

Building a Healthy North Penn School District



2005-2012



**Wellness Initiative for the School Environment:
Smart Nutrition and Activity Collaborative**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successes of the WISE SNAC initiative could not have been attained without the generous cooperation of school administrators, faculty, staff, student, parents, and community partners in the North Penn School District. We are grateful for the time and commitment they gave to the partnership to help build a healthier North Penn School District.

WISE SNAC® would not have been possible without the generous financial support from the North Penn Community Health Foundation.



BUILDING A HEALTHY NORTH PENN

BACKGROUND

Childhood obesity is a critical health concern. During the 2006-2007 school year 29.5% of North Penn School District (NPSD) elementary students (K-6th grades) were overweight or obese.¹ Childhood obesity threatens the health of youth, putting them at greater risk for other chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and other costly, debilitating chronic diseases that once affected primarily adults.

The North Penn Community Health Foundation (NPCHF) has long recognized that establishing healthy eating and physical activity habits among youth has the power to counteract the increasing prevalence of obesity and associated chronic conditions. In 2005, NPCHF committed \$1 million over several years towards childhood obesity prevention efforts in the greater North Penn region of Montgomery County, PA. At the time, NPCHF identified Health Promotion Council (HPC), with its long-term strategic goal to prevent and reduce the negative impact of childhood obesity through community-based programs, as an ideal partner.

In 2005, with sole funding from NPCHF, HPC launched the *Wellness Initiative for the School Environment: Smart Nutrition and Activity Collaborative (WISE SNAC)*. With a primary focus on elementary schools, WISE SNAC aims to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity by fostering collaboration among school and community partners, providing training and capacity-building opportunities, and supporting the development of policies, practices, and environments that encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

Guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Coordinated School Health Program model (CSHP), WISE SNAC addresses healthy eating and physical activity by engaging stakeholders from eight key areas within the school environment (See Figure 1). CSHP also points to the importance of extending wellness efforts beyond the schools' doors to include families and community-based organizations in the wellness journey. As schools, community organizations, and parents adopt healthier habits, children become increasingly exposed to healthy eating and physical activity in all areas of their lives—where they live, learn, and play.

In 2006, NPSD partnered with HPC to implement the WISE SNAC initiative in all seventeen district schools, with a primary focus on its thirteen elementary schools.

In its role through WISE SNAC, HPC conducted a comprehensive needs assessment at NPSD during the 2006-2007 school year. The needs assessment examined knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors among students, parents, and school staff regarding healthy eating and physical activity. Through the needs assessment, HPC identified the following assets and needs within the district¹:

- Access to healthier food options at home and school were needed, including breakfast and snack choices;
- Opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day were needed;
- Parents and classroom teachers could serve as role models for healthy behaviors;
- Resources and tools needed to be available to staff and parents in order for them to serve as role models and integrate healthy messages into the home and school environment;
- Wellness efforts needed to be communicated on a district-wide level in order to be successful; and
- Coordinated and collaborative efforts between home, school, and community had the potential to impact student behaviors.

Figure 1.

Coordinated School Health Program Model





In response to the WISE SNAC needs assessment and the Child Nutrition Act, a federal mandate requiring school districts to establish school wellness policies, NPSD administrators spearheaded the development and adoption of the NPSD student wellness policy and administrative guidelines. Parents, students, teachers, school administrators, school board members, and community partners were included in the policy development process. The student wellness policy required the district to:

- Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school grounds during the school day;
- Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school based activities that promote wellness and meet academic standards; and
- Develop a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the policy.

Administrative guidelines ensure compliance with the student wellness policy and set provisions for nutrition education, school nutrition services, health services, and parent/community awareness. The student wellness policy and administrative guidelines led to the establishment of a district-wide Wellness Committee comprised of school board members, district administrators, teachers, school nutrition staff, students, parents, and community members. The Wellness Committee meets once a year and serves in an advisory capacity regarding student health issues. Today, this committee is responsible for monitoring the student wellness policy for compliance. In addition, an internal Wellness Steering Committee, comprised of district administrators and staff, meets six times a year to set priorities and plans for policy implementation. Further, the Wellness Steering Committee encouraged schools to establish School Health Councils (SHC), comprised of school staff and parents, to promote and implement wellness programs and activities at the school building level. By 2007-2008, seven NPSD schools had established SHCs.



