

# Building a Healthy Souderton Area 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 Souderton Area School District. We are grateful for the time and commitment they gave to the partnership to help build a healthier Souderton Area School District.

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



## BUILDING A HEALTHY SOUDERTON AREA

### BACKGROUND

Childhood obesity is a critical health concern. During the 2005-2006 school year 30% of Souderton Area (SASD) elementary students were overweight or obese.<sup>1</sup> 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.

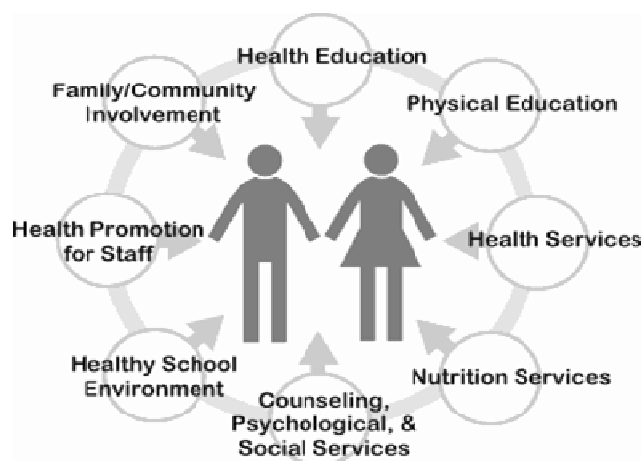
Guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Coordinated School Health Program model (CSHP), WISE SNAC addresses healthy eating and physical activity by engaging stakeholders from eight key areas within the school environment (See Figure 1). CSHP also points to the importance of extending 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 2005, SASD partnered with HPC to implement the WISE SNAC initiative in all ten district schools, with a primary focus on its seven elementary schools.

In its role through WISE SNAC, HPC conducted a comprehensive needs assessment at SASD during the 2005-2006 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 district<sup>1</sup>:

- Students recognize parents and classroom teachers as role models for healthy behaviors;
- Students, parents, and staff would benefit from improvements in daily health behaviors, such as breakfast consumption, and snack and beverage choices;
- More opportunities for physical activity were needed throughout the school day;
- Parents and school staff needed resources and tools in order to serve as role models and integrate healthy messages into the home and school environment; and
- Coordinated and collaborative efforts between home, school, and community had the potential to impact student behaviors and many of the challenges faced.

**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, SASD administrators, along with assistance from HPC through the WISE SNAC initiative, spearheaded the development and adoption of the SASD student wellness policy. The policy set specific requirements for nutrition education, physical activity, physical education, foods available during the school day, and other school based activities, such as fundraisers. The policy led to the establishment of a district-wide School Health Council (SHC). The SHC, comprised of at least 14 members including district administrators, school nurses, parents, students, classroom teachers, athletic directors, and community members, serves as an advisory committee regarding SASD student health issues. Today, this council is responsible for monitoring the student wellness policy for compliance.

Following the dissemination of the 2006 WISE SNAC needs assessment report and development of the SASD student wellness policy, HPC worked closely with SASD 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, while addressing wellness priorities outlined in the WISE SNAC needs assessment.

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

- Identify and prioritize district wellness goals;
- Apply evidence-based resources 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 seven 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 SASD implemented a number of new practices in order to establish and maintain a healthier school environment for students and faculty.

This report highlights just a few of the many successes SASD has achieved in partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative, as well as the impact each has had in changing students' behaviors, knowledge, and overall health.



## **PRIORITY AREA #1: THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT**

Through the baseline WISE SNAC assessment, SASD identified students' daily eating habits as a priority area for its health and wellness efforts. Understanding that at least a third of a child's daily food intake is consumed at school, SASD embarked upon the task of overhauling its school food environment to support healthier dietary choices.

