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Get in the Game of Kids Nutrition through School and Community Volunteerism

By Dayle Hayes, Ms, RD

You don't have to work in school nutrition in order to join the fight for healthy children. Unprecedented interest in school meals, nutrition education and local wellness policies means a plethora of options for RDs looking to get involved as volunteers. From neighborhood schools to national organizations, richly rewarding opportunities exist in education, advocacy and policy development. Below is a guide for ADA members looking to find a place in America's ongoing children's nutrition revolution.

Join your local school wellness committee or school health advisory council.

These groups go by many names—school wellness committees, school health advisory councils, school health task forces—but their goal is the same: to bring together school and community leaders who can advise districts on ways to create healthier school environments through nutrition, physical activity and wellness education. The first step is to contact your district administrator or nutrition director to find out if your district has a health or wellness committee. Some states require them in all districts, while in other locales, funding organizations or agencies may mandate a health advisory council. And in May, the White house Task Force on Childhood Obesity recommended all schools establish an advisory group to provide support, oversight and accountability for school nutrition improvement efforts. Still, not all schools or districts have been able to answer the call, so you may find your expertise and commitment put to great use in developing a wellness committee. But whether you join or perhaps help establish a school health council or wellness committee, there are dozens of resources to help maximize the effectiveness of your efforts (see *Tools You Can Use*).

Local wellness or health councils are just one example of school-related advisory groups that can benefit from the nutrition expertise of ADA members. Many governors have established state councils to discuss childhood health concerns. States funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (see list and links at

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cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/fundedstates.html) usually have a school work group to assist in developing plans and monitoring progress.

TIP: When getting involved in schools, always respect the experience of the nutrition staff already working there, whatever their background or training. In many cases, they have dedicated years to making gradual improvements in their programs, often with minimal administrative or financial support. Your efforts have a greater chance of success with a positive, collaborative approach.

Tools You Can Use

School Wellness councils: Whether you are forming a new committee or joining a group that is already established, here are some resources to help maximize success:

- **WellSAT: Wellness School Assessment Tool** (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University 2010) can help you assess the quality of wellness policies and provides guidance and resources for making improvements. Visit wellsat.org.
- **School Wellness Council Toolkit** (Alliance for a Healthier generation 2008) provides information, tips and templates to create a successful wellness council. Visit healthiergeneration.org.
- **Promoting Healthy Youth, Schools, and Communities: A Guide to Community-School Health Councils** (American Cancer society 2003) is a comprehensive guide to forming an effective health council. Visit cancer.org/Healthy/MoreWaysACSHelpsYouStayWell/SchoolHealth.

Expanding Breakfast: Expanding morning meals in or outside of the cafeteria? The National Dairy Council offers free resources and case studies for a variety of alternative breakfast options, such as breakfast in the classroom. Learn more at nutritionexplorations.org/sfs/programs_breakfast.asp.

Recess before Lunch: The Montana Office of Public instruction has a free guide with everything you need to know about introducing this research-based, no-cost best practice. Visit http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/SchoolPrograms/School_Nutrition/Wellness.html?gpm=1_3.

School Garden Wizard: Planning an on-campus garden? Visit schoolgardenwizard.org for step-by-step instructions and lesson plans from the U.s. and Chicago Botanic gardens. The plans are customizable to schools of any size and in any season.

Farm to School: Want to connect local or regional farmers with schools for fresher foods and new educational opportunities? Farmtoschool.org offers free resources and links to successful programs across the country.

Coordinated Approach to Child Health: Teaching elementary students, parents, teachers and school staff the skills they need to support healthy lifestyles, evidence-based CATCH programs provide materials and training in curricula, foodservice modifications, physical education and family behavior changes. You can learn more at catchinfo.org. In addition, the National institutes of Health program *We Can!* (which stands for Ways to

Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition) provides regional training through its partnership with CATCH. Visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/newsevents/news53.htm for more information.

Enter the Recipes for Healthy Kids Contest!

