

# EDUCATION

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ***Top Ten Ways to Get Kids Eating Healthy in School***

*Why everyone from parents, schools and businesses needs to get involved*

***Danbury, CT (April 9, 2010):*** According to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, students often consume up to 50% of their daily calories at school. And it is widely known that poor nutrition can negatively impact school performance and cognitive development. But school systems trying to make changes in the foods they serve face pressures from many levels; from budget constraints to teacher complaints to kids just not wanting to take the broccoli, schools are trying innovative ways to change. With the recent ABC hit Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, new attention is being brought to the food our children are eating at school.

We spoke with some experts who suggested some ideas on how to get kids eating healthy in school:

1. **Serve meals family style.** Get volunteers to sit at the lunch table with the kids, engage them in conversation, and make eating fun. Too often the lunchrooms are chaotic, noisy, and have lunch monitors on the alert for out of control behaviors. The positive isn't reinforced, and the children aren't being encouraged to eat the right types of food.
2. **Serve fresh fruits and veggies in a fun and appealing way.** Schools have increased their offering of healthy food, but due to regulations the fresh vegetables are served in containers with saran wrap- not too appealing to kids who like to see what they are eating. At home when kids won't eat, making the food look like fun using toothpicks or chopsticks goes a long way in changing their attitude. Schools need to get creative while still following health guidelines.
3. **Parents: Skip the cupcakes for the party** and send in fresh fruit that is cut up to look fun. Then you know every child received at least one serving of fruit that day!
4. **Game show day in the cafeteria:** Kids win prizes for eating well and answering questions on nutrition and health. Local businesses and PTOs could sponsor a day a month. Whole lunch tables could compete as a team.
5. **Create a peer pressure campaign.** One area expert told the story of a school who stressed healthy eating. One child said to another when they were about to drink a soda, "Eww, you're going to drink those chemicals?" There is nothing better than positive peer pressure.
6. **Fun food demonstrations.** Children love the food stations at stores like Costco. Why not host them at the school? Stamford schools have been successful in introducing new foods by having their chef on hand for food demonstrations.
7. **Invite businesses to sponsor the changes needed,** so schools are not reliant on pizza and snack bar sales to survive
8. **Get the family involved.** Send in healthy snacks and lunches. Reward healthy eating at home, and it will carry into all the other areas of their lives.
9. **Give the kids time to eat.** The lunchroom can be a very stressful place. With the rush of lunch lines, raising their hands for quiet time, announcements, and rest time, kids don't have time to

enjoy their food.

- 10. Put pressure on the school board of education.** Remove the vending machines with the candy bars, ice cream and potato chips. Replace them with foods that provide energy and nutrition.

### **What else can be done?**

**Get your school recognized.** The HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC) was established to recognize schools that are creating healthier school environments through their promotion of good nutrition and physical activity. According to their website, four levels of superior performance are awarded: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Gold of Distinction.

To be certified as a HUSSC School, a school must:

- be enrolled as a Team Nutrition School
- offer reimbursable lunches that demonstrate healthy menu planning practices and principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and that meet USDA nutrition standards
- provide nutrition education to students
- provide students with physical education and the opportunity for physical activity
- maintain an Average Daily Participation of school enrollment for reimbursable lunches
- adhere to guidelines established by FNS for foods served/sold in schools outside the National School Lunch Program.

Go to: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html> to learn more and take the challenge.

### **United Way's across the country have also advocated Reauthorizing the Child Nutrition Act.**

According to Letsmove.gov, “the rise in the rates of children who are overweight or obese are a result of poor diets, a lack of physical activity, and insufficient nutrition education. A healthy school environment can help correct these problems. More than 31 million school children participate every day in the National School Lunch Program, plus more than 11 million participate daily in the National School Breakfast Program. Many children eat half of their daily calories at schools.”