### *Expand and Promote School Breakfast Program*

Studies show that, compared with students who do not eat breakfast, students who eat breakfast maintain improved nutrition, are less likely to be overweight, and are likely to perform better on standardized tests.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the importance of eating a healthy breakfast, SASD created a traditional school breakfast program for students at the start of the 2005-2006 school year. Despite offering a breakfast program, one in five SASD elementary students reported not eating breakfast daily during the 2005-2006 school year.<sup>1</sup> Students faced challenges in arriving to school early enough to participate in a traditional breakfast program, and students acknowledged through the WISE SNAC assessment that breakfast was often a "rushed" meal for themselves and their families.<sup>1</sup> During the 2006-2007 school year, SASD utilized mini-grant funds from the Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (currently, the Penn State PRO Wellness Center), and in partnership with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative and the Montgomery County Health Department, piloted a Grab n' Go breakfast program at Indian Crest middle school. The Grab n' Go program allowed students to pick up breakfast at a breakfast cart upon entering the school, and take their bagged breakfast to their homeroom to eat prior to the start of the school day. The Grab n' Go program made it more convenient, and easier, for students to eat breakfast on school days.



### **Salford Hills C.R.O.P.S. Connects Classroom to Cafeteria**

In 2009, Salford Hills Elementary school formed the Cultivating Responsible Options for Positive Sustainability committee, also known as C.R.O.P.S. This committee leads many environmental efforts, including annual Earth Day celebrations, trash-free lunches, and the establishment and maintenance of the Salford Hills Community Garden, an edible garden featuring a variety of fruit and vegetables, such as peas, radishes, lettuce, strawberries, carrots, pumpkins, and more. The school garden, through C.R.O.P.S. leadership and many school and community partnerships, expanded education beyond the classroom walls and connected science, math, and ecology curriculum, nutrition education, social responsibility, and the SASD school meal program.

In November 2010, C.R.O.P.S. partnered with HPC's WISE SNAC initiative and SASD Food Service Department to host an after-school cooking club for fifth-grade students. The cooking club connected the school's vegetable garden, math curriculum, and the school meal program to educate students about where their food comes from, enhance their kitchen math skills, and teach basic culinary techniques. Salford Hills received a health education mini-grant from the NPCHF to support the after-school cooking program. During math classes, students tested their kitchen math skills and converted pumpkin pie recipes to ensure appropriate quantities of ingredients were used to make enough pies to feed the entire school during the Thanksgiving lunch. Salford Hills' faculty, students, food service staff, and parent volunteers used pumpkins from the school garden to prepare the pumpkin pie recipes during the afterschool program. The success of the after-school cooking club resulted in another cooking club being held in November 2011. In 2011, students used carrots harvested from the school garden to make carrot cake.

The garden has been expanded to increase the variety and quantity of fruits and vegetables harvested. In future years, C.R.O.P.S. hopes to expand the Salford Hills Community Garden to further supplement lunches for students, increase the variety and quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables provided to Salford Hills' families through their weekly summer swaps, and increase the amount of healthy donations provided to local food pantries.

Further, the district introduced healthier breakfast food and beverage options to the traditional and Grab n' Go programs, including increased variety and availability of fresh fruits, low-fat and fat-free dairy choices, reduced sugar cereals, and whole grain items. SASD promoted the importance of eating a healthy breakfast to students and parents through monthly wellness newsletters and e-mail blasts. Back to School Nights, e-mail blasts, and online communication were used to promote the districts breakfast program to parents; bringing awareness to parents that a healthy, low-cost, breakfast option was available to students every day at school.

Today, all ten SASD schools offer a school breakfast program, and Indian Crest and Indian Valley middle schools continue to offer Grab n' Go programs. Breakfast participation rates show that the district's efforts are having a positive impact on student breakfast consumption. Today, the district reaches 100 more students daily compared to participation during the 2005-2006 school year.

### *Competitive Foods*

The SASD student wellness policy sets nutrition standards for competitive foods available to students during the school day. Competitive foods are defined by the policy as foods offered at school other than through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs, and include a la carte foods, vending, school stores, fundraisers, classroom parties and holiday celebrations. SASD competitive food guidelines are based on the Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools, developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Through the WISE SNAC initiative, SASD food service staff worked closely with HPC staff to ensure competitive foods available to students during the school day align with the student wellness policy standards. The district identified classroom parties and vending machines as priority competitive foods to address.

