Healthy Schools NY
Makes an Impact Across the State
The Healthy Schools New York (HSNY) Program provides school districts in New York state with expertise and resources to positively impact student health through improved nutrition and physical activity, which, in turn, contributes to academic success. The New York State Department of Health Division of Chronic Disease Prevention funded 18 regional HSNY partners and a statewide trainer from July 2010 through September 2015. HSNY is designed to help school districts implement sustainable policy and practice changes that establish healthier nutrition environments outside of the School Meals Program and increase opportunities for physical activity and quality physical education.

The 18 HSNY coordinators were provided yearly in-person training and regular virtual learning opportunities with local, state and national experts to ensure they had the most current information to help schools. National experts were brought in to educate school staff and administrators on the link between physical activity and academic achievement. Many school districts took advantage of the resources and technical assistance to make a change in their school communities.

As of spring 2015, HSNY coordinators have worked with 175 school districts (25% of all districts in the state), and in 58 of New York’s 62 counties. Implemented policies have the potential to reach 484,000 students (16% of all students in the state).
A main objective of HSNY was to provide technical assistance to school districts in creating comprehensive school wellness committees that could conduct baseline WellSAT assessments of their Local School Wellness Policies (LSWP) and make improvements based on their needs. Schools built wellness committees that included students, staff, administrators, parents, local organizations and other interested parties to ensure representation among everyone impacted by the work. HSNY coordinators provided wellness committees with tools and resources to effectively develop, implement, communicate and assess the impact of policies related to nutrition and physical activity. Many schools took the skills learned during the process and went above and beyond updating their LSWP.

A wellness committee chair notes:

“As a result of our work with the Healthy Schools NY grant, the Ogdensburg City School District has renewed its commitment and dedication to health and wellness. The heart of our sustainability is our monthly wellness committee meetings. We have established a strong group of individuals who represent each building in the district as well as key areas to the grant, our wellness policy, and our district community as a whole.”
Not only have schools updated their wellness policies, they have revised many of their curriculums and lessons to incorporate more physical activity and nutrition elements, thus providing more opportunities for students.

Chatham CSD and Rensselaer CSD were able to construct a stronger Physical Education curriculum that builds upon skills from the year before, teaching more life skills including nontraditional fitness options and nutrition.

Richfield Springs Central School incorporated nutrition education into their reading lessons with the book “Tops and Bottoms” by connecting farming, planting and trying new vegetables that the students were excited to try.

Westfield Elementary School incorporated physical activity and nutrition into their K-2 reading curriculum. Students tried healthy snacks with fruit and vegetable taste testing after reading “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle.

Staff at the after-school program at MLK-LFH Elementary School incorporated nutrition education using a program called Grace Play USA into their lessons during Wellness Week. Grace Play USA is a motivational tool that inspires young people to strive to eat five fruits and vegetables each day.

Waterville Elementary School second graders learned about nutrition and tried a variety of healthy foods for the first time, thanks to HSNY. Students received lessons based on “Two Bites Club”, a book developed to introduce MyPlate to young children. Students received certificates and became official Two Bites Club members after trying two bites of a new food. Parents and elementary teachers were provided resources to effectively teach students about nutrition, healthy eating and menu planning.
Walnut Elementary School in the Uniondale School District utilized the “CATCH Go-Slow-Whoa” nutrition parachute during PE class to incorporate nutrition lessons with physical activity.

A French teacher at Saranac Middle School used Yoga Decks to integrate physical activity with language learning.

PE teachers at LaFrancis Hardiman Elementary School are incorporating nutrition lessons using the CATCH Go-Slow-Whoa parachute provided by the Healthy Schools New York coordinator.

HSNY districts demonstrate a long-term commitment to wellness through educating students about nutrition and establishing an environment that supports and promotes healthful eating. Districts have worked on improving snacks and celebrations in the classroom as well as school meals.

Rensselaer CSD has increased their breakfast numbers by offering a grab and go breakfast.

