

Creating a Healthy School Food Culture

Manzanita SEED Elementary - Oakland, CA

2013

WHY FOCUS ON A JUNK FOOD FREE CAMPUS?

Math and reading at school—of course! But schools can also educate students on important health and wellness life skills. Recognizing this role, Manzanita SEED Wellness Champions jumped at the opportunity to create a healthy school food environment. In many schools, parties and celebrations include junk food, but at Manzanita SEED, that is no longer the case. The school has integrated healthy foods so seamlessly into the school day that students, teachers, staff and parents alike are excited about healthy eating.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- K-5th grade
- 274 students
- 100% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals

Ethnicity:

- 68% Hispanic/Latino
- 15% African American
- 7% Asian
- 6% White
- 4% Other

ACTION STEPS

Manzanita SEED's comprehensive approach to school wellness has created a culture of healthy eating. Once a week, the school hosts an OUSD School Produce Market where students learn about different types of fruits and vegetables. The after school program participates in the wellness activities by hosting cooking and nutrition classes in which students prepare meals with interesting and healthy ingredients. In addition to encouraging healthy eating among students, the school encourages parent involvement in healthy eating activities by allowing parents to fulfill required volunteer hours at the school farmers market or by serving healthy snacks during school breaks. The School Wellness Policy has transformed celebrations by clearly laying out the school's junk food free policy and providing a healthy alternatives list for parents and teachers.



CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

While Manzanita SEED strives to provide the healthiest options it can, there are occasional challenges with unhealthy food and snacks provided by the school district or parents. Wellness Champions respond to these challenges by reinforcing the Wellness Policy. In the case of the district, they fill out a school rating sheet noting that the snack provided was not in alignment with the Wellness Policy. If parents bring cupcakes or cookies onto campus, staff let them know that Manzanita SEED is a junk food free campus and encourage them to consider healthy options such as fruit instead. Manzanita SEED's principal has played an important role, supporting the Wellness Policy and helping to reinforce it on campus.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

At Manzanita SEED, "The students have internalized the Wellness Policy...and are craving healthy foods." Instead of sneaking in candy or soda, students look forward to trying new foods such as figs and persimmons. Parents are thrilled about the changes that they have seen at the school, supporting the school's efforts to keep their children healthy by volunteering at food-related events and providing healthy snacks for celebrations. Manzanita SEED can see the "fruits" of their efforts; students are healthier overall and are more focused and alert in the classroom.

"The transition from families being put off by the Wellness Policy to welcoming the Harvest of the Month Box is exciting...[It] has become a part of our family cultures – the kids and parents will carry this with them forever."

Wellness Champion

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Wellness Champions suggest that "consistency is the key" to creating a healthy school food environment. Ensure that all parts of the school at all times, from classrooms during the school day to school community events, align with the school's Wellness Policy and give families an opportunity to learn about and enjoy healthy foods. Schools should ensure that any Wellness Policy is clearly defined and easy to read, so that parents, teachers and students can understand and refer to the policy. Finally, Wellness Champions will be successful by encouraging schools to do what they do best: educating students about the impacts of unhealthy foods on brains and bodies so that they feel invested and excited about healthy eating and support a policy that promotes their health.

For More Information:

Michelle Oppen
Program Manager, Wellness
Health & Wellness Unit
Family, Schools, and Community Partnerships
Oakland Unified School District
michelle.oppen@ousd.k12.ca.us
510-273-1676

The Oakland Unified School District Wellness Champion Program is funded by Kaiser Permanente and the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

Prepared by Ad Lucem Consulting
www.adlucemconsulting.com