Let's Move! and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are inviting school nutrition professionals, chefs, students, parents and community members to create recipes for lunch menus across the country. Teams from schools enrolled in the National School Lunch Program can develop recipes in one of three categories—Whole Grains, Dark Green and Orange Vegetables, or Dry Beans and Peas—to be served in their school's cafeteria and rated by students and judges. The teams with the top three recipes will compete in a national cook-off and the winners will receive cash prizes for their schools' foodservice programs. Semi-finalists' recipes will also be posted for online public voting to determine a Popular Choice Winner. In addition, the top ten recipes in each category will be published in a *Recipes for Healthy Kids Cookbook*.

Deadline to enter: December 30

More info: recipesforkidschallenge.com

Apply for a HealthierUS School challenge award.

Since 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's HealthierUS School Challenge has recognized more than 850 schools through its certification program for excellence in nutrition and physical activity.

Recently the program was incorporated into *Let's Move!* as part of First Lady Michelle Obama's campaign to raise a healthier generation. In addition, *Let's Move!* established monetary incentives ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 for elementary, middle and high schools that meet the HealthierUS School Challenge. You can help schools pursue HealthierUS School Challenge awards by lending your expertise to improve the nutritional quality of school foods and provide students with nutrition education and opportunities for physical activity.

To get started, go to www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html. Also check with your state Child Nutrition Office (www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/contacts/statedirectory.htm) to see what it offers in terms of additional incentives or technical assistance.

The USDA Team Nutrition—whose mission is to support child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance for food service, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity—also offers a wealth of information and materials that you can access at <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/library.html>.

Support a Fuel Up to Play 60 program.

A partnership of the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, Fuel Up to Play 60 empowers youth to improve nutrition and physical activity at their school and for their own health.

Fuel Up to Play 60 allows students in kindergarten through grade 12 to

choose tools and resources that best fit their wellness goals and school policies. The ultimate goal is to make sustainable changes, so that students become more physically active and enjoy more nutrient-rich foods like low-fat and fat-free milk, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins throughout their schools.

What role can you play? There are several options, depending on a school's current involvement and your available volunteer time:

- Encourage schools to enroll in Fuel Up to Play 60 and to request a free Wellness Kit.
- Work with your school wellness council to identify adult Fuel Up to Play 60 Program Advisors for each campus to gather data using the online FUTP60 School Wellness investigation tool and to hold a school-wide kick-off event.
- Volunteer to be a FUTP60 Program Advisor or offer nutrition expertise to an existing FUTP60 student group.

Visit Fuel Up to Play 60 at fueluptoplay60.com for more information.

TIP: If after getting involved in kids' nutrition you think you have found your calling, learn more about career options through your colleagues in ADA's School Nutrition Services (snsdpg.org), Pediatric Nutrition (pnpg.org) and Public Health and Community Nutrition (phcnp.org) dietetic practice groups.

Take Action with Action for Healthy Kids.

Through the coordinated collaboration of thousands of professionals, parents, educators, community volunteers and students as well as partnerships with more than 65 professional associations, government agencies and corporations, Action for healthy Kids addresses the epidemic of overweight, sedentary and undernourished youth by working with schools to improve nutrition and physical activity.

There are many opportunities to get involved through actionforhealthykids.org, from learning about grant opportunities and connecting with a state team (some states also have local Action for healthy Kids teams in cities or counties) to downloading free tools, reports and fact sheets.

More information is available through the program's additional sites:

- Students Taking Charge (studentstakingcharge.org) provides content and tools for teens and by teens.
- Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge offers step-by-step instructions at <http://actionforhealthykids.org/game-on> for nutrition and physical activity challenges to use before, during and after school.
- ReCharge! Energizing After-School (actionforhealthykids.org/recharge) teaches after-school students in grades 2 to 6 fun nutrition and physical activity habits. The kit comes with lesson plans, recipes, equipment, information for families and more.

Join the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

The healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a healthier Generation is another way to engage in making positive changes. Alliance for a healthier

Generation, a joint venture of the American heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, works to positively impact the places that affect children's health: homes, schools, restaurants, doctor's offices and communities.

