



HEALTHY LIVING MATTERS

Assessment of Policies and Practices Influencing Nutrition and Physical Activity Environments in Harris County Schools

ASSESSING ACTIVE LIVING AND HEALTHY EATING

CHILDREN AT RISK worked with the Healthy Living Matters (HLM) Collaborative to develop and conduct two surveys. These surveys were sent to both district and campus-level administrators to better understand nutrition and physical activity policies and practices in Houston/Harris County schools. Twelve districts participated in the district-level survey and 139 campus administrators completed the campus-level survey.



Both district (100%) and campus-level administrators (99%) strongly agree/agree that childhood obesity among children is a concern

99% of respondents said that schools have a responsibility to promote healthy choices among children and adolescents
Schools

100% of respondents said that providing students opportunities to be physically active during the school day is important

SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Barriers Preventing Healthy Eating and Adequate Physical Activity

- ➔ Student access to vending machines was minimal among elementary campuses (1%); 46% of intermediate/high school campuses completely restricted access, and 12% of intermediate/high school campuses allow access to vending machines throughout the day.
- ➔ Inadequate outdoor facilities and competing demands for teaching other subjects were the top barriers to implementing recess and physical education; approximately 1 out of every 3 campuses reported at least one barrier to implementing physical education.
- ➔ Active transportation and active commuting are often not encouraged.
- ➔ Local produce is typically not incorporated in school meals, but campus food gardens have support.



SCHOOL DISTRICT STAKEHOLDERS RECOMMENDED THESE POLICIES

EAT

- Propose a city or state ban on trans fat foods in restaurants and schools.
- Support a state bill to prevent the sales of competitive foods at elementary, middle, and high schools during the school day.
- Support the expansion of school breakfast to all students in public schools.
- Support the expansion of farm to school programs throughout school districts
- Assess the quality of food at public schools, how much food is being eaten, and identify programs where food is good and the program is successful.
- Request that the Texas School Health Advisory Committee develop a checklist for SHACs to use to assess their district's type of food advertisements, messages, etc.
- Propose a school district level policy to ban all food advertising on school property or ban advertising in school.
- A policy specifying limits to foods of low nutritional value in schools is needed.
- Advocate for more healthy food choices in the school cafeteria.
- Increase quality of protein in school cafeterias.
- Promote more options for healthy fruits and vegetables in schools.
- Promote more options for healthy drinks in schools.
- Promote the development of school gardens.
- Require healthier restaurants in the school so students don't have to leave campus.



PLAY

- Support changes to the Fitnessgram Policy that includes a random sampling of students throughout elementary, middle, and high schools to gather data.
- Encourage local school districts to apply for Carol M White Physical Education Program funding.
- Advocate for Texas Education Agency to focus on improved school sidewalks and enforcement programs for school crossing guards.
- Encourage SHACs to work with schools to submit SRTS project requests, and to promote "Active Transport" to and from school.
- Advocate to Texas Education Agency to propose physical activity policies/legislation to regulate after-school programs.

LEARN

- Teach school districts about how to donate leftover foods to charities.

HEALTHY LIVING MATTERS COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

GLOBAL POLICY ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY—G1. Advocate for Texas legislators to develop a statewide strategic plan to address hunger, nutrition, physical activity and obesity in children and families.

EAT: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to support access to, and age-appropriate serving sizes of, healthy foods for all children in Harris County.

- E1.** Support legislation and policies at the state level that incent the purchase of healthy foods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars.
- E2.** Advocate for the development and passage of a state law to create a grocery/food* store loan program to address the problem of food deserts. (*Not limited to grocery stores, may include local grocers, convenience stores, etc.)
- E3.** Support development and adoption of local laws to promote breastfeeding in Harris County, including recognizing designated breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, legally protecting breastfeeding mothers from harassment in public and while at work, and ensuring mothers are guaranteed a *Mothers' Bill of Rights*.
- E4.** Encourage use of available public lands in Harris County for the development of community gardens and farmers markets.
- E5.** Encourage school districts and appropriate public programs to increase awareness and promotion of school food options for low-income students during the summer.
- E6.** Advocate for low-fat, low-calorie drinks in schools and childcare facilities.

PLAY: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote opportunities for safe, adequate, and appropriate physical activity for all children in Harris County.

P1. Support the development and adoption of "Safe Neighborhoods" Policy:

- Eradicate abandoned houses;
- Ensure sufficient public safety officer coverage, encourage community policing approaches;
- Improve animal control efforts to reduce stray animals;
- Fix streets and sidewalks, promote Safe Routes to Schools efforts, build sidewalks in new developments, promote Complete Streets policy;
- Improve lighting in streets and parks; and
- Support the ongoing development of safe trails and parks, such as the Bayou Greenway Initiative and Utility Corridor Improvements.

P2. Support Harris County School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in implementing a policy that requires physical activity (PA) subcommittees and recommendations for joint-use agreements or community/school partnerships.

P3. Increase middle school physical education (PE) requirements to include moderate to vigorous activity for 6 semesters, high school PE requirements to 1.5 semesters, and make 1 semester of health education required for graduation.

P4. Institute a Texas policy on recess that encourages age-appropriate outdoor playtime.

P5. Conduct a study and encourage the Texas Education Agency to establish guidelines for outdoor features on public school campuses to maximize outdoor physical activity.

LEARN: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote health education opportunities related to nutrition, physical education, and general healthy living for all children, families and caregivers in Harris County.

L1. HLM recommends the development of guidelines to educate and incent administrators, school teachers, childcare providers, and other staff to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.

L2. Support a comprehensive "Community Health Literacy" strategy:

- Support a campaign for healthy eating for families;
- Expand community education programs on how to cook healthy;
- Expand public programs that teach community and backyard gardening; and
- Support a policy to expand coordinated school health strategies to grades 9-12.

L3. Establish state, city, and/or county healthy schools and healthy child care recognition programs with a training component.

L4. Promote outdoor classrooms and incorporate active learning into core curriculum subjects to increase physical activity in Harris County school districts.

For resources, full citations, and more information, please visit HealthyLivingMatters.net.