Following the development of the NPSD student wellness policy and dissemination of the 2007 WISE SNAC needs assessment report, HPC worked closely with NPSD administrators and staff to implement the WISE SNAC initiative. WISE SNAC sought to enhance the district's capacity to successfully implement the student wellness policy and administrative guidelines, while addressing wellness priorities outlined in the WISE SNAC needs assessment.

Since WISE SNAC's inception, HPC and NPSD have worked together to:

- Identify and communicate district wellness goals and priorities;
- Apply evidence-based resources and practices to support a healthier school environment;
- Increase opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity on school grounds;
- Build teacher and staff capacity to integrate healthy messages into the classroom; and
- Foster school and community partnerships to reinforce and expand efforts beyond the school walls.



During the 2011-2012 school year, HPC conducted a comprehensive reassessment to measure changes in eating and activity behaviors, knowledge and attitudes among students, parents, and school staff since the baseline assessment was conducted six years earlier. HPC also conducted an environmental scan to identify policy and practice changes implemented in the school environment since the inception of the WISE SNAC initiative. The reassessment and environmental scan showed that NPSD implemented a number of new practices in order to establish and maintain a healthier school environment for students and staff.

PRIORITY AREA # 1: COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED WELLNESS COMMUNICATION

To ensure NPSD wellness efforts were successful, the NPSD Wellness Steering Committee, in partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative, established and implemented a comprehensive, coordinated, and district-wide wellness communication plan. The communication plan aimed to:

- Raise awareness about the district's student wellness policy and administrative guidelines;
- Provide evidence-based resources to assist with policy implementation; and,
- Promote NPSD's partnership with HPC and the WISE SNAC initiative.

The NPSD Wellness Steering Committee identified school principals as key stakeholders to ensure compliance with the student wellness policy in NPSD schools. HPC and Wellness Steering Committee members participated in elementary and secondary principal meetings to communicate policy goals and raise awareness on resources and assistance available through the WISE SNAC initiative. Further, principals received frequent email communication from HPC staff to assist school wellness efforts, including updates on wellness funding opportunities such as the NPCHF's health education mini-grant program and monthly WISE SNAC wellness messages for school staff and parents.



The CSHP model highlights family and community involvement as an essential component for addressing student health. To communicate NPSD's wellness efforts to parents and the larger community, the Wellness Steering Committee partnered with NPSD Communications Department and HPC to launch the NPSD Wellness Program webpage in 2007. The website provides an overview of NPSD wellness successes and the NPSD partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative. The website also provides a venue for NPSD to share wellness resources with parents, staff, and the larger North Penn community. Resources on the website include the partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative, including WISE SNAC monthly wellness newsletters, resources for local pediatric weight management programs and services, ideas for healthy classroom parties and snacks, and local walking trail guides to promote and encourage physical activity.

To stay connected to community partners, NPSD administrators participated in health and wellness collaborative groups, including the Greater North Penn Collaborative for Health and Human Services, to leverage resources for continued support of NPSD wellness efforts and to stay abreast of community-based wellness services and programs available to the North Penn community. Through the WISE SNAC initiative, NPSD also participated in quarterly cross-district wellness meetings with Souderton Area and Wissahickon School Districts. Throughout the WISE SNAC initiative, wellness teams comprised of administrators from each school district have utilized cross-district wellness meetings to share school wellness best practices and resources, and communicate district successes and challenges related to wellness policy implementation.

Results

NPSD efforts to communicate wellness messages and resources have not gone unnoticed. In 2011-2012, 69.5% of school staff were aware of the WISE SNAC initiative.² Seventy-three percent (73%) of parents reported hearing healthy eating and physical activity messages from the school district, primarily through school or district newsletters, family fitness nights at school, the school lunch menu or cafeteria, and e-mail blasts.³

