IT TAKES A VILLAGE: INVOLVING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

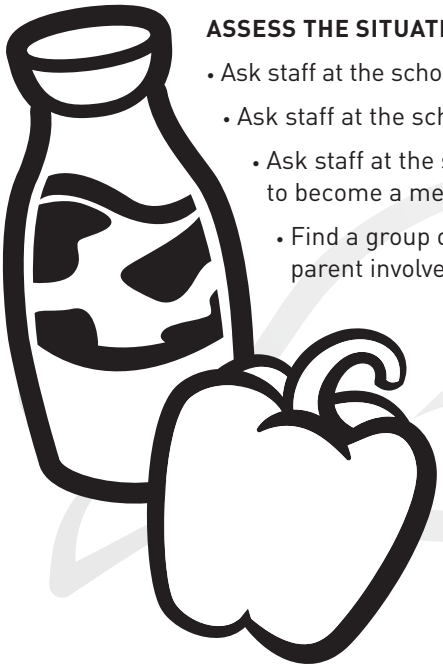
Families want their children to have the best possible foundation for a bright future. Healthy food and beverages are the building blocks for healthy bodies and brains. Many parents choose to play an active role in their child's education at home and at school. Children spend a significant amount of time at school and it reinforces a parent's message when healthy habits are consistent in both locations.

There is a movement nationally and in Michigan to improve the food and beverage offerings in schools. In October 2010, the Michigan State Board of Education approved the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*: Michigan Department of Education Recommendations for Food and Beverage Offerings in Michigan Schools gives schools guidance on healthy offerings available to students. The *Michigan Nutrition Standards* address all the places where food and beverages are offered and sold in schools. Schools are under tremendous pressure to meet rigorous academic standards. They may be very interested in impacting the health environment but may have equally important competing priorities. Be prepared to offer your help. Below are some ideas on how to get involved.

For links to the underlined resources, go to the online toolkit at www.michigan.gov/nutritionstandards

FAMILIES CAN...

- Learn why nutrition standards are important
- Become familiar with the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*
- Role model healthy behaviors



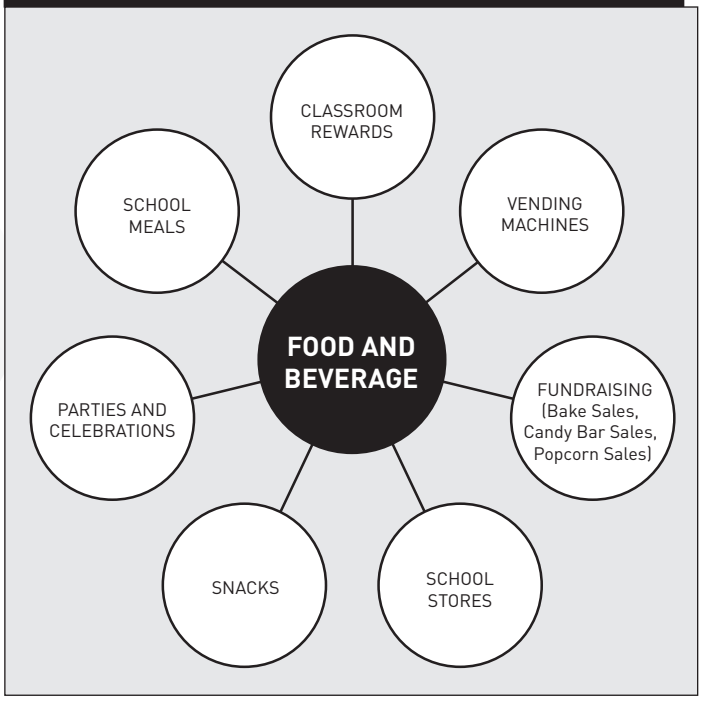
ASSESS THE SITUATION AT THE SCHOOL

- Ask staff at the school/district if they are working to implement the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*.
- Ask staff at the school/district about their Local Wellness Policy.
- Ask staff at the school/district if they have a Coordinated School Health Team and if so, ask to become a member of the team.
- Find a group of families that are interested in nutrition and wellness. Check out your local parent involvement group like the Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO).

INVESTIGATE

- Become familiar with the district's Local Wellness Policy and how the policy is being implemented.
- Learn about the school and district vision, philosophies and high priority areas.
- Evaluate the food and beverage options students have in all of the areas. Figure 1 shows different areas where food and beverages are found in schools.
- Use the checklist to see how the different areas are meeting the standards.
- Review the school menu and talk to your child about the different options available.
- Go to school and eat a meal with your child. School meals have changed since you were a student. See School Meals 101 for more information.
- Schedule a meeting with the Food Service Director. Keep the message positive. Ask what you can do to help and then enlist the help of others.

FIGURE 1: FOOD AND BEVERAGES IN SCHOOLS



- If you have a concern about an area outside of the cafeteria, schedule a meeting with the principal. State the concern in a positive manner and offer potential solutions and assistance.
- Check out what other schools are doing around the state.

ACT

- Use the GO! Family Resources and model the behaviors you want to see at home.
- Get other parents, friends and neighbors involved.
- Work with or help start a Fuel Up to Play 60 team at your school.
- Go to PTA/PTO or other parent group meetings to gather support and help in implementing the standards.
- Use the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* training to educate others about why implementing the standards is important.

KEEP IT UP

- Change takes time. Don't get discouraged if things are not going as you planned. Be patient and persistent.

TIPS FOR FAMILIES ON WAYS TO SUPPORT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS*

AROUND THE SCHOOL

- Send your student to school with healthy snacks.
- If the classroom has group snacks, offer to plan the snack calendar and make assignments.
- Organize a school-wide healthy snack challenge. Solicit healthy prize donations for the winning classrooms.
- Offer to help plan a classroom party with the focus on fun and activity.
- Work with the Food Service Director and assist with taste testing events to expose children to new foods and add them to the menu.

PARENT GROUPS

- Work with the PTA/PTO or other parent organizations to use alternative fundraisers. Think about the message that you want to send to your kids. Is their health more important than having to sell unhealthy foods?
- If your organization is providing snacks to students, make sure they are healthy.
- If your school or booster group makes spirit bags for the athletes, think about what is going in them. Isn't it better to fuel our young athletes with healthy offerings instead of sugar and high fat food and beverages?
- Does your group host a carnival? Think about ways to incorporate foods that fit the standards and fun healthy messages:

  - Serve/sell healthy offerings such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy and lean proteins at the concession stand.
  - Ask for donations such as bottled water instead of less healthy food and beverages.
  - Ask your Food Service Director, and local farmer or produce supplier for healthy food donations.
  - Replace unhealthy food games like the soda toss with health-promoting games or stations such as a hula hoop making station. See the Resources tab for a way to make hula hoops out of PVC and duct tape.
  - Have an edible sculpture auction instead of a baked goods auction—provide a prize to the most creative or highest bid obtainer.
  - Have a dance-off instead of a cake walk.

A Mid-Michigan PTA sponsors the annual field day snack for 1400 elementary students in their district. During the 2010-2011 year, instead of popsicles the children were given the choice of five different fresh fruits! By working with a food vendor, it cost only $125 more to offer fresh fruits than popsicles. What a great use of funds to teach children to fuel themselves with yummy juicy fruits and water after working up a sweat.

NOTES: