

## Help Make Your Child’s School Healthier

Because children spend most of their time in classrooms, schools are an ideal setting for healthy behaviors to be taught and modeled. Therefore, parents are speaking up and getting involved in an effort to improve the health of their children at schools.

One Washington, D.C. mother of two Roots Charter School students recognized the need for her children’s school to incorporate more physical activities into the school day. “The obesity rate among children is at an all-time high, so getting our kids to be active is more crucial than ever,” said Michelle Jones. “I want to make sure my children live their lives to the fullest, and getting exercise can help them do that.”

Michelle banded together with other parents to form an advisory council that works with local schools to host events focusing on health and wellness. Activities like yoga, Zumba, and healthy eating inspires students, parents, and community members to be physically active and make healthier food choices.

Other schools are making healthy changes through programs with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which supports communities across the country by making healthy living easier where people live, work, learn, and play.

Through help from CDC, communities all over the country are making improvements. A New York City School District made 800,000 daily meals healthier by ensuring that foods and drinks meet certain standards for sodium, fat, and calories. A school district in Las Cruces, New Mexico has opened physical activity space to the community during after-school hours.

Such improvements can help prevent obesity—a serious and growing public health concern that increases an individual’s chance of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, several types of cancer, and other health problems.

Eating well and participating in regular physical activity not only has health benefits, but they have also been linked with better academic achievement by enhancing important skills like concentration and attentiveness. For example, students who eat foods rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals are more likely to perform better than students whose diets are heavy in unhealthy foods – like sweets and fried foods.

### What Parents Can Do to Support Healthier Schools

- Ask that water be made available throughout the day.
- Encourage teachers and administrators to reward kids with extra recess, fun pencils and erasers, or time for a special game—rather than with sweet treats.
- Encourage kids to sign up for after-school sports, running clubs, and other physical activity opportunities offered by the school—or volunteer to lead such activities.
- Talk with neighbors about forming a walking school bus—taking turns walking with groups of children to and from school.
- Support safe walking and biking routes to school if the community does not already have them.

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Although changes are already being made in some schools around the country, more can be accomplished. To support healthy schools, parents can recommend ways to increase physical activity during the day and ask that healthy food and drink options be made available to students throughout the school day.

Parents can learn more about improving health in their local schools and communities at [www.MakingHealthEasier.org](http://www.MakingHealthEasier.org).