



**CALIFORNIA ADOLESCENT NUTRITION AND FITNESS PROGRAM**

## **Policy Recommendations on Nutrition and Physical Activity in Middle Schools, After School Programs, and Communities April 1, 2005**

### **Introduction**

The California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFit) Program is a statewide, non-profit organization whose mission is to engage communities and build their capacity to improve the nutrition and physical activity of California's low income African American, American Indian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Latino youth 10-14 years old. Since 1993, CANFit has worked with numerous youth-serving organizations across the state and gathered data on the nutrition and physical activity of low-income, multi-ethnic youth. From that experience, CANFit recommends the following policies to be implemented either legislatively or institutionally.

### **MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

#### ***Background***

Schools play an important role in the development of youth. Schools should promote good nutrition and physical activity because they are related to learning and cognitive development. However, many do not create an environment that is conducive to healthy eating and physical activity. Schools influence the health decisions of youth through what they teach in the classroom and what they promote on campus. Currently, the situation in most schools is one of abundant junk food, both in vending machines and the cafeteria, and sparse physical education (PE). Both a lack of facilities and enough trained PE specialists contribute to the lack of PE. Schools also lack adequate kitchens and cafeteria seating, a problem especially for low-income, multi-ethnic youth who may skip breakfast and eat their only nutritious meal of the day at school.

#### ***Recommended Actions***

1. The Legislature should build on Senate Bill 19 by extending its requirements to middle schools. Eliminate soda and establish nutrition standards similar to those affecting elementary schools.
2. Local school districts should prohibit exclusive soda contracts.
3. The California Department of Education should require low performing middle schools to serve breakfast every day.
4. The California Department of Education should establish PE standards in middle schools.
5. The California Department of Education should increase the number of credentialed PE teachers.
6. Local school districts should improve kitchen, cafeteria, and PE facilities in middle schools.

## **AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

### ***Background***

Since 1998, the Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program (BASLSNPP) has provided education and enrichment programs to over 30,000 middle school students in California. While these programs succeed in reducing juvenile crime, offering safe alternatives for youth after school, and improving academic success, the program is limited in its ability to meet the needs of low-income, multi-ethnic adolescents. Many do not attend schools in their own neighborhoods and are less inclined to attend programs that are not in their neighborhoods. Youth with low-income, working parents may also require care and services that go beyond the typical after school program hours. Staff in after school programs are also usually not trained to provide programs and environments that promote health, especially in the areas of nutrition and physical activity.

### ***Recommended Actions***

1. BASLSNPP should expand to include off-site community-based organizations with safe transportation as eligible service providers working under the school as fiscal agent.
2. The Extended Day/Latchkey Program should be preserved as the program provides grants to programs for low-income kids with working families during out-of-school hours, including before and after school, vacations, intersession, and summer.
3. After school programs should improve the quality of staff by providing competitive salaries, professional development training in areas including nutrition and physical activity, and other incentives for retention.
4. After school programs and city government should institute policies that limit or prohibit the consumption of soda and unhealthy snacks from vending machines during after school program hours.
5. After school programs should provide at least 30 minutes of moderate physical every day through games, sports, dance, and other activities.
6. After school programs should provide healthy snack options every day that include at least one serving of fruits or vegetables and two servings of water. Serve snacks that reflect cultural backgrounds of youth, such as corn tortillas, noodles, yams, or salsa.
7. After school programs should conduct programmatic activities that encourage nutrition and physical activity, such as taste tests that also introduce youth to new foods and involve them in decision-making.
8. After school programs should encourage discussions of body image concerns, and create a climate that supports body size acceptance and respect.

## **COMMUNITIES**

### ***Background***

The communities where youth live also influence their nutrition and physical activity habits. Many communities, particularly low-income ones, are home to abundant fast food restaurants and other vendors of unhealthy snacks. This is ameliorated by limited access to fruits and vegetables and inadequate opportunities and facilities for physical activity. Parks, playgrounds, and neighborhoods are often in poor condition and unsafe for youth. In addition, certain ethnic communities face language and cultural barriers to improving nutrition and physical activity.

### ***Recommended Actions***

1. City government should prohibit exclusive soda contracts in local departments of Parks and Recreation.
2. Communities should increase access and exposure to fruits and vegetables through community gardens, local farmer's markets, and incentives for stores that sell snacks to carry fruits and vegetables.
3. City government should improve parks, playground facilities, and sidewalks.
4. Communities should make neighborhoods safe for youth to run, walk, bike, and play.
5. Communities should provide educational resources, such as cookbooks, that are culturally and linguistically relevant.
6. Communities should provide opportunities for youth to experience a variety of physical activities. Expose them to activities that draw on their cultural backgrounds, like traditional dance.