PRIORITY AREA # 2: HOME & SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

The initial WISE SNAC assessment identified that NPSD students look to their parents as role models for healthy eating and physical activity.¹ Therefore, parents play an important role, both at school and at home, in helping to promote and support the NPSD student wellness efforts. To foster healthy habits in NPSD students, the district applied a coordinated wellness approach using the school environment as a conduit to reach parents and engage them in adopting healthier habits at home. This approach ensured that healthy habits promoted and practices in the school environment extended to the home environment, and vice versa. Through WISE SNAC, HPC partnered with NPSD to offer a variety of programs and services to educate parents and build their capacity around offering healthy eating and physical activity opportunities at home. Since 2007, the district has offered monthly WISE SNAC wellness newsletters to parents. The newsletters share tips and resources that parents can use to adopt healthier habits for them and their families at home. Between 2007 and 2009, the NPSD partnered with the Greater North Penn Collaborative for Health and Human Services' Child and Youth Cabinet to promote a Family Meal Campaign. The campaign served to educate parents on the importance of family meals. During the 2008-2009 school year, NPSD expanded wellness resources previously available through the district wellness website to the NPSD Parent Resource Center. Resources available to parents through the Parent Resource Center served to reach parents who may not have access to wellness resources through the internet. In 2009 and 2010, HPC offered free FACE Time workshops to staff and parents through the NPSD Community Education Program. FACE Time workshops focused on how families can make healthier food choices and be physically active. In addition, HPC partnered with Giant supermarkets in 2012 to offer WISE SNAC healthy eating grocery store tours. The tours provided parents with tips on shopping for healthy, kid-friendly meals and snacks.

Results

Efforts to educate and provide resources to parents are having a positive impact on parent eating and activity habits, paving way to healthier role models for NPSD students. In 2011-2012, NPSD parents reported adopting healthier habits:

- 75.5% reported eating breakfast most days of the week, up from 72% in 2010;
- 50% reported eating healthy snacks between meals on most days of the week, up from 43% in 2010; and
- 79% reported eating fruits and vegetable on most days of the week, up from 72% in 2010.

Professional Development Spotlight:

Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthier Classroom

The initial WISE SNAC assessment revealed a positive attitude from school faculty toward the integration of nutrition and physical activity messages into the school curriculum. Further, 72% of NPSD faculty and staff reported that they were willing to participate in training session to learn how to further integrate nutrition and physical activity into the classroom. Based on these early findings, HPC developed Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthy Classroom, a four hour interactive workshop designed to provide classroom teachers with evidence-based resources and tools to integrate healthy eating messages and physical activity into the classroom. Resources provided through WISE SNAC's Tips, Tricks and Tools for the classroom include:

- Evidence-based child nutrition recommendations, including the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Choose MyPlate;
- Visual aids, such as posters and bulletin board materials;
- Ideas for non-food rewards;
- Suggestions for healthy classroom party, celebration, and snack options;
- Educational materials to support parent and guardian health promotion efforts at home;
- Energizers and transition activities to build in physical activity throughout the school day; and
- General resources, such as websites, books, and lesson plans.

Since 2008, almost 200 NPSD faculty and staff have participated in Tips, Tricks and Tools for Healthy Classroom workshops. On-going communication about and access to the Tips, Tricks and Tools resources are having a positive impact on staff utilization of the resources. Eighteen percent (18%) of staff reported using the Tips, Tricks and Tools resources in 2012, an 8% increase from two years earlier. Increased access to nutrition and physical activity resources are having a positive impact on the amount of classroom time that teachers are dedicating to healthy eating and physical activity. In 2012, 34% of staff reported that they had increased the amount of time they spend incorporating healthy eating and physical activity into their work with students and their families.

PRIORITY AREA #3: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Numerous research studies highlight the positive impact physical activity can have on students' academic performance and school attendance.⁵ Further, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily to achieve optimal health.⁶ In the school environment, physical education curriculum, before and after school programs, and recess provide opportunities for students to be physically active.

In 2010, the NPSD Wellness Steering Committee made it a priority to increase opportunities for physical activity across the district to improve the health and academic outcomes of its students. The committee encouraged classroom teachers to integrate movement into the classroom for at least ten minutes each day, and provided elementary classroom teachers with resources to help them integrate movement into the classroom. At the start of the 2010-2011 school year, the committee provided over 700 elementary classroom teachers with Classroom Energizer booklets. The Classroom Energizers, developed by East Carolina University, provided ideas for classroom-based physical activities to help teachers integrate physical activity with academic concepts. Additionally, articles included in the internal staff newsletter, *Inside Information*, were used to raise staff awareness on the benefits of physical activity, the connection to academic performance, and available resources to help integrate physical activity into the school day.

While the Wellness Steering Committee worked to provide resources across the district to support physical activity in the classroom, individual schools also spearheaded efforts to increase physical activity before, during and after the school day for their students.

