

STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM: PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

Progress in Meeker, McLeod and Sibley Counties



The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is a community-based initiative funded by the Minnesota Department of Health. It works to prevent disease before it starts by helping create healthier communities that support individuals seeking to make healthy choices in their daily lives.

Schools are a vital partner with SHIP. Because children learn, eat and play at school during the years when they are acquiring lifestyle habits, an environment that supports healthy choices is critical to their becoming healthy, productive adults. Children and youth spend roughly half of their waking hours in school, so this setting is a key place to reinforce the importance of eating well, being active and avoiding commercial tobacco products. Since SHIP began, more than 26 schools have increased access to healthy foods for 13,300 students in Meeker, McLeod and Sibley counties.



Meeker, McLeod, Sibley
Healthy Communities
www.mmshealthycommunities.org

Highlights from 2009–2013

GOAL: Create healthy food environments and increase access to healthy foods in schools through:

1. Improved school nutrition policies

Accomplishments

- New Century Academy strengthened its school wellness policy to address use of food as rewards and better promote breakfast.
- Glencoe-Silver Lake schools updated and strengthened their wellness policy.
- Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop schools strengthened their wellness policy to encourage healthy foods for classroom snacks and school-sponsored meetings and discourage the use of food for rewards. The school district also provides a list of non-food reward alternatives for activities such as birthday celebrations.

2. Farm-to-school programs that connect farmers with schools to provide fresh, local foods

Accomplishments

- The Glencoe-Silver Lake Future Farmers of America Chapter is raising awareness for healthy eating, the value of a garden for exercise, and smart environmental and conservation practices. Through their school garden, they are supplying food to the middle and high school cafeteria and they donated approximately 150 pounds of food to the food shelf in the 2013 growing season. Voss Farms formed a partnership with Eden-Valley-Watkins to provide local food to schools.
- Nineteen school districts implemented or expanded their farm-to-school programs.



Community Supported Agriculture shares from Sibley East

- Eight schools created or expanded school gardens, incorporated the garden into school curriculum and served the food to students through the school nutrition program at breakfast and/or lunch. Several schools have had three harvest seasons since SHIP began.

3. Supplemental changes to the school food environment

Accomplishments

- Eden Valley-Watkins encourages parents to send fruits and vegetables for group snacks.
- Litchfield schools added water and other healthy alternatives to their previously soda-only vending machines.
- Sibley East is using its garden produce for student cooking lessons in the family and consumer science foods classes.
- Atwater/Cosmos/Grove City; Sibley East; and Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop now provide parents with a list of recommended healthy snack foods and healthy alternatives for birthdays and celebrations.





Harvest at Atwater/Cosmos/Grove City school garden

- Sibley East purchased a high tunnel greenhouse that allows for year-round growing of produce for the school lunch salad bar.
- Atwater/Cosmos/Grove City and Litchfield Elementary students no longer hurry through their lunch to get to recess earlier; they now go to recess first and then to lunch.

GOAL: Implement safe routes to school to increase opportunities for walking and biking to and from school

Accomplishments

- Since SHIP began, seven schools have created Safe Routes to School coalitions and are working to promote walking and biking to school for 2,503 students.
- Ten schools participated in National Walk to School Day in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, five of the schools continued their participation and one new school joined the effort. Walking school buses were piloted, providing students the opportunity to safely walk to school with the camaraderie of fellow students and under the supervision of adults. Park Elementary in Hutchinson is working to establish these groups on an ongoing basis.



Walking school bus in Litchfield



The Sibley East Agriculture Program created a very successful school garden program. As a part of a 2011 expansion, SHIP grant funds were used to purchase a high tunnel, which extends the growing season by one month on each end. Produce from the garden is used for the school lunch program and for fresh snacks for the children in school. Superintendent Stephan Jones says, "I'm an optimist, but this blew me away—how successful as it was. From a school administrator's standpoint it was the best PR we have done to create a link between the rural community and kids in the schools. We had a lot of publicity, but it was seeing the impact on kids and how it has been a unifying thing for our staff. The garden will help incorporate more of that."

- Sibley East schools and St. Paul Lutheran School added bike racks to their campuses. St. Paul Lutheran also updated their school wellness policy and incorporated pedestrian and bike safety into their curriculum
- In Litchfield, a walking school bus with drop sites at three public school buildings and one parochial school bus has been implemented. Five additional routes were piloted. One of the walking school bus routes utilizes a newly paved trail. This trail provides access to a safe walking or bike route to school to more than 100 students.
- All Meeker County Schools, St. Paul Lutheran School and Green Isle Community School held bike safety events.
- The City of Glencoe received a SRTS grant.

GOAL: Create tobacco-free post-secondary campuses

Accomplishments

- Ridgewater College strengthened their policy by adding permanent signs to its grounds and is collaborating with Hutchinson Health to offer cessation programming for its 4,373 students and 125 staff.



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