### **Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthier School Meal Experience**

On October 26, 2011, the SASD food service director, along with 13 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 increase knowledge and enhance skills to help school nutrition professionals provide nutritionally balanced school meals and enhance the overall school meal experience for school food service staff and students. Food service leaders 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 SASD 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 93% of participants reporting an increase in knowledge, skills, and confidence in preparing, promoting, and serving healthier school meals. Further, 93% of participants reported that they plan to use the information and resources in their work at SASD.

Since offering the workshop to school nutrition leaders, SASD kitchen managers have been observed using appropriate knife skills to efficiently prepare healthier meal options, and applying marketing concepts, such as asking students in line if they would like to have a serving of fruit with their meal, to ensure students eat the healthy food choices available. In addition, the district has integrated new, healthier recipes from the workshop on the menus, including more beans, whole grains, and dark green vegetables, such as kale and Brussels sprouts.



### *Healthy Classroom Parties and Holiday Celebrations*

The SASD student wellness policy encourages classroom parties to offer minimal amounts of foods that contain added sugar as the first ingredient. Healthy food options encouraged include fresh fruits and vegetables, water, low-fat dairy choices, and 100% fruit juice. In addition, the district encouraged schools to integrate physical activity and non-food activities into classroom parties and celebrations. Through WISE SNAC, SASD provided resources to classroom teachers and parents, through on-site professional development and Home and School Association meeting presentations, respectively, to identify healthier food choices and share tips and suggestions for adding physical activity to classroom parties and celebrations.

The WISE SNAC baseline assessment found that parents looked for convenience when making food choices for their families.<sup>1</sup> Knowing that parents wanted healthier food choices for their children, but also needed convenience, SASD food service department established services for parents to make healthy choices available and convenient. In 2007, SASD launched its Birthday Basket program, providing parents the option to purchase healthy snacks and beverages directly from the SASD food service department for classroom parties and celebrations. SASD worked with HPC staff, through WISE SNAC, to ensure all Birthday Basket food and beverage options met the SASD student wellness policy nutrition standards. Today, a variety of healthy treats are available, such as apple slices, low-fat ice cream, low-fat milk, and 100% fruit juice, for parents to purchase for their child's classroom party.

SASD efforts are paving the way to a culture of healthier classroom parties and celebrations. During the 2011-2012 school year, 35% of school staff reported that they had noticed an increase in healthy classroom parties and celebrations.<sup>5</sup> Elementary students (3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders) also noted healthier classroom party practices, with<sup>3</sup>:

- 74% reporting soda is never served at classroom parties;
- 40% reporting healthy foods are available all or most of the time at classroom parties; and
- 25% reporting physical activity is included in classroom parties all or most of the time.

### *Healthier Vending Machines*

Across the country, many schools provide students with access to vending machines during the school day. At SASD, vending machines are not accessible to elementary students; however, secondary students do have access to vending machines during the school day. During the 2008-2009 school year, SASD aligned the district's 13 vending machines with the student wellness policy nutrition standards, ensuring healthier vending choices were available to middle and high school students and staff. Through the WISE SNAC initiative, HPC staff conducted vending machine assessments and recommended product substitutions to ensure all vending food and beverage options offered met the student wellness policy nutrition standards. Unsweetened beverage options replaced sugar-sweetened beverages, and whole-grain, low-fat snack food options were added in place of high-fat snack foods.

Marketing strategies, such as signage and taste tests, were implemented to promote healthy vending choices and raise awareness to students, staff, and parents that vending machine food and beverage items aligned with the student wellness policy. To get student buy-in, SASD partnered with HPC to host a vending machine taste test event at Souderton Area High School during the 2008-2009 school year. At the event high school students had the opportunity to taste several new vending machine food and beverage options, and share feedback on healthier food items they would be willing to purchase. The taste test event conducted during all three lunch periods brought healthy vending exposure to approximately 1,500 high school students. **Healthier vending items and marketing tactics had a positive impact on the district's vending revenues, with the district generating an extra \$29,724 in vending machine sales between the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years.**





In 2011-2012, elementary students acknowledged healthier options are available at school<sup>3</sup>:

- 53% reported more fruit choices are available;
- 35% reported more salad choices; and,
- 33% reported fewer fast food options, such as pizza, burgers, and fries, during school meals.

