

Improving school nutrition: Resources and experts

How can you improve the pre-K-12 dining experience and inspire healthy habits in schools? Here are some examples and experts from the University of California and its Global Food Initiative.

INFORMING HEALTHY DINING OPTIONS

A GFI subcommittee has compiled a free online toolkit of resources to help schools teach healthy eating habits and provide nutritious, sustainable food to students. The Good Food for Local Schools website features proven resources for educators and change-makers.

More information:

<http://goodfood.ucla.edu>

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REIMAGINING SCHOOL LUNCHES

UC researchers are evaluating a pilot program at San Francisco Unified School District that aims to engage kids to eat more healthful meals, from a comfortable dining space to a smart meal app to a grab-and-go cart that cuts wait times. The project will measure the impact of student-centered strategies based on behavioral economics to increase participation in the school lunch program, reduce plate waste, improve dietary intake and reduce obesity among low-income youth.

More information:

www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/opinion/serving-up-school-lunches-of-tomorrow.html, www.kcet.org/food/how-to-get-kids-to-eat-healthier-at-school

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MAKING HEALTHIER SCHOOL MEALS

Armed with data from a UC Berkeley study analyzing the financial implications of cutting the sale of junk food in schools, California became the first state in the nation to limit the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages in K-12 schools. Studies of California students indicated a reduction in obesity after the policy change, fueling adoption of similar policies across the country.

More information:

<http://ucfoodobserver.com/2015/05/20/qa-pat-crawford-university-of-california-nutrition-policy-institute>

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REDUCING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

U.S. childhood obesity rates have tripled over the past three decades. Improving the school food system is a key starting place to keep kids healthy and boost academic performance. During the first year that UC Davis' Shaping Healthy Choices Program was used in Sacramento County schools, the number of children classified as overweight or obese dropped to 38 percent from 56 percent. The program integrates nutrition education with family and community partnerships, foods available at schools, and school wellness policies.

More information:

<http://cns.ucdavis.edu/programs/shcp/index.html>

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CONDUCTING NUTRITION, WELLNESS OUTREACH

UC ANR's nutrition education efforts help families make healthy food choices, stretch food dollars and increase consumption of California's agricultural products with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and UC CalFresh Nutrition Education Program. For example, the UC CalFresh Youth Nutrition Education Program provides support and resources to preschool through high school teachers in low-income schools to deliver nutrition and physical activity education in their classrooms. Campuses also are doing their part. UC San Diego's Center for Community Health has reached more than 40,000 San Diego County children by providing local schools and teachers with a blueprint to implement health and wellness topics such as nutrition education in class curriculums.

More information:

<http://efnep.ucanr.edu>, www.uccalfresh.org/curriculum/youth-materials,
<http://ucsdcommunityhealth.org/resources>

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INSPIRING ENGAGEMENT IN SCIENCE AND FOOD

In her work developing science curriculum for continuation high school students at John R. Wooden High School, UCLA assistant professor Amy Rowat also has been inspired to change the way UCLA students connect with science. Her Science and Food program at UCLA aims to promote knowledge of science through food, and food through science. Now, in brainstorming lessons for ethnically diverse high schools students, she sees opportunities to further engage students at UCLA by connecting with their personal interests and experiences.

More information:

www.scienceandfood.org

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PROVIDING HEALTHIER DRINKS

A UC study found a substantial need for improving the beverages served to young children in licensed child care, which helped lead to the Healthy Beverages in Child Care Law (AB 2084), aimed at offering alternatives to sugary drinks. After follow-up research found the need to raise awareness of the law, the Legislature passed AB 290, requiring that newly licensed child care providers receive at least one hour of child nutrition training.

More information:

<http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=18202>

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PROMOTING WATER CONSUMPTION

UCSF researchers have conducted numerous studies to encourage children to drink healthy beverages in schools and other settings. These include studies in schools, child care and community settings to examine how interventions to increase children's intake of water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages impact child health, and the evaluation of policy efforts to improve the healthfulness of beverages offered in schools and community settings.

More information:

www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Schools-buying-water-filters-even-though-7253189.php, www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Refill-stations-make-water-the-drink-of-choice-in-6728723.php,
<http://ww2.kqed.org/stateofhealth/2013/07/12/drink-up-schools-must-provide-more-water-during-meals>

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RELATED REPORTS

Read more about case studies and lessons learned in GFI working group reports on K-12 schools and leveraging research for food and agriculture policy.

www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/index.html