

7 Things Teachers Can Do to Make Your School a Healthier Place!

Healthy children are better learners. They perform better on all levels of academic achievement: performance, behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes. Here are seven things you can do today to help ensure that all kids have the opportunity to be healthy and successful.



1. Encourage students to drink water.

Water is a healthier alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages. You can help students to stay hydrated by letting them visit the water fountain periodically. In addition, you can support adoption of a school policy that allows students to have water bottles. This type of policy has been shown to increase student access to water throughout the day.



2. Offer healthy rewards.

Concrete rewards can motivate students to attend class, behave well in class, or produce better work. If you are not careful in choosing what you reward, however, you can have an unhealthy impact. Research on child eating habits has shown that foods used as “rewards” become more desirable to children throughout adulthood and suggest that good behaviors should be rewarded with something sweet. Help students learn to celebrate success in a healthy way through:

Social rewards – like attention or praise
Recognition – a certificate, announcement on the loudspeaker, letter to parents
Privileges – homework pass, choosing the class activity, extra recess time, helping you (the teacher)
Supplies or trinkets – stamps, gift certificate to the school store, stickers



3. Choose healthy classroom celebrations.

There are lots of ways to celebrate. Using healthier celebration options sends a consistent message to students that you (the teacher) and the school prioritize health. Celebrations without food are the gold standard and may include games, dance parties, extra recess, “free choice” time, outside class time, or a scavenger hunt. If food is involved, encourage healthy alternatives like a yogurt parfait bar, carrots and hummus, or a fruit salad.



4. Advocate for healthy fundraisers.

Encourage planning committees to host a healthy fundraiser such as a dance-a-thon, basketball tournament, sponsored bike ride, or auction. These fundraisers promote health, raise money, and have the added bonus of engaging students, families, and the community.



5. Mix in some small physical activity breaks during the day.

Activity helps students focus, making it especially important to take a break for physical activity before a hard task such as a test. Here are some suggestions:

- Play a 2-3 minute video with some movement (for example, www.gonoodle.com)
- Have students do small moves (squats, hops) in response to math questions

6. Role model healthy behaviors.

Students look up to you! If they see you making healthy choices, they'll want to make them too. For example, eat the school lunch every now and again—it can encourage participation in school meals, which are designed to be balanced and healthy. In addition, if you are choosing a product that has a label or branding on it, think twice about whether the brand is one you would want your students to choose, as they are heavily influenced by marketing and branding.

7. Advocate for student health and wellness.

You can be a voice for change at the school, and make sure that health is a consideration in all school policies. Your voice counts, whether you join the school wellness committee or champion healthy practices.



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