Waterville Central School District students won the Junior Iron Chef Competition at Oneonta with their flat bread falafel topped with yogurt sauce slaw and pickled radishes. This is just one of the district’s Farm to School Program activities that include a variety of student outreach, classroom education and curriculum integration with hands-on activities to engage the students.

Watervliet Elementary buildings have eliminated non-nutritional food selections for birthday and holiday celebrations. Instead, they will engage their students in physical activity, favorite activity or birthday sashes.
At the elementary level, teachers have begun using celebration carts for classroom educational experiences, parties, and rewards.

Onteora CSD added a salad bar to the middle and high school buildings and implemented “Try it Tuesday” on which a new vegetable is featured each week.

Newburgh Enlarged CSD made several enhancements to their school lunch menu to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, as well as distributed water bottles to encourage water as a preferred beverage.

Monticello CSD used more than six tons of fresh Farm 2 School produce in the school’s kitchens and increased the consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits through student taste-testing activities.

A “Catch a Kid Eating Healthy” campaign was developed in the public schools of the Tarrytowns to encourage students to bring and buy healthy snacks. Middle and high school students challenged their friends to try new healthier foods and took selfies of themselves; and elementary schools students, who were caught eating a healthy snack, earned rewards.

Kingston City School District has school gardens in both the elementary and high schools.

PS 44 and PS 155 provided stickers as incentives to students who tried the salad bar on Healthy Wednesdays in January, reaching about 500 students during school lunches each week.

PS 25 held a parent workshop on menu planning and the nutritional content of school meals, along with food samples, ultimately aiming to increase their children’s participation in school meals.
PS 155 students went on a field trip to the School Food headquarters to participate in a taste-testing event and learn about the nutritional content of their school meals. The trip aimed to empower students and make sure their voices and opinions are heard when it comes to planning healthy and delicious school meals.

Following taste testing to determine which flavors students find the most appealing, the York Central School District is offering smoothies to students during breakfast.

Brooklyn Lab High School created a healthy beverage policy prohibiting the sale of sugary beverages and students from bringing them to school. Students are working on getting a water fountain with a bottle-filling spout to encourage students to use reusable water bottles and promote water consumption as an alternative.

PS 305 received very positive student and parent feedback when they transitioned to only healthy fundraisers, such as raising money by selling water, fruit, nuts and granola bars to students.

PS 89 is promoting healthy snacking and purchasing through “adopting” a local bodega near the school. Seventeen parents and their children participated in a workshop facilitated by the Healthy Schools Brooklyn program during which they prepared salad with ingredients from the bodega, discussed healthy snack choices, and pledged to pack only healthy snacks and promote their local healthy bodega.

Several school districts received mini chalkboards, chalkboard stickers and chalk markers to attractively promote the healthier choices available in the cafeteria during breakfast and lunch, and regularly change the signage.
HSNY districts think outside the box and offer varied opportunities for students to be physically active. Resources provided through the grant allow schools to implement many innovative solutions for getting kids active in the classroom and during the school day, which helps their bodies and their brains.

Staff at Rensselaer CSD and Hudson CSD received training on physical activity in the classroom and received resources such as “Brain Gym”, “Math Mats”, “Math and Movements” books, “Energizing Brain Breaks” books and Classroom Activity cards. Teachers and Aides learned the effect physical activity has on a student’s brain, how and when to get students up and moving, how to settle the students down when it is time to resume class. At a follow up meeting, they reported better behaved students and asked for more resources.

Unadilla Valley installed a traverse climbing wall to help students manage their emotions, focus, organize and plan ahead, and adapt to change, resulting in skills for improved academic success.

Harrisville Central School elementary students get moving and stay focused in the classroom with the help of ball chairs and active Brain Breaks.

Lyncourt Union Free School District is committed to creating a dynamic environment for students and staff that promotes fun and learning through physical activity. Fitness stations line the hallways complete with QR codes to access student-led demonstrations, and yoga has been added to the PE curriculum. Teachers use Brain Breaks to enhance learning through physical activity.

