrition education workshop to staff.
- Make full use of USDA Foods (commodities) like whole grains and canned and dried beans to help reduce food costs.
- Apply for grants that provide opportunities to enhance the wellness environment. Check the KidsEatWell.org website for new grant opportunities.
- Tap into community partners, like banks, landscapers, grocery stores and doctors, to provide services and funding for wellness activities.



Interested in taking the Challenge or looking for nutrition education resources?

The Illinois Nutrition Education and Training Program can assist your school team in the following ways:



- Free onsite and online nutrition education workshops for school staff
- Expert assistance to help you locate resources and meet HealthierUS School Challenge criteria
- An electronic newsletter for school staff with the latest resources and grant opportunities
- KidsEatWell.org—a health education link for school staff, parents and kids

Contact the Illinois Nutrition Education and Training (NET) Program at ilnet@kidsroe.org or (800) 466-7998 with questions or to schedule a training.

Visit <http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/healthierUS/index.html> to learn more about the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge.

The Illinois Nutrition Education and Training Program is supported by the Illinois State Board of Education.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.