Many schools have increased opportunities for physical activity by taking advantage of the NPCHF's Health Education Mini-grant Program. Between 2003 and 2012, NPCHF awarded 31 health education mini-grants to NPSD totaling \$16,000 to support school-based wellness activities. Mini-grants supported a variety of physical activity and healthy eating projects at 14 of the district's schools, including Walton Farm, A.M. Kulp, Oak Park, York Avenue, Hatfield, Gwyn-Nor, Bridle Path, North Wales, Gwynedd Square, Montgomery, Knapp, General Nash, Inglewood, and North Penn High School.

Physical activity programs at NPSD that were supported by NPCHF health education mini-grant included:

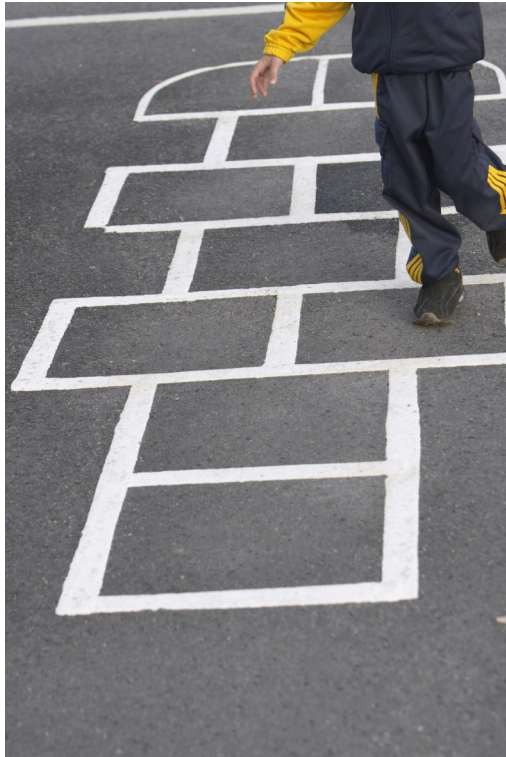
- Recess programs and walking clubs at York Avenue and Hatfield elementary schools;
- Fitness incentive programs at Gwyn-Nor and A.M. Kulp elementary schools;
- School Health Council sponsored physical activity programs, such as family fitness nights at North Wales and Bridle Path elementary schools;
- Fitness club at Oak Park elementary school;
- An outdoor fitness course at Gwynedd Square elementary school;
- Got GAS! Games, Activities, and Sports night for North Penn High School students; and
- A district-wide IRON Knight triathlon, with participation from 548 students representing all 13 NPSD elementary schools.

Success Story:

IronKnight Triathlon

During the fall of 2011, NPSD elementary schools formed IronKnight Clubs through funding from the NPCHF health education mini-grant program and leadership from the NPSD physical education department. The afterschool clubs, held at all 13 elementary schools, were designed to engage students in a triathlon training program. Held after school once a month, IronKnight Club engaged students in a variety of physical activities. Through the program, students were provided with a physical activity training calendar to encourage physical activity, and triathlon training, beyond the once a month after school program. Students were educated on the important role diet plays in helping to build a healthy athlete through WISE SNAC nutrition newsletters. The after school training program led up to the culminating IronKnight triathlon event held on June 9, 2012. Over 540 NPSD elementary students completed the triathlon, making the first annual NPSD Iron Knight triathlon a huge success!





Results

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of parents reported an increase in physical activity promotion at their child’s school between 2010 and 2012, and 24% of staff reported an increase in opportunities for students to participate in physical activity before, during, or after school during that same time period.^{2,3} In 2011, 22% of staff reported that they integrated at least ten minutes of physical activity into their classroom each day.⁷ That translates to an additional 30 hours of physical activity for students each year! Increased opportunities for physical activity during the school day are having a positive impact on student activity habits. During the 2011-2012 school year, 87% of elementary students reported that they participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on three or more days a week.^{4,8} Further, more than half of parents reported that their interest, and their child’s interest in healthy eating and physical activity had increased.³ Increased parent and student interest in physical activity provides an opportunity for NPSD to expand current efforts to ensure more opportunities are available within the school environment for students and their families to engage in physical activity.

**Success Story:
Got G.A.S.?**

In 2012, the North Penn High School (NPHS) physical education department got together and decided to come up with some activities to get students active and highlight fun ways they could adopt physical activity for a lifetime. This resulted in the concept of Got G.A.S., or Games, Activities, and Sports. Got G.A.S. is an after school event designed to engage students in physical activities that are exciting and fun for the teenage population.

