



Section

05

PTA Fact-Finding Project:

How Healthy Is Your School?

Use this survey tool to get a quick sense of how your school is doing in terms of student nutrition and wellness, and to pinpoint the areas in which there is room for improvement.

PTA Fact-Finding Project: How Healthy Is Your School?



Note: You may find that your school excels in certain areas but is surprisingly lacking in others. Some standards may not be appropriate for your school, given its particular financial situation, geography or demographics. But making even small changes as a result of what you find through the survey may not be as difficult as you imagine, and will go a long way towards promoting the student body's health.

PTAs can use this survey as a tool to get a quick idea of how successful their schools are in supporting student nutrition and wellness.*

Ask PTA members to volunteer to complete different sections of this survey. They will be responsible for:

- Finding out the answers to questions by approaching the principal or other appropriate people, talking to students, and taking a look at the school environment.
- Marking each question with a yes or no and writing relevant notes.

Have your members reconvene to discuss results and to make plans for action.

Acting on your findings

If the survey reveals areas in which your school can make improvements, take a look at the corresponding actions for each section. These actions are simple steps that

you can take to begin the process of changing your school's environment.

You can also use the fact sheets, tips and other resources in the *Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School Notebook* to dig deeper, and to learn more about all the ways parents and PTAs can improve student nutrition and wellness.

**If you would like to do a more in-depth assessment of your school's wellness environment, use any of the Toolkits to Change the School Environment listed in the resources section of this notebook. You can also refer to the grassroots advocacy section for more information to guide you through the process of implementing change.*

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Part 1: Nutrition

Note: If you answered no to any of these questions, refer to the corresponding actions you can take to change things for the better.

QUESTION AND ANSWER		
1. Is nutrition education part of the school curriculum?	Yes	No
2. Does your school participate in the National School Lunch, School Breakfast and/or Afterschool Snack programs?	Yes	No
3. Do students in your school have enough time to eat (i.e., at least 20 minutes for breakfast and at least 30 minutes for lunch)? Are the food lines efficient enough to allow students adequate eating time?	Yes	No
4. Are the vending machines on campus stocked with only healthy beverage or snack items (i.e. bottled water, 100% juice, low-fat snacks)?	Yes	No
5. Are healthy snacks served at PTA events, in the classroom, and at school parties?	Yes	No
6. Do students generally like the food offered at school?	Yes	No

Part I: Nutrition

*Note: See the other sections of the **Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School Notebook** for more ideas and information on improving student nutrition and wellness.*

ACTIONS

1. **Nutrition Education:** Meet with the person(s) responsible for curriculum content and urge that nutrition education be included as early on in the grade levels as possible -- i.e., nutrition education should target the youngest students who would be able to understand the concepts. Many states require nutrition instruction in health education classes and research has shown that focused nutrition instruction can cause positive behavioral change in children.¹ If there is no room for an additional module in your health curriculum, consider adding it to a science class.
2. **School Breakfast, National School Lunch, and Afterschool Snack programs:** Encourage school leaders to enroll in these meal programs. Advertise them to students and send home information about the programs to parents. Information about these programs and how schools can enroll is available at www.frac.org.
3. **Enough Time for Meals:** If students do not have adequate time to eat, discuss the reasons with school administrators. Help them brainstorm ways to lengthen meal periods. Meet with the food service staff to discuss whether lines are a problem.
4. **Vending Machines:** If your school's vending machines are filled with soda and junk food, as most are, do a more in-depth survey using the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) Survey of School Vending Machines, available at www.cspinet.org/school-foods. Share the results with school officials and urge them to require that all vended options are healthful and make a positive contribution to students' diets and health.
5. **Healthy Snacks at PTA Events and in Classrooms:** Pass a PTA resolution that all PTA events and fundraisers will be consistent with a healthy lifestyle. Start by using the ideas in this notebook. Suggest that the school pass a similar resolution pertaining to classroom snacks and parties.
6. **If Students Don't Like the School Food:** Survey students and ask what items they would like to see on the menus, including ethnic foods. Take their suggestions to food service personnel and find out if any are feasible. Ask food service menu planners to include student volunteers in their decision-making processes.