Further, students reported adopting healthier habits<sup>3,4</sup>:

- 92% reported eating fruits and vegetables at least three days per week - up from 71% at baseline (Figure 2);
- 89% reported eating breakfast daily—up from 79% at baseline; and
- 8% reported drinking soda three or more days per week—a sharp decline from 59% at baseline (Figure 3).

### Student engagement

SASD recognized that offering healthy food options alone would not lead to healthier students—students must *choose* to eat the healthy options available to them at school. To capture input from students, SASD food service staff established student menu committees at three schools – West Broad, Vernfield, and Souderton Area Senior High School. Menu committees provided approximately 60 SASD students with an opportunity to taste test healthier products and share opinions and suggestions for healthy foods they would be willing to purchase and eat in the cafeteria.

At the elementary level, HPC staff, through WISE SNAC, provided menu committees with nutrition education materials to educate students on the importance of making healthy food choices during breakfast and lunch. In addition, SASD and HPC worked with Vernfield’s menu committee to create their own student-inspired healthy lunch entrée. Vernfield students created the “Vernfield Veggie Hoagie”, which still remains a featured lunch item on school menus across the district.

### Results

Engaging students for their input on healthy school meal options, along with special programs and assistance through the WISE SNAC initiative, have led to many positive changes to the school food environment, including:

- Offering a greater variety of seasonal fresh fruit and vegetable options, including a daily vegetable tray;
- Adding a daily vegetarian entrée option to the school lunch menu;
- Adding entrée salads to the school lunch menus; and
- Replacing processed, breaded poultry products, such as chicken nuggets, with healthier unprocessed, all white meat chicken tenders.

Figure 2.

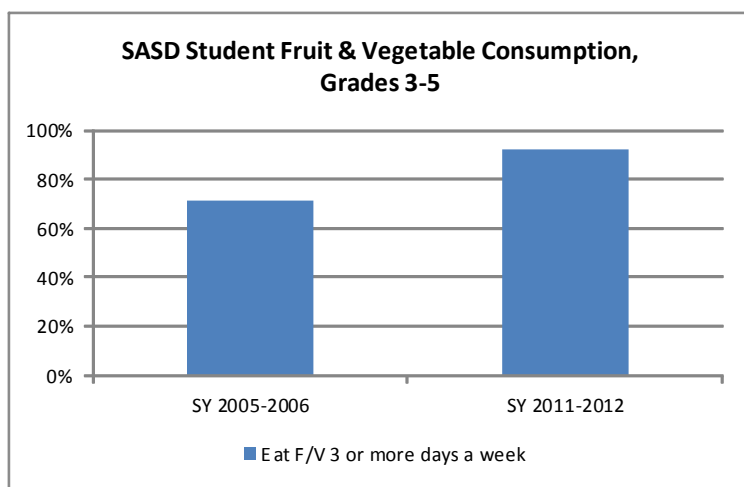
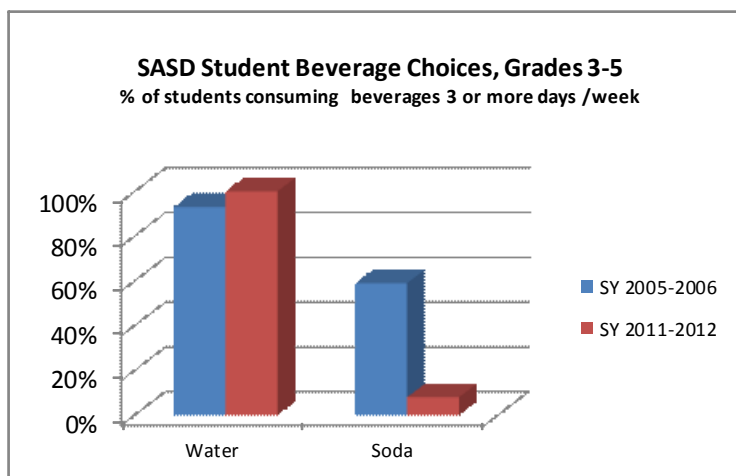


Figure 3.