On February 16, 2012, NPHS physical education department hosted the first annual Got G.A.S. night. Hundreds of high school students participated in the event where they had the opportunity to participate in activities such as rock climbing, dance, volleyball, and more. The event provided students with a nice, free, and safe opportunity to come out and have a good time, burn some calories, and have fun. The success of the first Got G.A.S. event led to over a thousand high school students participating in the second annual event held in the early spring of 2013.

School sponsored activities, such as Got G.A.S., are paving the way to increased opportunities for students to engage in physical activity. In 2012, 85.5% of NPSD secondary students reported that they are physically active for at least 30 minutes on three or more days a week. Further, students have decreased the amount of time they spend watching television, leaving more time for physical activity. In 2012, 26% of NPSD students reported watching three hours or more of television daily – a 2% decrease from 2009.

GOT GAS?? Schedule:

Activities	7-7:45	7:45-8:15	8:15-8:45	8:45-9:15	9:15-10
YOGA	Fitness Ctr	x	x	x	x
Just Dance	Wrestling Room	—————>			
Pickle ball	Boys Gym	—————>			
Badminton	Boys Gym	—————>			
Basketball	Girls Gym	—————>			
Volleyball	x	Aux Gym	—————>		
Rock Climbing	Rock Wall	—————>			
Dunk Competition	x	x	Aux Gym	x	x
Flickerball	x	x	x	Girls Gym	x
Pillow Polo	x	x	x	Aux Gym	x
Spinning	x	x	x	Spin Room	x
Dodgeball	x	x	x	x	Aux Gym
Mat ball	x	x	x	x	Boys Gym
3 Point Comp	x	x	x	x	Girls Gym

PRIORITY AREA #4: THE SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENT

School breakfast and lunch programs, classroom parties and celebrations, a la carte snack items, and vending machines all provide access to food choices throughout the school day. Further, at least a third of a child's daily food intake is consumed at school. These realities led NPSD to embark upon the task of overhauling its school food environment to increase access to healthier food choices throughout the school day, including school meal programs and classroom parties and snacks.

Healthier School Meal Programs

All NPSD students have access to a school breakfast and school lunch program daily. NPSD's School Nutrition Services (SNS) Department improved the nutritional quality of school meals across the district to ensure healthy options were available to students at breakfast and lunch, including:

- Adding more whole grains;
- Increasing offerings of legumes and beans;
- Offering a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Offering only low-fat and fat free milk options; and,
- Increasing access to water during meal times.



During the 2011-2012 school year, SNS, in partnership with North Wales Elementary School's staff and School Health Council, revised the school meal program to receive a Healthier US School Challenge Award (HUSC). The HUSC is a voluntary certification initiative created by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) to recognize schools participating in the National School Lunch Program that have created healthier school environments through promotion of nutrition and physical activity. In addition to changes already made to the school meal program across the district, the revised meal program at North Wales resulted in smaller portion sizes of a la carte offerings, reducing the calories, sodium, and fat content of snack items available to North Wales' students. The success of the program at North Wales led SNS to set a goal to enroll all 13 of its elementary schools during the 2012-2013 school year.

Professional Development Spotlight:

Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthier School Meal Experience

On November 5, 2012, the NPSD food service director, along with 27 of the district's food service managers, participated in the WISE SNAC Tips, Tricks, and Tools for a Healthier School Meal Experience. The workshop, developed by HPC for the WISE SNAC initiative, is a culinary boot camp designed to enhance knowledge and increase skill sets to help school nutrition professionals provide nutritionally balanced school meals and enhance the overall school meal experience for school food service staff and students. During the half day training food service managers and director learned about the history of the school meal program and new regulations in the Child Nutrition Act; had the opportunity to learn new cooking techniques and skills to better equip them to prepare healthier school meals; and, heard about emerging research and simple marketing techniques so that their schools can not only prepare healthy meals, but get the students to eat the healthier food choices.

The WISE SNAC workshop successfully provided the opportunity for the NPSD food service leaders to increase knowledge and skills in preparing healthier meals in order to incorporate healthier recipes in the district's menus. Workshop evaluations found that 89% of participants reporting an increase in knowledge and skills in preparing, promoting, and serving healthier school meals. Further, 86% of participants reported that they plan to use the information and resources in their work at NPSD.

In addition to offering professional development to its food service staff, NPSD Nutrition Services has worked to create exciting, appetizing meals for students that are healthy and nourishing. Students have access to daily salad and fresh fruit options. Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, school meal options began to offer more whole grains, including whole grain breading on all-white meat chicken nuggets, offering kid-friendly healthy options to students.

