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Ten Strategies for Promoting Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle Through School Health Programs

CDC has developed guidelines for school programs on promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle among young people. Based on rigorous reviews of the scientific literature and expert opinion, these guidelines include many recommendations for action. From these guidelines, CDC has developed the following ten key strategies, along with sample action steps that schools can implement to support these strategies.

- 1. Assessment:** Assess the school's health policies and programs and develop a plan for improvement.
 - Assemble a team of staff, students, parents, and community members to assess the school's health policies and programs using *CDC's School Health Index* or a similar tool.
 - Work with staff, students, parents, and the community to develop and implement an action plan for improving school health policies and programs.
 - Communicate results of the policy and program assessment and the action plan to the school community.
 - Monitor implementation of the action plan.
 - Use *CDC's School Health Index* or similar tool to reassess school policies and programs on a regular basis.
- 2. Policy:** Improve the school's health policies.
 - Assemble a team of staff, students, parents, and community members to improve the school's health policies using *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide* as a reference.
 - As needed, develop new or improved policies with input from key constituencies.
 - Communicate the importance of the new or improved policies to the entire school community and orient staff to policies that relate to their job responsibilities.
 - Create and implement a plan for monitoring and enforcing compliance with these policies.
 - Use *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide* to re-examine these health policies on a regular basis.
- 3. School Health Coordinator and Council:** Designate a school health coordinator and maintain an active school health council to help coordinate and guide the school's health program. (A school health program should include the following components: health education; physical education; health services; nutrition services; counseling, psychological and social services; healthy school environment; health promotion for staff; and family/community involvement.)
 - Hire or designate a school health coordinator to build the school's capacity for school health, coordinate multiple programs, establish a viable school health council, strengthen the quality and quantity of health and physical education instruction, and assess overall program progress.
 - Ensure that the school health council has a wide variety of members, including representatives of all components of the school health program, teachers, administrators, other school staff, students, parents, and community members.
 - Ensure that the school health council helps establish the school's health priorities and is involved in assessing, developing, and improving health policies and programs.
 - Ensure that the school health coordinator and school health council establish an effective relationship and communicate regularly with the parent/teacher organization, the school administration, and the school board.

- 4. Health Education:** Implement a quality health education course of study that includes education to promote physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle.
- Ensure that all health education classes are taught by state-certified health education teachers.
 - Require all who teach health education to participate in professional development/continuing education in health education at least once a year and support their efforts to meet this requirement.
 - Provide an adequate amount of instructional time for the approved health education course of study.
 - Use a sequential health education course of study that is consistent with state and/or national standards for health education.
 - When choosing or developing a curriculum, assess the extent to which it includes characteristics identified as critical for improving health behaviors (e.g., teaching the skills needed to adopt healthy behaviors, giving students ample opportunities to practice skills, identifying societal pressures that influence behavior and ways to resist these pressures, and using culturally appropriate examples and activities.)
 - Whenever possible, use curriculum with research-based evidence of effectiveness. (Some federal agencies and other organizations have published lists of curricula with evidence of effectiveness.)
 - In addition to implementing a health education course of study, support the integration of health education content and concepts into other subject areas.
 - Use the school health council or other established review panels to ensure that all health education materials are up-to-date, are medically accurate, and meet community norms and needs.
- 5. Staff Health Promotion Program:** Implement a quality health promotion program for school staff.
- Provide staff access to a physical health screening at least once a year, as well as free or low cost access to physical activity/fitness and healthy eating/weight management programs.
 - Offer school-based tobacco-use cessation services to staff who smoke or refer them to such services in the community.
 - Encourage staff participation in school wellness program activities. Such participation will not only benefit staff members but serve as a positive example for students.
 - Identify a full- or part-time school staff wellness coordinator/advisor.
- 6. Physical Education:** Implement a quality physical education course of study.
- Ensure that all physical education classes are taught by state-certified physical education teachers.
 - Require all who teach physical education to participate in professional development/continuing education in physical education at least once a year and support their efforts to meet this requirement.
 - Provide an adequate amount of time for physical education classes (at least 150 minutes per week for elementary school students and at least 225 minutes per week for middle and high school students for the entire school year).
 - Ensure that physical education classes have a teacher/student ratio comparable with those of other classes.
 - Implement a sequential physical education course of study consistent with state and/or national standards for physical education and with a focus on students' development of motor skills, movement forms, and health-related fitness.
 - Ensure that all students are moderately to vigorously active at least 50% of the time while participating in physical education classes.
 - Provide a physical and social environment that encourages safe and enjoyable physical activity for all students, including those who are not athletically gifted.
 - Prohibit the use of physical activity as punishment, the withholding of participation in physical education class as punishment, or the use of physical education class time to complete assignments from other classes.