¹ Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

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Part II: Physical Education and Activity

Note: If you answered no to any of these questions, refer to the corresponding actions you can take to change things for the better.

QUESTION AND ANSWER		
1. Do all students participate in daily physical activity at school (including recess and at least 30 minutes a day of physical education)?	Yes	No
2. If physical education is available, do the classes teach skills and behaviors promoting lifelong fitness (as opposed to competitive sports only)?	Yes	No
3. Are school recreational facilities adequate (e.g., upkeep of gym equipment and grounds)? Are there any safety concerns?	Yes	No
4. Are school recreational facilities (e.g., gymnasium, pool, fields, tennis and basketball courts) available for use by students before and after school hours?	Yes	No
5. Are students taught the importance of physical activity to health maintenance?	Yes	No

Part II: Physical Education and Activity

*Note: See the other sections of the **Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School Notebook** for more ideas and information on improving student nutrition and wellness.*

ACTIONS

1. **At Least 30 Minutes of Physical Education Daily:** Many government health agencies, as well as the PTA, recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of physical education, run by accredited professional instructors, every day. Talk to school leaders about ways to make this happen.
2. **Beyond Competitive Sports:** Ask students what activities they would like to do that may not be so traditional (e.g., biking local trails, dancing, aerobics, hula hooping). Take the results to the director of physical education to discuss ways in which some of the students' suggestions might be implemented.
3. **Adequacy of Recreational Facilities:** If improvements are necessary, advertise this need to the community — they will respond. Solicit donations from equipment companies, or hold fundraisers to pay for what is needed. Consider partnering with nearby schools, gyms, or YMCAs with agreements to use their equipment.
4. **Facilities Open Other than School Hours:** Speak to your facilities manager about making school recreational facilities (gymnasium, pool, fields, tennis and basketball courts) available for use by students before and after school hours. Find out the barriers to accomplishing this goal (e.g., the need for volunteers to open the facility) and brainstorm ways to resolve them.
5. **Teaching About Physical Activity's Importance to Health:** Meet with the person(s) responsible for curriculum content, and urge that this concept be included in an appropriate class — if not in physical education or health class, perhaps science.

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Part III: Marketing in the School

QUESTION AND ANSWER		
1. Is there advertising (print or TV) by companies that sell junk food (soda, candy, etc.) on your school campus? At school events?	Yes	No
2. Are there incentives to buy junk food at school (coupons provided by companies, etc.)?	Yes	No
3. Are advertisers' (sponsors') company logos present on the school campus on surfaces such as scoreboards or vending machine covers?	Yes	No

Note: If you answered yes to any of these questions, refer to the corresponding actions you can take to change things for the better.

Part III: Marketing in the School

*Note: See the other sections of the **Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School Notebook** for more ideas and information on improving student nutrition and wellness.*

ACTIONS

1. **Advertising by Junk Food Companies on Campus:** Make a list of all the junk food ads that students are subjected to in your school and take that information with you when you speak with the person that negotiates on-campus advertising rights. Did school officials realize there would be as much advertising as there is? Encourage officials to disallow advertising of this kind and to only contract with companies that will promote only healthy foods on campus. (This may not necessarily mean changing vendors.)
2. **Incentives to Buy Junk Food:** Encourage your school administrators to disallow incentives for junk food sales on campus or at school events. The same companies likely have healthier options they can give your school—for some suggestions look at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) *School Foods Tool Kit: A Guide to Improving School Foods and Beverages*, available at www.cspinet.org/schoolfoods.
3. **Company Logos on Campus:** Logos are a particularly prominent and simple way to ingrain product names in students' minds. Unless the logo is of a company that promotes healthy eating, encourage the school to get rid of it. Research shows that children's eating behaviors are definitely influenced by marketing.¹

¹ Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