Healthy Classroom Parties and Celebrations

The NPSD encourages classroom parties that include foods of sound nutritional value. At the elementary level, homeroom parents plan a variety of classroom celebrations throughout the school year. Between 2007 and 2009, HPC and NPSD Wellness Steering Committee members presented to homeroom parents at eleven of the district's elementary schools. Through the presentations, Wellness Steering Committee members communicated the district's expectations that classroom parties provide healthy options. Further, HPC shared resources with over 400 homeroom parents to support healthy snacks and classroom party practices. In 2012, 28% of NPSD staff reported that classroom parties provide healthy options at least half of the time.² Similarly, 28% of elementary students reported classroom parties offer healthy food options most of the time, and 38% reported that physical activities are frequently integrated into their classroom parties.⁴

Results

Healthier food and beverage options throughout the school day, from classroom parties and celebrations to school meal programs, provide greater opportunities for NPSD students to engage in healthier dietary choices. Many positive changes to the school food environment have been implemented at NPSD to support student health. In 2011-2012, elementary students noted healthier options are available at school⁴:

- 51% reported more fruit choices are available;
- 50% reported more fat free milk choices; and,
- 32% reported fewer fast food choices, such as pizza, burgers, and French fries.

Further, elementary students reported adopting healthier habits⁴:

- 89% reported eating fruits and vegetables at least three days per week - up from 83% at baseline (Figure 2); and
- 20.5% reported drinking soda and 38% reported drinking sports drinks, like Gatorade, frequently—a decrease from 38% and 51%, respectively, at baseline (Figure 3).

Figure 2.

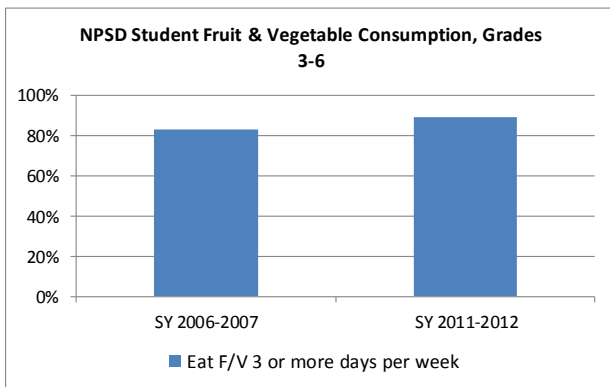
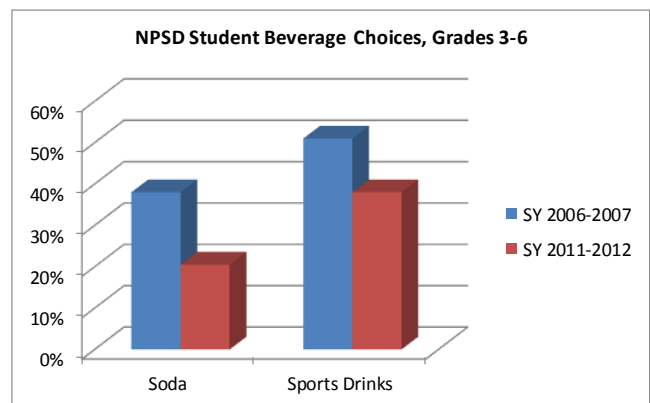


Figure 3.



PRIORITY AREA #5: STAFF WELLNESS

The initial WISE SNAC assessment revealed that elementary students look to their teachers as role models for healthy eating and physical activity. These findings led NPSD to transform their staff into advocates and role models for healthy lifestyles.

In partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative, NPSD offered resources to staff that addressed both personal health and wellness, and strategies for integrating healthy messages into their work with students. Specific resources and programs include:

- HPC's *Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthier Classroom*, an interactive workshop for school staff where HPC provided strategies and resources for integrating healthy eating messages and physical activity in the school environment;
- Wellness messages disseminated through the district's wellness website and internal newsletter, *Insider Information*, reaching approximately 2,500 NPSD staff and retirees;
- 2009 Staff Wellness Expo, an in-service dedicated to connecting NPSD staff to community resources and information to support healthy lifestyles; and
- *2012 Healthy Opportunities for All* employee wellness program, a staff wellness program that included health screenings, coaching sessions, and PE staff-led physical activity sessions. Seven hundred staff members received blood glucose, cholesterol, body mass index, and blood pressure screenings.