Fifth graders from Greater Plains Elementary School in the Oneonta City School District really like the Energizing Brain Breaks built into the day and now ask for a Brain Break, especially when reviewing tough materials. The teacher says “it seems to settle them down, and gets them ready to complete the task in front of them.”
All K-12 staff in Gowanda CSD were trained on how to incorporate PA into the classroom before, during and after school. As a result, the middle school started morning walking and basketball programs. In addition, many teachers are incorporating movement breaks throughout the day and students have opportunities to sit on exercise balls in class. “The exercises get my brain motivated when I’m trying to learn,” remarked one student.

Wyandanch School District had such success with their National Walking Day event that they are developing a walking program in their buildings and the LaFrancis Hardiman Elementary school uses Activity Works during their classroom time to increase opportunities for physical activity during the school day.

The availability of a variety of new equipment, such as exercise balls, resistance bands, Brain Break books, jump ropes, and footballs is increasing opportunities for physical activity during the day in York CSD classrooms.

PS 202 Implemented the Activity Works program in five classrooms to promote fitness breaks in grades K-2. A teacher shared, “Putting on the videos after lunch helps students to focus better — especially during the winter months when they are spending more time indoors.”

PS 13 created a plan for making indoor recess more fun and active with games from Playground Activity Cards provided by the HSNY program. Staff commented that students are better behaved during recess when these activities are offered.

PS 13 also organized a “walking drill” with kindergarten classes. After morning attendance, students and staff exerted some energy by walking around the school track five times before sitting down to focus on their academic lessons.
School Districts have realized how important active recess is for student development and learning. Schools are getting creative and using new resources to get students active both outside and when recess needs to be indoors, and teachers are noticing a difference!

PS 184 updated their wellness policy to include a plan for active recess indoors with teacher-led relays and games with balls for younger students, and double Dutch, basketball, and kickball in the gym for older students.

Teachers report calmer students that are ready to focus on school work since the Watervliet Elementary schools received training on Skillastics Indoor Recess options. Now, students are physically active even when recess is indoors!

Rensselaer CSD and Hudson CSD have implemented Peaceful Playgrounds for recess. Both districts were describing problems with injuries such as concussions, bad behavior, broken or not enough equipment to keep students engaged, along with bullying during recess. Peaceful Playgrounds offers an opportunity for all students to be engaged in physical activity for the entire recess period, and offers structure that makes the recess aide’s job more successful.

Activity mats at Edwards-Knox Central School and giant-size games at Clifton-Fine Central School are two popular options for elementary students to be active during the school day, regardless of weather. Easy for classroom teachers and fun for students!

Schools have even used resources to assist with creating wellness opportunities with physical activity and nutrition for students beyond the classroom.

Table tennis tournaments, with tables provided by HSNY, have become a popular intramural activity for middle school students at Watertown City Schools!
Richfield Springs Central School was able to purchase 25 pairs of snowshoes with HSNY funding to use during PE class. The activity has become so popular that a school club was formed so students could snowshoe after school two days per week.

The “Mighty Milers” intramural club has been using lap clickers to track their activity and begin to write short/long term goals, both individually and as a club.

Central Islip launched a fifth grade walking club in one elementary school and after school programs have incorporated more walking and physical activity.

HSNY was able to supply new recreation equipment to Gloversville Enlarged School District to enhance their summer academic enrichment program with an added physical activity component.

Districts that participate in HSNY are motivated to improve the overall wellness environment and receive the tools and supplies to do just that. Many districts have incorporated wellness initiatives beyond just the students to include staff, parents and the community.

In an effort to increase physical activity for all stakeholders in the district as part of a Comprehensive Physical Activity Program, the First Annual McGraw Eagles 3K Mud Run was attended by more than 200 young and old enthusiasts!

