

## **SHIP School Nutrition Intervention**

**Progress report: July – December 2010**

*Prepared for CJRR as part of their SHIP evaluation*

Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville (CJRR) counties are working with schools in their service area to improve nutrition among students. The overall objective is to increase access to high quality nutritious foods, by implementing comprehensive nutrition policies including breakfast promotion, healthy lunch and snacks (which included classroom celebrations, incentives, fundraising, concessions, and vending), school gardens, and Farm-to-School initiatives. The project is part of a larger effort, which is funded by the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP).

This report provides a snapshot of progress from July through December 2010. It was prepared by Wilder Research. CJRR SHIP compiled existing data and collected original data as a part of this evaluation, using tools developed by Wilder Research.

### **Reach**

There are a total of 8,015 school-age children who live in Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville Counties. CJRR SHIP is working with the following schools and districts, which represent a total of over 3,600 students who are impacted by this intervention, which is 46 percent of the total school-age population in Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville Counties..

<b>School</b>	<b>School population</b>
Jackson County Central (JCC) Schools	1,119
Windom Area Schools	990
Westbrook-Walnut Grove (W-WG) Schools	301
Redwood Area Schools	1,277
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,687</b>

Parents and community members have been informed of the SHIP initiative in various ways, including through letters sent home, articles in local newspapers, family nutrition events, and information on school websites.

## **Activities**

From July through December 2010, the CJRR SHIP program has engaged in various activities related to this project. These activities include: promoting Farm-to-School initiatives; starting school gardens; removing unhealthy items from concessions; providing more fruits and vegetables in school lunch programs; taste testing; providing nutrition education to staff, parents, and students; and offering healthy options during school celebrations.

Parents and community members have also been involved in a number of ways. This includes:

- Parents have participated in a Farm-to-School and nutrition display during parent/student orientation
- Community members donated locally grown food after they learned of the Farm-to-School program and the produce raised in school greenhouse was provided for the high school lunch program
- The Food Service Director for the Redwood Area Schools worked in collaboration with the Future Farmers of America advisor to use produce from the garden for the Farm-to-School program
- Nutrition-related presentations from various community organizations have produced support for changes in nutritional settings within schools

## **Policy, systems, and environments**

One of the goals of SHIP is to change policies, systems, and environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice. In the case of this School Nutrition Intervention, it means specifically changing policies, systems, and environments to create opportunities for healthier eating and learning about nutrition among students, parents, and school staff.

Policy, systems, and environmental changes that have occurred as a result of this initiative include:

- Farm-To-School initiatives have connected schools and growers in providing more nutritious school lunch options
- School garden projects have expanded the classroom to the outdoors and have created opportunities for new methods of teaching about healthy fruits and vegetables
- New school lunch menu items, as well as snack and concessions items, have increased opportunities for students to select healthier options
- Providing taste testing in school lunch rooms has introduced a fun way to encourage students to try new foods

Many of the schools plan to maintain or expand their Farm-to-School programs in future years. They also have or intend to make changes to policies regarding snacks that students bring from home.

## **Impact**

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, children age 4 and older should consume between one and three cups of fruit and vegetables per day. The Minnesota Student Survey found that approximately one-quarter of ninth grade students are overweight based on their Body Mass Index, slightly more than half of students drank pop or soda the previous day, and less than 20 percent of students eat five or more fruits and vegetables a day. Because students eat one and often two meals plus snacks in school each day, interventions related to school nutrition are one way to address the issue of childhood obesity, which may have a long-term impact of preventing adult obesity and chronic disease.

As a result of this intervention, CJRR SHIP has achieved many short-term outcomes, including:

- Implementation of nutrition and wellness policies that result in students having decreased access to energy-dense foods, and students having increased access to high quality nutritious foods through school gardens, Farm-to-School initiatives, and healthy lunch and snacks
- Students and parents have increased access to information about the nutritional value of foods served at school
- School and community stakeholders have increased knowledge and awareness about nutrition
- Social norms and the school environment support healthy nutrition



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