Results

As a result of these and other efforts, NPSD staff are incorporating healthy habits into their personal and professional lives. During the 2011-2012 school year:

- 60% of staff reported an increase in healthy eating and physical activity habits in their personal life; and
- 34% of staff reported that they increased their integration of healthy eating and physical activity into their work with students and families.

OVERALL IMPACT & NEXT STEPS

After six years of WISE SNAC implementation, HPC worked with NPSD during the 2011-2012 school year to evaluate changes in eating and activity behaviors, knowledge and attitudes among students, parents, and school staff since baseline. HPC also conducted an environmental scan to identify school district policy and practice changes implemented since WISE SNAC's inception. Lastly, HPC analyzed aggregate student Body Mass Index (BMI) data, measured and reported annually by NPSD nurses, to track changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among NPSD students. The reassessment and environmental scan showed positive changes related to healthy eating and physical activity knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as identified opportunities, or next steps for fostering a healthy school environment.

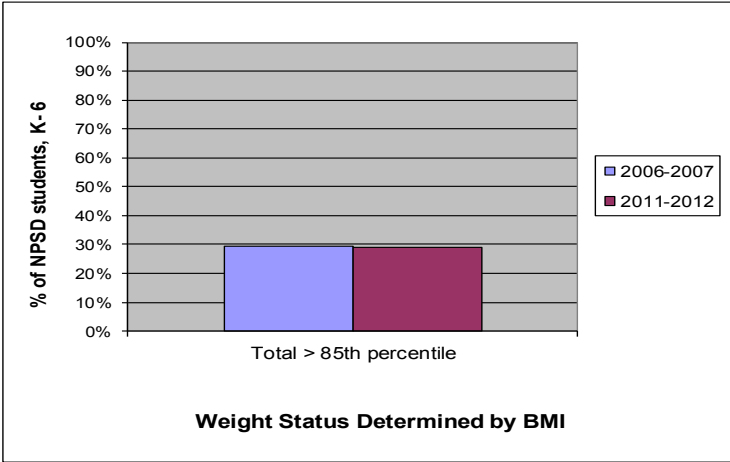
As a result of NPSD's wellness efforts at school and complementary efforts at home and in the community, more than half of students, parents, and staff reported an increase in knowledge and interest in healthy eating and physical activity. Most notably, however, is that the prevalence of overweight and obesity among students has not increased but has begun to level off; supporting the notion that environmental support for healthy habits can help to turn the tide in the fight against childhood obesity.

North Penn Student Weight Status

Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, the Pennsylvania Department required schools to measure and report student Body Mass Index (BMI) data as part of the Pennsylvania Growth Screening Program. BMI is a measure of weight in relation to height used to determine weight status. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledges that BMI provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most people and is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems.⁹ BMI is the most widely accepted method used to screen for overweight and obesity in children and adolescents.

Since WISE SNAC’s inception, HPC partnered with school nurses to track student BMI to help determine the impact healthier school policies and practices have on student weight status. Figure 4 illustrates changes in weight status among NPSD elementary students (K-6) between the 2006-2007 and 2011-2012 school years.

Figure 4.



Today, NPSD is seeing the positive impact the WISE SNAC initiative is having across the district. In the 2011-2012 school year, 29% of NPSD students (K-6) were overweight or obese – a 0.5% decrease since the launch of the WISE SNAC initiative six years ago. Further, NPSD students are at a healthier weight than their peers across Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Department of Health reports that 33% of school-aged kids across the state are overweight or obese.⁸

Next Steps and Recommendations for Future Focus

Periodic monitoring and review of the NPSD student wellness policy implementation and school wellness efforts are critical to understanding the districts future priorities and needs. Having a clear understanding of these priorities and needs will ensure wellness continues to be central to the NPSD culture. The NPSD Wellness Steering Committee must continue to take on a leadership role to ensure schools have the necessary support and resources to make available opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. Further, the NPSD Wellness Steering Committee must engage school principals to ensure schools are in compliance with the NPSD student wellness policy and administrative guidelines.

While many positive changes have taken place during NPSD’s partnership with HPC, through the WISE SNAC initiative, opportunities remain to build upon current wellness efforts. The WISE SNAC reassessment and environmental scan identified the following opportunities for the Wellness Steering Committee’s leadership to target its efforts:

- Continue to make accessible and communicate wellness resources to parents and staff; and
- Offer additional opportunities to engage students, parents, and staff in physical activity.