## **PRIORITY AREA # 2: HOME AND SCHOOL WELLNESS COMMUNICATION**

The CSHP model highlights family and community involvement as an essential component for addressing student health. The WISE SNAC needs assessment revealed an opportunity to engage constituents within home, school, and community and enhance communications among these groups to communicate the SASD student wellness policy, and address areas of concern, such as Body Mass Index (BMI) interpretation and healthy snack choices.<sup>1</sup> The initial assessment also revealed that students recognize parents and classroom teachers as role models for healthy behaviors.<sup>1</sup> To this end, SASD set out to communicate a coordinated wellness message and share evidence-based resources and healthy eating and physical activity recommendations to school staff, parents, and the broader community in a variety of venues, including:

- A district wellness website to communicate the student wellness policy and share resources to support policy implementation, including healthy classroom party and snack ideas, a monthly physical activity calendar, and WISE SNAC wellness newsletters;
- A monthly WISE SNAC wellness e-newsletter to communicate evidence-based messages, recommendations, and tips for families to adopt healthy eating and activity habits at home;
- Wellness Wednesday messages at Vernfield and Franconia elementary schools to help classroom teachers integrate the WISE SNAC monthly wellness theme into the classroom;
- Dedication of the 2009-2010 Student Activities Calendar to the topic of wellness. The calendar, titled *Building Strong Minds & Healthy Bodies in SASD*, promoted the district's wellness efforts, and shared with parents and the community resources and tips for establishing healthy habits at home; and
- Resources and presentations to Home & School Associations to assist parents in supporting the SASD student wellness policy at school, and integrate healthy eating and activity practices at home.

### **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; however, two-thirds of faculty indicated that they did not have access to curricula on nutrition and physical activity.<sup>1</sup> Based on these early findings, HPC developed *Tips, Tricks and Tools for a Healthy Classroom*, an 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 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and 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 integrate physical activity into the school day; and
- General resources, such as websites, books, and lesson plans.



Since 2006, 120 SASD faculty and staff participated in *Tips, Tricks and Tools for Healthy Classroom* workshops. To further expand access to the *Tips, Tricks and Tools* resources, SASD provided the resources electronically to all SASD staff through the district intranet. WISE SNAC staff surveys administered in 2010 revealed 15% of SASD staff reported using the *Tips, Tricks and Tools* resources. More than a third of staff acknowledged they did not use the resources because they forgot about them. To overcome this barrier, the district offered monthly e-mail reminders to staff, highlighting specific *Tips, Tricks and Tools* resources and reminded staff to access the SASD intranet for wellness resources. Ongoing communication about and access to the *Tips, Tricks and Tools* resources had a positive impact on staff utilization of the resources. In 2012, staff reported<sup>5</sup>:

- 36.5% used *Tips, Tricks and Tools* resources, a 21.5% increase since 2010; and
- 45% increased their incorporation of healthy eating and physical activity messages and opportunities in their work with students between 2010 and 2012.

### *Results*

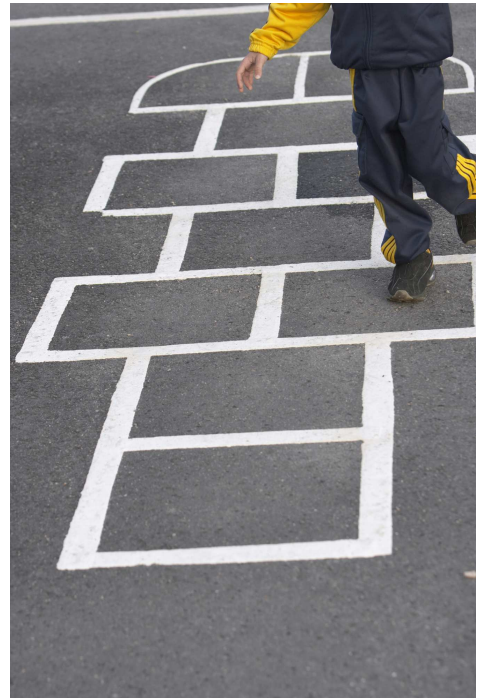
SASD efforts to communicate wellness messages and resources have not gone unnoticed. In 2011-2012, 82% of parents reported hearing healthy eating and physical activity messages from the school district.<sup>6</sup> The majority of parents (80%) reported hearing messages through e-mail blasts.<sup>6</sup> These 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 through the district's wellness website.

