

Healthier Middle Schools

Every parent can help.

Your child needs your involvement at home and school.

At home you do what you can to make sure your kids eat healthier and stay active. But since they spend so much of their day in middle school, your influence is needed there, too.

Parents are key to making middle schools healthier. Together we can influence:

- ✓ Cafeteria menus
- ✓ Vending machine choices
- ✓ Fundraiser options
- ✓ Physical activity time during and after school

There is power in numbers.

The USDA is reaching out not only to you but also to middle school teachers, school principals, food service managers, and students. Why? Because in schools where healthier change has successfully been made, people from all of these groups worked together to make it happen.

Physical activity and healthier foods can help your kids do better in school.

As almost any teacher will tell you, healthy foods and regular physical activity can make a positive difference in the classroom.^{1,2,3,4,5} They may help

kids to:

- ✓ Concentrate better
- ✓ Perform at their best
- ✓ Have better attendance



Some of the best ideas are on the back of this flyer, along with a web address where you can find ready-to-use materials to get started.

1. Florence MD, Asbridge M, Veugelers PJ. Diet quality and academic performance. *J Sch Health*. 2008; 78:209-215.

2. Fu ML, Cheng L, Tu SH, Pan WH. Association between unhealthful eating patterns and unfavorable overall school performance in children. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2007; 107:1935-1943.

3. Sigfúsdóttir ID, Kristjánsson AL, Allegrante JP. Health behaviour and academic achievement in Icelandic school children. *Health Educ Res*. 2007; 22:70-80.

4. Kim HY, Frongillo EA, Han SS, Oh SY, Kim WK, Jang YA, Won HS, Lee HS, Kim SH. Academic performance of Korean children is associated with dietary behaviours and physical status. *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr*. 2003; 12:186-192.

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.

Middle schools get healthier when **parents** use their power.



Start a conversation.

Let people at school know this issue is important to you. Talk with the principal, your child's favorite teacher, or other parents. Ask who is working on ways to improve food or physical activity options and how you can help.



Let your kids see you making healthier choices.

Middle school kids still need their parents to show them the way. Be their role model for healthy foods and physical activity at home and school. Encourage them all you can.



Sign up. Join in.

Volunteer for a project or join a parent's committee on wellness.

Get on the agenda at the next parent's association meeting. Or start a parent's group online.



Make fundraisers healthier.

Instead of the usual candy and dessert foods, how about selling fresh fruit or holding a car wash or walkathon? Healthier choices can work just as well and are better for everybody.



Start small and work with others.

The important thing is to get something going now. Even small changes can make a healthy difference.



Get started today at TeamNutrition.usda.gov.

You'll find ready-to-use tools, like conversation starters and checklists. You'll also see what other middle school parents are doing to make their schools healthier.

Thanks for your help.



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