Continue to Make Accessible and Communicate Wellness Resources to Parents and Staff

The district is encouraged to continue efforts to communicate and make accessible healthy eating and physical activity resources to parents and staff in order to garner support for NPSD student wellness policy implementation; promote healthy eating and physical activity at home; and, create healthy role models for NPSD students. Health and physical education staff and school nurses are valuable resources for identifying evidence-based health messages and resources to communicate to parents and staff.

At follow-up, more than half of parents reported an increased interest in healthy eating and physical activity, yet only 10% of parents reported that they had accessed the district’s wellness website. Forty-four percent (44%) reported that they had seen health messages through school or district newsletters.³ Reassessment findings indicate that parents are receptive to receiving health messages and resources from the district; however, parents may not be taking full advantage of the resources available to them, particularly resources available through the district’s website.

School newsletters appear to be the best way to reach parents, compared to relying on parents to access the district website on their own. In addition, parents recommended using e-mail blasts as another communication mechanism to get wellness information to them. The Wellness Steering Committee can provide schools with monthly or weekly wellness tips and resources that can be incorporated into school newsletters or e-mail blasts to parents.

These newsletter and e-mail updates can be used as a way to connect parents to the district wellness website to download additional resources that may be of interest to them. Parents noted that they wanted to learn more about healthy meal and snack ideas, healthy recipes, and local physical activity options available to children. The Wellness Steering Committee is encouraged to expand the current wellness website to provide resources that offer tips and tools for these topics that interest parents. Further, the committee can continue to engage parents to identify future resources that are appropriate to continue promoting a healthy home environment.



Similar to parents, school staff acknowledged an increase in their interest in healthy eating and physical activity. Between 2010 and 2012, more staff reported adopting healthier habits in their personal lives and integrating healthy messages into their work with students. NPSD should continue to support staff in their efforts to lead healthier lifestyles so that staff can serve as healthy role models for NPSD students. The district can continue to offer staff wellness programs and in-service opportunities dedicated to the topic of personal health and wellness. Ongoing communication with staff and administration of staff surveys can be used to ensure personal wellness topics and resources offered are of interest to staff.

Offer Additional Opportunities to Engage Students, Parents, and Staff in Physical Activity

While 87% of NPSD students reported participating in physical activity for 30 minutes or more at least three times per week, national physical activity guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.^{4, 6, 8} With students and parents reporting increased interest for physical activity, opportunities exist for NPSD to expand on current efforts to integrate physical activity before, during, and after-school to ensure all students meet national physical activity recommendations.

Many schools across the district are already engaging students and their families in a variety of successful physical activity programs before, during, and after school. Classroom teachers are utilizing the Energizer booklets provided by the Wellness Steering Committee to integrate physical activity into the classroom. Opportunities remain for school staff to communicate their success stories and share resources with their peers at other NPSD schools so that best practices can be expanded across the district, engaging even more students and families in physical activity offerings. Further, NPSD physical education professionals are a valuable resource to the district, and their expertise should be leveraged to provide ongoing professional development for classroom teachers to provide activities and energizers that can be used to integrate physical activity into the classroom and throughout the school day. The Wellness Steering Committee can encourage schools to enroll in physical activity promotion programs, such as the Let's Move Schools program (www.letsmoveschools.org), to access free resources and tools to empower school champions to create active school environments.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that creating healthier schools, families, and communities, require a coordinated, comprehensive approach, and that schools should not be expected to undertake wellness on their own. NPSD must identify key partners, including community organizations and parents, and engage these partners to leverage resources and bolster efforts to sustain and enhance wellness efforts for years to come.

References:

1. Health Promotion Council. (2007). 2007 Final Needs Assessment Report.
2. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC NPSD Faculty & Staff Surveys.
3. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC NPSD Parent/Guardian Surveys.
4. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC NPSD Student (3-6 grade) Surveys.
5. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Active Living Research. (2009). Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance. http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/ALR_Brief_ActiveEducation_Summer2009.pdf
6. United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>
7. Health Promotion Council. (2011). WISE SNAC NPSD Faculty & Staff Surveys.
8. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC NPSD Student (7-12 grade) Surveys.
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Body Mass Index. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/>
10. Pennsylvania Department of Health. (2010). Growth Screens and BMI for Age Percentiles. <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=556724&mode=2>



Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Inc.
2506 North Broad Street, Suite 204
Colmar, PA 18915
www.hpcpa.org
p: 215-731-6150 • e: hpcpa@phmc.org