### **PRIORITY AREA #3: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

While changes to the school food environment and wellness communication to parents and staff have primarily been initiated at the district level, individual schools have spearheaded efforts to increase physical activity before, during and after the school day.

Many schools have increased opportunities for physical activity by taking advantage of the NPCHF's Health Education Mini-grant Program. Between 2005 and 2012, NPCHF awarded ten health education mini-grants to SASD totaling \$4,500 to support school-based wellness activities. Mini-grants supported a variety of projects at six of the district's elementary schools including Oak Ridge, Vernfield, Lower Salford, E. Merton Crouthamel, Salford Hills, and Franconia, including:

- Lower Salford's Hiking the Appalachian Trail project engaged students to collectively walk the distance of the Appalachian trail;
- Vernfield's No Child Left Inside Program constructed a walking path with built in display boards along the way for teachers to conduct "walking classroom instruction";
- E. Merton Crouthamel's and Franconia's walking paths offered an opportunity to establish walking programs before, during, and after school;
- Lower Salford's Recess Club provided students with games and activities for a structured recess program designed to keep them moving during recess; and
- Salford Hills' CROPS garden project provided students with an opportunity to engage in physical activity while working in the school garden.



### *Results*

At reassessment, 32% of parents reported an increase in promotion of physical activity at their child's school between 2010 and 2012, and 41% of staff reported an increase in opportunities for students to participate in physical activity before, during, or after school.<sup>5,6</sup> During the 2011-2012 school year, 89% of students reported that they participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on three or more days a week. Further, more than half of parents reported an increase in their interest, and their child's interest in healthy eating and physical activity.<sup>6</sup> Increased parent and student interest in physical activity provides an opportunity for SASD to expand current efforts to ensure more opportunities are available within the school environment for students and their families to engage in physical activity.

### **OVERALL IMPACT & NEXT STEPS**

After seven years of WISE SNAC implementation, HPC worked with SASD 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 SASD nurses, to track changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among SASD 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.

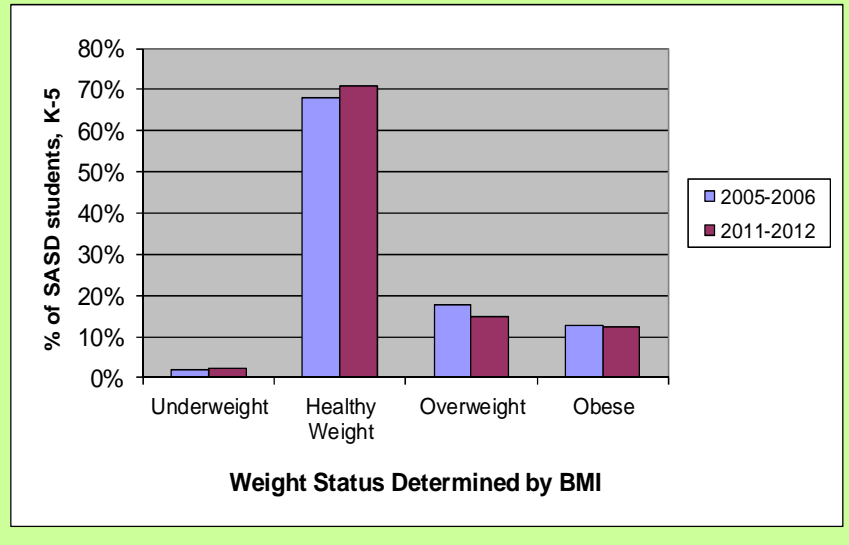
As a result of SASD’s wellness efforts at school and complementary efforts at home and in the community, more than half of students, parents, and staff report an increase in knowledge and interest in healthy eating and physical activity. Most notably, however, is the decline in prevalence of overweight and obesity among students, supporting the notion that environmental support for healthy habits can help to turn the tide in the fight against childhood obesity.

*Souderton Area Student Weight Status*

Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Health 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 SASD elementary students (K-5) between the 2005-2006 and 2011-2012 school years.