- 7. Opportunities for Physical Activity:** Increase opportunities for students to engage in physical activity outside of physical education classes and interscholastic sports.
- Provide daily recess periods of at least 20 minutes for all elementary school students.
 - Provide daily physical activity breaks in the classroom setting.
 - Offer after-school intramural programs and/or physical activity clubs that meet the needs and interests of all students, including those who are not athletically gifted and those with special health care needs.
 - Provide community access to and encourage students and community members to use the school's physical activity facilities outside of school hours.
 - Encourage parents and community members to institute programs that support physical activity, such as a walk-to-school program, using *CDC's Kids Walk-to-School* manual or other similar tools.
 - Encourage after-school child care programs to provide developmentally appropriate physical activity for participating children and reduce or eliminate the time youth spend in sedentary activities such as watching television or videos.
- 8. School Meals:** Implement a quality school meals program.
- Hire a school food service manager who has a nutrition-related baccalaureate or graduate degree and certification/credentialing in food service from either the state or the American School Food Service Association.
 - Require food service managers to participate at least once a year in professional development/continuing education on meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans or on nutrition and support their efforts to meet this requirement.
 - Offer nutritious breakfast and lunch meals that meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's school meal nutrition standards and are appealing and fully accessible to all students.
 - Promote and advertise cafeteria food selections low in fat, sodium, and added sugars (e.g., low-fat fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and whole grains).
 - Provide free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch for qualified students.
 - Provide meals that meet the nutritional requirements of students with special health care needs.
 - Provide students with at least 10 minutes to eat breakfast and at least 20 minutes to eat lunch, counting from the time they are seated.
 - Maintain safe, clean, and pleasant areas to eat.
- 9. Healthy Food Choices:** Ensure that students have appealing, healthy choices in foods and beverages offered outside of the school meals program.
- Ensure that all food venues within the school (e.g., cafeteria, a la carte, vending machine, school store, or concession stand) offer foods that are appealing and low in fat, sodium, and added sugars (e.g., fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low fat dairy products).
 - Prohibit the sale and distribution of foods of minimal nutritional value and other foods of low nutritive value anywhere on school property until after the end of the last lunch period.
 - Engage in fund-raising efforts that support healthy eating through the sale of healthy foods as well as non-food products and services.
 - Prohibit giving students low nutritive food as a reward or withholding food as punishment.

10. Tobacco-Free Environment: Establish a tobacco-free school.

- Prohibit the use of tobacco by students, staff, and visitors at all times, on all school property, in any form of school transportation, and at school-sponsored events on or off school property.
- Communicate policies on tobacco use to students, staff, parents, and visitors through a variety of methods.
- Develop written school-specific procedures for enforcing policies on tobacco use and identify those responsible for enforcement. These procedures should emphasize support over punishment and be applied consistently to everyone.
- Prohibit tobacco advertising and the display of tobacco-industry brand names and logos on school property, at school functions, in school publications, and on student and staff clothing and gear.
- Offer tobacco-use cessation services to students who smoke or refer them to community-based tobacco-use cessation services designed for youth.
- Offer school-based tobacco-use cessation services to staff who smoke or refer them to such services in the community.