**School Strategies**

Obesity is a growing problem in the United States, not just for the adult population but for children as well. Poor diet and physical inactivity are major contributors to our increasing obesity epidemic. There are over 6,000 students who attend schools in Mower County; the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is hoping to impact these students through improving healthy eating and physical activity. Healthy eating and physical activity help to build strong, healthy bodies, but also can create a lifetime of good habits for kids. Targeting these areas has also shown to improve academic performance, attentiveness, and concentration in the classroom.

Below are the strategies that SHIP supports and is able to help schools to implement through providing resources, technical assistance, training, and/or mini-grant funding.

Healthy School Strategies

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| Active Classrooms | Physical Education |
| Active Recess | Active Before/After School |
| Safe Routes to School | School Garden |
| Farm to School | Concessions/vending |
| A la Carte | Snacks |
| Classroom Incentives | Classroom Birthdays/celebration |

These strategy details are explained below. If you need more information or have any questions please contact the Mower County SHIP Coordinator Karissa Studier at 507-437-9740 or karissas@co.mower.mn.us

Active School Time

Implement policies and practices that create active schools by increasing opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day including: quality physical education, active classrooms, active recess, and opportunities for increased physical activity throughout the school day.

**Description of Strategy:** Active school time provides safe and convenient opportunities for physical activity within the school day for students while increasing activity levels and enhancing academic performance. One of the best strategies to increase physical activity amongst youth is by daily physical education. Currently, daily physical education is offered in only about 4 percent of our nation’s elementary schools, 8 percent of middle schools, and 2 percent of high schools. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) provide national guidelines of a minimum of 150 minutes per week of PE instruction for elementary students and 225 minutes per week for middle and secondary schools. Additionally, quality PE promotes enjoyable participation in physical activity and helps students develop the knowledge, attitudes, motor and behavioral skills, and confidence needed to improve physical fitness and adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle. The activity level of PE classes can be enhanced by adopting new curricula, extending course offerings, incorporating active time teaching practices, and by changing policies.

Active school time strategies can also incorporate short activity breaks during the school day; during transition time, within classrooms and during recess. These physical activity breaks can improve students’ concentration skills and classroom behavior while increasing activity level for all students. Adding time during the day for physical activity does not take away from academic performance. Adding physical activity during the day in 5-10 minute increments was effective for increasing daily in-school physical activity and improving on-task behavior during academic instruction.

Regional optional training opportunities available on request:

(Please note: On-request workshops/trainings may be delivered regionally as opposed to delivering the workshop/trainings to individual sites.)

1. School Team engagement, assessment, and action plan training available upon request.
2. 6-hour Active Schools workshop, which addresses Quality Physical Education, Active Classrooms, Active Recess, Safe Routes to School in addition to also addressing Before/Active School Time, Family and Community Involvement, and Staff Wellness.
3. 3-hour Active Recess workshop, which addresses best practices, game ideas, active supervision and addressing behavioral issues. This training is recommended for local public health, but primarily geared towards school staff including administrators, playground supervisors, physical education teachers, counselors, support staff, classroom teachers, as well as parent volunteers.

4) Workshop for Active Classrooms, which identifies specific classroom activities that can be utilized as either physical activity breaks or integrated as content specific activities. This training is recommended for administrators, all classroom teachers, physical educators, support staff, and other interested school wellness members.

5) 3-hour workshop on Active Before/After School Time highlighting the importance of physical activity, the link to learning, identification of hands-on practices, and identifying valuable resources that can be implemented in a before/after school setting. This training is recommended for local public health, 21st Century Learning Communities staff, before/after school staff, and others interested in out of school time physical activity for youth.

 6) Regional workshops are anticipated for the 2013-2014 school year on implementing the Minnesota Walk! Bike! Fun! Curriculum. This curriculum can be implemented as part of an upper elementary curriculum in physical education class and/or integrated across other content areas in school; or as part of a community or organizational program. Walk! Bike Fun! is a two-part curriculum designed specifically for Minnesota’s schools and is structured to meet Minnesota education standards. It helps children ages five to thirteen learn traffic rules and regulations, the potential hazards to traveling, and handling skills needed to bike and walk effectively, appropriately and safely through their community. This training is recommended for local public health and community members, as well as interested school personnel.

Safe Routes to School

Implement Safe Routes to School (SRTS) practices and policies which may include infrastructure improvements, education and promotional activities.