Figure 4. Student Weight Status, Grades K-5,



Today, SASD is seeing the positive impact the WISE SNAC initiative is having across the district through a decrease in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in its student population. In the 2011-2012 school year, 27% of SASD students (K-5) were overweight or obese – a 3% decrease since the launch of the WISE SNAC initiative seven years ago. Similarly, the original cohort of K-5 students with BMI measured in 2005-2006 saw a 3% decrease in the prevalence of overweight and obesity, representing approximately 98 sixth to tenth grade students at a healthier weight during the 2011-2012 school year than they were in the 2005-2006 school year.

Compared to their peers at the state and county level, more SASD students are at a healthy weight. At the time of this publication current BMI data was available from the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s Growth Screening Program for the 2010-2011 school year. In 2010-2011, 33% and 29% of K-12 students across Pennsylvania and Montgomery County, respectively, were overweight or obese.<sup>8</sup> That same school year, SASD school nurses reported 27% of SASD were overweight or obese.

**Next Steps and Recommendations for Future Focus**

Periodic monitoring and review of the SASD student wellness policy implementation and school wellness efforts are critical to understanding the districts future wellness priorities and needs. Having a clear understanding of these priorities and needs will ensure wellness continues to be central to the SASD culture. The SASD SHC must take on this leadership role to ensure schools have the necessary support and resources to make available opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity.

While many positive changes have taken place during SASD’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 SHC to target its efforts:

- Increase participation in school breakfast programs;
- 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.

### *Increase School Breakfast Program Participation*

SASD has made progress in expanding the school breakfast program to provide access to a nutritious breakfast every day during the school year. And, while 89% of students reported eating breakfast daily in 2012, a 10% increase from 2005, opportunities remain to engage the 11% of students who are not consuming breakfast daily.<sup>1, 3, 4</sup> While school breakfast participation rates have increased from 2.5% to 4% between 2006 and 2012, the number of students enrolled in the free and reduced meal program has increased from 8% to 18% during the same time period. Further, only 17% of free and reduced meal students participate in SASD school breakfast program, compared to 70% who participate in the school lunch program.

Numerous studies note the association between students' participation in school breakfast programs, improved eating habits, and better academic performance.<sup>10</sup> Because it is the mission of SASD to assure a quality education for all students, increasing participation in the school breakfast program can be a means to enhance student learning, thereby contributing to the mission of SASD. Additionally, the Food Research Action Center notes, "Low-income children who eat school breakfast have better overall diet quality than those who eat breakfast elsewhere or skip breakfast".<sup>11</sup> Opportunities remain for the district to target school breakfast marketing efforts to its free and reduced meal population to ensure this vulnerable population takes advantage of the school breakfast program, available to them at no or low-cost. Alternative meal service models such as Breakfast in the Classroom, Second Chance Breakfast, or "Brunch", and Breakfast Vending have all been proven strategies to increase school breakfast participation.<sup>12</sup> Ideas to further increase student participation in the current SASD breakfast program include involving students with planning the breakfast menu, offer incentives for breakfast participation such as placing a ticket in the breakfast bag that enters students into a raffle for prizes, and invite local celebrities or special guests to eat breakfast with the students.<sup>12</sup>

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

The district is encouraged to continue efforts to make accessible and communicate wellness resources to parents and staff in order to garner support for SASD student wellness policy implementation; promote healthy eating and

## **OAK RIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GETS KIDS MOVING**

Current research by John Ratey, author of the book *Spark*, demonstrates the connection between exercise and the brain's performance. After attending a presentation by Mr. Ratey, Colleen Wegimont, Health and PE teacher, knew she wanted to start a morning fitness club at Oak Ridge Elementary School to provide students the opportunity to not only wake up their bodies, but their minds too, preparing students for the school day.

During the 2009-2010 school year, Ms. Wegimont started the Wake Up Club at Oak Ridge; offering students more opportunities to be physically active before the start of the school day. The program was designed to target the school's 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, because scheduling conflicts provided these students with fewer opportunities to be active during the school day. From September through April, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade club members arrive at the school gym half an hour before school starts to participate in a physical activity circuit made up of six to eight stations, each focusing on a different activity. To engage students in taking responsibility for their health, they must choose the activities, set-up the proper equipment for those activities, run the stations, and put all the equipment away prior to the start of the school day.

