

Healthy Classrooms, Healthy Schools

Quick Tips for Teachers and School Nurses



How can I fit healthy eating lessons into the day when it's already so busy? **How can my students be more active when space is limited?** Where can I find easy nutrition education lessons? **How can I make birthday celebrations healthier?**

Research documents what teachers and school nurses know: healthy, active, well-nourished students are better prepared to learn. The school environment—from the air students breathe to the food they eat, the opportunities they have to be active and the habits they develop—will shape their health and learning for a lifetime. Initiatives to improve student wellness offer an opportunity to prepare students for **increased academic achievement** and **reduced absenteeism**: studies show that when kids are physically active and have a healthy school environment, learning and test scores improve.

Teachers and school nurses play a particularly key role in promoting student wellness as they spend significant time with students and serve as critical role models.

For this reason, Healthy Schools Campaign created Fit to Learn, a professional development program focused on practical approaches to making health and wellness a regular part of the classroom experience. The training spotlights ways to fit healthy habits into daily learning, integrating nutrition education and fitness into classroom lessons that meet learning standards in math, reading, science, social studies, art and music. Chicago teachers taking part in Fit to Learn have described it as “awesome,” “realistic and helpful,” and “right on track.”

This tip sheet includes quick ideas from Fit to Learn that you can use to create a culture of wellness in your classroom and beyond. To learn more or access additional resources, visit www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/FitToLearn.

Nutrition education

Make healthy eating part of the classroom conversation.

Helping students understand healthy eating is a fundamental part of creating a healthy school environment. While nutrition education can certainly be a subject of its own, you can also reinforce these important messages by integrating them into your other lessons. For example:

- Make school snack and lunch a teachable moment. Praise children for making healthy choices. Challenge students to make their plates balanced. Eat lunch with your students and encourage them to take and eat fruits and vegetables.
- Engage students in creating visual representations such as graphs of the number and types of healthy foods eaten during lunch.
- Decorate classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and other common spaces with healthy eating messages. Invite your students to join you in creating these materials.
- Integrate nutrition education into academic lesson plans: read about how food is grown, learn about healthy food in different cultures, swap out a flash card featuring french fries for one that features fresh fruit.
- Grow a garden! Gardening connects to a range of academic goals, from writing to math, and is a great way to build excitement for working together and... enjoying vegetables!



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Physical activity

Stay active throughout the school day!

Teachers can increase physical activity by capitalizing on opportunities to integrate fitness into daily classroom routines and by creating opportunities for students to take movement breaks throughout the day. A few ideas:

- Practice spelling words while getting some exercise and have students spell words aloud, doing one jumping jack for each letter. This works with reciting the alphabet too.
- Review any subject in a fun, active way by having students form a circle, with one of them holding a playground ball. Ask a review question. The student will have to answer correctly before tossing the ball to a classmate of their choice.
- Line students up opposite you. State a fact you have studied. If students think the fact is true, they will take one step forward, if they think it is false, they will take one step back.
- Incorporate walking breaks and take your class for a walk while discussing with the students what they learned during the previous lesson.
- After long, sedentary periods, transition to a new lesson with an activity break!

Healthy celebrations and rewards

Focus on fun, not food.

The way you choose to celebrate special days, reward students and even raise funds for school sends messages about healthy eating and physical activity: and with a little effort, you can make sure those messages are in sync with the lessons you're working so hard to teach students!

Celebrations

- Find a fun focus other than food: plan activities and themes to keep kids excited without snacks being the main event.
- Celebrate creatively by setting up craft stations and playing music in the background.
- Have a scavenger hunt for items or information in the classroom or around the school. Have children search for items related to the party theme.
- Have a dance party, such as learning an Irish step dance for St. Patrick's Day.
- Instead of a party, organize a special community service project, like inviting senior citizens for lunch, decorating pillowcases to give to a homeless shelter, or making holiday cards for hospital patients.

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Rewards, incentives and prizes

- Going first, being the teacher helper, or other special role
- Pencils, books, chalk, stamps, notepads
- Experiences such as extra play time, listening or dancing to music or eating lunch outdoors
- Taking a fun walk around the school with the principal or teacher
- Trophy or certificate

Fundraisers

- Book fairs or sale of school-related promotional items
- Car washes
- Cookbook fundraisers
- Recycling fundraisers
- Student artwork sale

Staff Wellness

Walking the walk!

Teachers, school nurses and all school staff are important role models for students. Your own approach to wellness makes a big impression on children. Staff wellness initiatives can also boost morale and increase productivity as healthy staff, like healthy students, are better prepared to bring energy and focus to the day.

- Find out if your school or district offers staff wellness resources or initiatives.
- Get active with your colleagues! Join together to organize after-school aerobics, walking clubs or yoga for staff.
- Walk while you talk. Meeting with a few others? Try a “walking meeting” and discuss your ideas as you stroll.
- Recruit a local expert (perhaps that’s you!) to offer nutrition education classes to staff.
- Make sure your snacks are healthy, too. Make it a policy that food served in staff meetings or in the break room will be just as healthy as the nutritious snacks you’d want students to eat.

Stay connected and learn more!

Get more tips and resources from Fit to Learn:

www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/FitToLearn

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www.healthyschoolscampaign.org