To make it easy for any school to get healthy, the healthy Schools Program offers hundreds of tips, dozens of inspiring success stories and an outstanding recognition program, as well as helpful online tools, including:

- Healthy Schools Program Framework: a set of best practice guidelines to serve as a road map to creating a healthier school environment.
- Healthy Schools Builder: an online tool to help develop customized action plans for positive and sustainable changes.
- Healthy Schools Resource Database: a searchable database of more than 800 resources and funding opportunities (free to healthy Schools Program members).
- Healthy Schools Product Navigator and Calculator: free online tools to help determine which products meet the program's Beverage and Competitive Foods Guidelines. Learn more by clicking on the At School tab at healthiergeneration.org.

Apply for a Champions for Healthy Kids grant.

This program is perfect for ADA members—having an RD participant is one of the requirements for a Champions for healthy Kids grant. Since the program's inception in 2002, the General Mills Foundation in partnership with the ADA Foundation and the President's Council on Physical Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, has annually awarded 50 grants of \$10,000 each to community-based groups that develop creative ways to help youth adopt a balanced diet and physically active lifestyle.

While Champions for healthy Kids projects do not have to be based in schools, school-related programs are eligible. A quick scroll through past recipients can offer lots of ideas for potential programs and partners. Now is a great time to begin planning a project for the 2011-12 school year.

Applications are due December 15. Learn more at generalmills.com/corporate/commitment/champions.aspx.

Get Involved in Kids Eat Right

November marks the launch of Kids Eat Right, a joint initiative of the American Dietetic Association and the ADA Foundation, which supports the efforts of the White House to end the childhood obesity epidemic within one generation.

Kids Eat Right is a two-tiered campaign—with components both for ADA members and the public—and its ultimate goals are to educate families, communities and policy makers about the importance of quality nutrition and to raise awareness of the need to help children meet their nutrient requirements. Kids Eat Right provides resources for RDs to participate in community and school childhood obesity prevention efforts and to gain their deserved recognition as leaders in child nutrition.

Campaign actions aim to:

- EDUCATE key audiences about the necessity of a quality diet and the consequences of poor nutrition.
- ADVOCATE on behalf of a quality nutrition approach to promote growth and development.
- DEMONSTRATE the food and nutrition expertise of registered dietitians through educational programming and advocacy.

The first year of Kids Eat Right depends on ADA members, who can get involved in several ways.

Members can become Campaign Volunteers and take action through **Shop-Cook-Eat**, which educates families on strategies for bringing the family together for healthy meals. Weekly messages, shopping ideas, cooking tips and recipes are shared on *kidseatright.org* and through social media. Partners in ADA's dietetic practice groups, member interest groups and state affiliates will offer their expertise and resources to equip Campaign Volunteers to fulfill the commitment of Kids Eat Right.

Kicking off Kids Eat Right is the release of *The State of Family Nutrition and Physical Activity: Are We Making Progress?* This touchstone report outlines the need to discuss quality nutrition when addressing the complex state of children's health as they contend with both under-nutrition and overweight and obesity. In addition, a survey of the general population conducted by the ADA Foundation found that when it comes to credible sources for eating healthfully and being physically fit, more parents (79%) think registered dietitians are a very believable source, followed by doctors (78%), nurses (62%), books (54%), a cooking class (47%), internet (34%), family members (33%), friends (26%) and cable television (26%).

Well over half of African American and Hispanic parents expressed interest in meeting with an RD to discuss nutrition-related topics, including ideas for healthy meals, which foods and drinks are healthy, foods and drinks their child should not eat and reading food labels for healthy selection when grocery shopping.

Visit KidsEatright.org/volunteer!

Check the Kids Eat Right member page regularly for updates and links to resources such as:

- Online CPE training course on prevention strategies for childhood obesity, such as strategies for the school environment.
- Special grant opportunities for ADA members, including designated grants to implement Fuel Up To Play 60 in targeted school districts, and grants from MetLife for RDs to work with parents, community organizations and schools on improving kids' nutrient intake.
- Education materials for families, city and state decision makers, school leaders and other health professionals.
- Tips for successfully working with schools.