After four years, the program remains a hit with students. So much so that Ms. Wegimont had to break out the grades with 4<sup>th</sup> graders participating on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders participating on Monday and Wednesdays. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade club averages 38 kids and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade club averages 30 kids each week.

In addition to the Wake Up Club, Oak Ridge has engaged parents in its wellness efforts. Parents volunteer to come to school during recess to lead a successful Jump Rope Club. And, the Oak Ridge Home & School Association established a wellness committee, which supports activities such as the Family Walk held in September 2011.

Programs like those being implemented at Oak Ridge are helping to increase awareness of the need for healthy eating and physical activity. The WISE SNAC reassessment found that SASD students are more active than their peers across Montgomery County, with 89% of SASD participating in at least 30 minutes of physical activity on three or more days a week, compared to 87% of school-age children across Montgomery County.<sup>13</sup>

physical activity at home; and, create healthy role models for SASD students. SASD health and physical education teachers and school nurses are valuable resources for identifying evidence-based health messages and resources to communicate to parents and staff.

At follow-up, only 15% of parents reported accessing the district's wellness website, while most (80%) reported seeing health messages through SASD e-mail blasts and e-newsletters. These 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 through the district's wellness website. E-mail communication appears to be the best mechanism to reach parents and staff, compared to relying on parents and staff to access the district website on their own. SASD can expand its wellness website to provide a greater variety of health and wellness resources for parents and staff, and utilize monthly e-mail blast to communicate a brief wellness tip that connects parents and staff to the district wellness website to download additional resources.

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

While 89% of SASD students report 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.<sup>3, 4, 13</sup> With students and parents reporting increased interest for physical activity, opportunities exist for SASD 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. Opportunities exist for school staff to communicate their success stories and share resources with their peers at other schools so that best practices can be expanded across the district, engaging even more students and families in physical activity offerings. Classroom parties and celebrations also provide an opportunity to integrate physical activity into the school day. While students and staff acknowledge classroom parties are offering healthier foods, fewer acknowledge parties are integrating physical activity. Further, SASD Physical Education staff are a valuable resource to the district, and their expertise should be leveraged to provide ongoing professional development for classroom teachers to provide classroom activities and energizers that can be used to integrate physical activity into the classroom.

Recommended strategies to increase opportunities to engage students, parents, and staff in physical activity include:

- Offer professional development opportunities to raise awareness on the connection between physical activity and academic performance and share strategies to integrate physical activity into the school day; and
- Encourage schools to enroll in the Let's Move Schools program ([www.letsmoveschools.org](http://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, requires a coordinated, comprehensive approach, and that schools should not be expected to undertake wellness on their own. SASD 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. (2006). September 2006 Final Needs Assessment Report.
2. Action for Healthy Kids, Wyoming. (2007). Breakfast = Achievement (Fact Sheet). <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/for-schools/resources/files/wyafhk-breakfast-achievement.pdf>
3. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC SASD Student (3-6 grade) Surveys.
4. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC SASD Student (7-12 grade) Surveys.
5. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC SASD Faculty & Staff Surveys.
6. Health Promotion Council. (2012). WISE SNAC SASD Parent/Guardian Surveys.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Body Mass Index. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/>
8. 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>
9. Center for Hunger Free Communities. (2012). A Preliminary Analysis for Ending Hunger in Montgomery County. <http://npchf.org/resources/ending-hunger-montgomery-county-2012>
10. Nemours Health and Prevention Services. (2009). Healthy Students = Successful Learners (Fact Sheet). <http://www.nemours.org/content/dam/nemours/www/filebox/service/preventive/nhps/pep/healthacademfs.pdf>
11. Food Research and Action Center. (2011). Breakfast for Health (Fact Sheet). <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf>
12. NEA Health Information Network and Share Our Strength. Start School with Breakfast: A Guide to Increasing School Breakfast Participation. <http://www.neahin.org/assets/pdfs/hin-sos-for-web-final.pdf>
13. United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>



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