PS 184 increased physical activity opportunities for the whole school community by having the PE teacher offer fitness classes to students, staff, parents, guardians, and community members after school on Mondays and Tuesdays.
The Lucero Elementary School in the Bronx held an annual Family Fitness Night that featured tastings from the School Food Alternative Menu, physical activity stations, fruit smoothie samples, and a raffle with fitness prizes for students and their families.

Teachers at Highland CSD role model fitness at each school through a fitness club, biking, and “biggest loser” contest.

Otego Elementary School has focused on staff wellness with a ‘biggest loser’ contest to coincide with the student Mileage Club. The school atmosphere has changed by becoming more excited. Staff are comparing lunches to see what they brought, and in the faculty room, the snacks teachers bring in to share have changed from cookies and cakes to fruits and other healthier choices. Everyone is supporting each other with their goals of making lifestyle changes. Students are very supportive to the adults who walk with them. “We are supposed to be encouraging them but they are the ones encouraging me,” said a staff member.

Brooklyn Law and Tech started a cycle club with students and teachers to encourage biking to and from school and to learn about bike maintenance.

Over 130 students, staff and parents participated in family fun fitness night with a cardio dance class called “Kerboom Kidz”.

PS 345 promotes physical activity amongst staff and students through a walking club that meets before school weekly and tracks their steps with pedometers.

The Roosevelt Middle School Wellness Warriors held a health fair that took hula hooping to another level and created “Wellness Walkshops” where people learned about a wellness topic while walking, and even incorporated a conference call line so participants could walk in their own space!
Wellness committees have taken what they’ve learned from HSNY and worked to continually improve their school community through engaging the community, local and statewide organizations and even writing for additional grants and other funding opportunities to improve the wellness of everyone.

Port Chester-Rye is an exemplary example of organizing resources in a community around student success, joining the Community Schools movement. Through partnerships with Open Door Family Medical Centers, Rye YMCA, Healthy Schools NY, The Carver Center, AmeriCorps, United Way and the like, the District and its partners work together to support student success, build stronger families and improve communities.

Bronx Writing Academy wrote and received grant funding from Grow to Learn NYC to transform an unused plot into an outdoor classroom for hands-on science and nutrition education. The school garden will complement the nutrition education curriculum that the school adopted, called Choice, Control, and Change.

During National School Breakfast Week, Middle Early College High School (Buffalo Public Schools) invited families to a breakfast celebration honoring academic and other student successes and showcasing healthy breakfast options. HSNY assisted in making this event possible by serving as a collaborative partner, helping the district coordinate their own resources and access community resources.

East Middle School has been successful in receiving Fuel Up to Play 60 and Action for Healthy Kids grants. Their most recent award covered the cost of an awesome fitness trail which is being utilized in afterschool programs and PE classes.

Clyde-Savannah Central School District is leveraging their Healthy Schools New York and PEP Grant resources to create sustainable opportunities for increasing physical activity for students through engaging activities such as snowshoeing and expanding intramural opportunities with evening swimming and free swim lessons on Saturdays.
These are just a sampling of the amazing initiatives that have happened in school districts over the past five years while working with Healthy Schools New York Coordinators. More than just a grant that provided expertise and resources to positively impact health through improved nutrition and physical activity, Healthy Schools New York propelled schools and communities into a culture of wellness. Districts implemented sustainable changes that benefit the entire school community and, most of all, our children as they build upon these healthy behaviors.

The Riverside Elementary School PE teacher created a running program connected to a local 5K race. The 12th annual Riverside 5K had 38 staff, students, and parents from the 98 participants. All funds go directly to an annual 5th-grade field trip. “It’s a great way to generate funds rather than selling candy!”

After attending the Poughkeepsie Learning Connection Forum hosted by Healthy Schools NY and the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council (ADADC), Beacon City School District was able to get a cart donated by ADADC to address barriers to school breakfast in the high school. With the mobile cart, high school students will be able to grab breakfast on the go.

HSNY collaborated with the Health Department organizing the Longest Day of Play, which coincides with the final day of classes for Clinton County schools. This day is dedicated to promoting play as a great form of physical activity and was well attended.
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