Letsmove.gov states “Recently, the Administration unveiled its plans to enhance the nutrition and wellness of tens of millions of school children through the updating of the Child Nutrition Act and announced a proposed increase in the federal budget of \$1 billion per year for the next ten years to improve the quality of school meals, increase the number of kids participating, and make sure schools have the resources they need to make changes. With these changes, an additional one million students will be added to the School Lunch Program over the next five years, and all school children will have access to healthier snacks and meals.” United Way representatives went to Capitol Hill on March 18 to advocate for reauthorizing this Act.

### **Local Experts:**

Robin Quay, MS, RD  
Sodexo School Services  
Danbury School Lunch Program  
(203) 797-4747

### **The Danbury School Lunch Program: Making School Meals Better**

#### **Nutrition Education:**

Sodexo's Registered Dietitian is in classrooms providing nutrition education in Danbury Public Schools 3-5 x a week.

Activities include:

- For K-2 –a discussion about why we need to eat vegetables and fruit, and what they do

for our bodies. This is followed by “Basic Veggie Tasting”, where the RD brings veggie platters for a veggie party with broccoli, carrots, celery, peppers, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers and fat free ranch dip for the children to taste.

- For 3-5 – a discussion about nutrition using the food pyramid followed by preparing a healthy snack like banana “sushi” (bananas wrapped in whole wheat bread spread with apple butter and sliced to look like a sushi roll), veggie robots, or wild things. OR a game is played – either Nutrition Jeopardy or Food Pyramid Bingo.
- Another activity for grades 3-5 is called “Advanced Veggie Tasting”, where children have the opportunity to taste 4 unusual vegetables, like asparagus, artichokes, avocados, brussels sprouts, and sugar snap peas. The nutrient content and benefits of these vegetables is also discussed.

### **Healthy Food Certification:**

Danbury Public Schools is Healthy Food Certified in the State of CT, which means that all food, sold to students separately from the reimbursable meal, meet State guidelines for sugar, fat, sodium and

portion size. A summary of State nutrition standards is listed at

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/SummaryCTnutritionStandards.pdf>.

### **Menus:**

Menus are written to ensure that children have the opportunity to make food selections so that their intake exceeds USDA standards. Offerings of “sides” include raw and cooked vegetables, fresh fruit, and canned fruit. We use brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, and breads that contain whole grain.

Desserts are usually limited to 1x a week in the elementary school. This year, we have offered many “homemade, from scratch” items at the Middle Schools and High School. Some foods have been eliminated from the menu because they contained trans fats or artificial colors.

### **Free Fruit and Vegetable Grant:**

Four schools in Danbury (Ellsworth, Morris, Park and South) received grant money for fresh fruit and vegetable snacks for the 2009 fresh fruit or vegetable for a snack. The grants were applied for, and are managed by, the Danbury School Lunch Program.

### **Resources:**

Let’s Move! [www.Letsmove.gov/schools](http://www.Letsmove.gov/schools)

Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution: [www.jamieoliver.com/campaigns/jamies-food-revolution/school-food](http://www.jamieoliver.com/campaigns/jamies-food-revolution/school-food)

USDA Food and Nutrition Service: [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html)

Alliance for a Healthier Generation: [www.healthiergeneration.org/schools](http://www.healthiergeneration.org/schools)

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### **ABOUT UNITED WAY OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT**

United Way of Western Connecticut’s mission is: “To improve lives by mobilizing the power of caring communities

to create lasting change". We work to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. Working with many partners, United Way is focused on the building blocks that we need for a good life: a quality education that leads to a stable job, income that can support a family through retirement, and good health. The towns covered within UWWC's region are Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, Stamford, Warren and Washington. For more information about United Way of Western Connecticut, please visit: [www.uwwesternct.org](http://www.uwwesternct.org).

**Note to Editor:**

Please see the service area of United Way of Western Connecticut listed above. If this article will appear in a publication within other towns in Fairfield County, please also contact Donna Pfrommer at 203-339-6312.