



# Nutrition

Nutrition is essential for sustenance, growth and development, and health and well-being. Nutritional or dietary factors contribute substantially to the burden of preventable illness and premature death. Behaviors, often established in youth, contribute to these health problems in adulthood.

Washington State Senate Bill 5436 (effective June 10, 2004), calls for districts to establish a comprehensive school health policy that addresses the nutritional quality of food sold at schools, and the availability and quality of health, nutrition, and physical education and fitness curriculum by August 1, 2005. This requirement is compatible with the new Federal Wellness Policy that requires the same by start of school 2006.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that to stay healthy, people should eat a wide variety of foods, including a diet that is plentiful in grains, vegetables and fruits, and low in saturated fat and cholesterol. All people should eat five or more servings of fruits or vegetables each day. There is room for improvement in young peoples' diets:



About 25 percent of 8th and 10th graders reported eating fruits or vegetables five or more times per day in the past week.<sup>1</sup>

Healthy diets should also include few “junk foods” – foods that are very high calorie or have poor nutrient content. Soda pop is an example of a nutrient-poor food.



About half of students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 reported drinking at least one sugared soft drink or soda pop per day (does not include diet soda).

## Nutrition Policies and Procedures

The United States Department of Agriculture urges schools to ensure all students have designated lunch periods of sufficient length to enjoy eating healthy foods with friends.

- Principals reported 80 percent of secondary schools have 20 or more minutes to eat lunch once students are seated.
- 4 percent of principals reported their school does not serve lunch to students.

Schools offer programs to provide healthy meals at lower cost so that low-income students have access to appropriate nutrition at school. In 2005, about 37 percent of Washington State students receive free or reduced-price meals<sup>2</sup> through Washington's Child Nutrition Program.

Having convenient offerings of fruits and vegetables in vending machines, school stores, snack bars, and a la carte lines might help students meet the recommended five to nine servings of fruit and vegetables each day. Conversely, easy access to unhealthy foods may increase consumption of those items.

Most secondary schools provide access to food or beverages in addition to cafeteria foods. Most (91 percent) principals reported having vending machines or a school store, canteen, or snack bar where students can purchase snack foods or beverages. Principals reported the following “competitive” food sources are available at school:

### Healthier Options

- 96 percent have bottled water.
- 86 percent have 100 percent fruit juice.
- 84 percent have salty, low-fat snacks including pretzels, baked chips.
- 64 percent have low-fat baked goods including cookies, crackers, cakes, pastries.
- 46 percent have fruits or vegetables.

### Less Healthy Options

- 97 percent have soft drinks, sports drinks, and non-100 percent fruit drinks.
- 80 percent have salty, high fat snacks including regular potato chips.

<sup>1</sup> The national recommendation for fruit and vegetable consumption is 5–9 servings per day, but the HYS asks about “times per day”. It is likely that students eat more than one serving in a sitting, thus the gap in nutrition may not be as serious as displayed.

<sup>2</sup> OSPI May 2005, <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>



- 72 percent have chocolate candy.
- 75 percent have other candy.

The overall high availability of high-sugar drinks and foods and low availability of fruits and vegetables at schools is at odds with health messages to moderate intake of sugars and choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily. Limiting availability of unhealthy foods specifically during meal times is one suggestion for improving student diets.

- Principals reported at most secondary schools (82 percent) students can purchase unhealthy foods such as candy; high-fat snacks; or soft drinks, sports drinks, or fruit drinks that are not 100 percent fruit juice during school lunch periods.
- Ten percent of principals reported having a school or district policy stating that fruits or vegetables will be offered at school settings such as student parties, after-school programs, staff meetings, parent meetings, or concession stands.

### **Nutrition Instruction**

Nearly all (98 percent) health teachers reported trying to increase students' knowledge of nutrition and dietary behaviors in a required health education course.

Health teachers incorporated a variety of specific nutrition topics into required health education courses, including:

- 97 percent taught the benefits of healthy eating.
- 91 percent taught aiming for a healthy weight.
- 90 percent taught choosing diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol.
- 89 percent taught the Food Pyramid groups and serving recommendations.
- 89 percent taught choosing a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.
- 89 percent taught risks of unhealthy weight control.
- 88 percent taught accepting body size differences.
- 88 percent taught about eating disorders.
- 87 percent taught how to use food labels.

- 87 percent taught moderating sugar intake.
- 86 percent taught choosing a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains.
- 81 percent taught preparing healthy meals and snacks.
- 75 percent taught choosing calcium rich foods.
- 73 percent taught choosing and preparing low-salt food.
- 70 percent taught how to keep food safe to eat.

### **Nutrition Staff Development**

About twice as many health teachers reported wanting to receive staff development in nutrition/dietary behavior as actually received it:

- About 27 percent of health teachers reported receiving staff development in nutrition/dietary behavior in the past two years.
- About 63 percent reported wanting to receive more staff development in nutrition/dietary behavior.

### **Nutrition Resources**

Information about Washington Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) is available at the OSPI Health and Fitness Web site:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/curriculumInstruct/healthfitness/resources.aspx>.

Resources for implementation of new health and fitness policy requirements as a result of SB 5436 are provided at: <http://depts.washington.edu/waschool>.

“Action for Healthy Kids” is a state leadership team, linked to a national network, focused on reducing childhood obesity by changing school environments: [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org).

Information about federal wellness policy requirements and implementation is available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>.