 **Description of Strategy**: Students who are active learn better. Safe Routes to School aim to increase the physical activity children can obtain before and after the school day. Safe Routes to School encompasses changes within the school, curriculum and community where children have safe places to walk and bike to school, and learn walk and bike safety skills to navigate environments, to instill life-long habits that support physical activity and health. Some operationalized strategies of Safe Routes to School include school travel plans, bike and pedestrian safety education, and maps of suggested walking/biking routes to school. Walking and biking to school helps families stay active and healthy, and kids arrive focused and ready to learn. A comprehensive and effective SRTS initiative can help create a healthier community for generations to come.

Active Before/After School Time

Implement policies and practices that create increased opportunities to physical activity outside of the regularly scheduled school day/calendar.

 **Description of Strategy:** Active before and after school strategies will provide safe and convenient opportunities for physical activity in the school and around the school grounds outside of the regularly scheduled school day/calendar. Extra-curricular programming will be aimed at engaging students, particularly non-athletes, into participating in active living opportunities including school-community recreation, community education, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and other education-focused programs. These programs may be run by the school district alone or in partnership with existing community organizations. Typically, schools have a variety of recreational facilities within the school building or around the school grounds. They include athletic fields, playgrounds, and other open outdoor space; gymnasiums, swimming pools, and ice rinks; classrooms and other rooms equipped with activity or fitness equipment; and walking and biking paths, trails, greenways, and boulevards within two miles of the school. Ideally, these school recreation facilities are conveniently located in close proximity to the school and homes within the community, offering affordable; age and culturally appropriate, safe, clean, and aesthetically appealing options for youth. Access to school recreation can be provided through policies and practices that address hours of operation, safety, maintenance, and community connectivity. Examples of increasing access to school recreational facilities that policies and practices may be applied to include:

* Expanding hours of availability for before- and after- school use and when school is not in session
* Providing access to school buildings for indoor walking
* Establishing liability policies

However, simply having a variety of school recreation facilities is not enough to effectively increase levels of physical activity. In addition to increasing access to school recreation facilities, the development and promotion of programs that effectively increase levels of physical activity for students must be addressed. Examples of promotion include:

* Provide extracurricular groups or clubs, e.g. walking clubs, jumping rope, in-line skating
* Expand upon community education offerings to youth during the summer months, on non-school days, and weekends
* Provide quality, accessible physical activity opportunities for children with disabilities
* Provide a listing of community physical activity resources to students and parents

Farm to School

Implement Farm to School practices and policies which may include school gardens, orchards, and harvest bars.

**Description of Strategy:** Students who eat well learn better. Farm to School strategies aim to increase the number of fruits and vegetables children eat during the school day while also lowering their intake of sodium, saturated fat and added sugar. Farm to School encompasses changes within the classroom, curriculum and community. Children have increased access to minimally processed, local food and an environment conducive to learning about how food is grown and good nutrition is created. Some operationalized strategies of Farm to School include cafeteria menu changes with local sourcing, harvest bar implementation, school gardens and/or orchards, on-site greenhouses or hoop houses as well as incorporation of these elements into the school curriculum such as FACS or FFA classes.

Healthy School Food Options

Healthy School Food Options involves implementation of policies and practices that increase access to healthy snacks and beverages and limit unhealthy snack and beverage choices through lowering sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar while increasing fruit and vegetables within the school environment but outside of the USDA reimbursable meal program; such as snack carts, a la carte, vending, concessions, school store, food rewards, fundraising, and celebration/parties.

**Description of Strategy:** This strategy supports increased fruit and vegetable intake and decreased sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars in Competitive Foods. Competitive Foods are defined by the USDA as foods and beverages, regardless of nutritional value, that are sold separately from the USDA school meals program. Due to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act the USDA is required to issue nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools with the goal of eliminating unhealthy foods in vending machines, snack bars, a la carte, and other foods sold outside of the federally-reimbursed school meal program. Adopting *Smart Snacks in Schools* (as currently termed) guidelines will be a federal requirement for participation in the federal school meal programs; however, the final rule is yet to be released. To view the proposed rule that was released early in 2012, visit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2013/001913>.

Improving the nutritional content/value of snacks available in schools may also directly impact student’s eating behaviors, as research shows that over 40 percent of young people have a snack at school. Until the USDA releases the final federal rule, schools can work towards this strategy by implementing competitive food guidelines at the local level to get a jump on adopting the federal competitive food guidelines that are forthcoming.

Specifically, schools can restrict the availability of less healthy foods by adopting standards for the foods sold; restricting access to vending machines, banning food as rewards in the classroom; or by prohibiting food sales at certain times of the school day.8 The Institute of Medicine recommends that competitive foods be limited to nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables.

Implementation of this strategy will be unique to each school due to differing results of school environment assessments. All strategies can be tailored to accommodate age and developmental differences.