

IMPROVING HEALTH HABITS THROUGH COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH

Changing health behaviors can improve academic performance and reduce health disparities

Public Health Problem

- Many health-related behaviors are established during childhood and adolescence.
- Addressing health risk behaviors among youth can improve academic performance and reduce health disparities.
- Effective coordinated school health programs can increase the adoption of health-enhancing behaviors, improve student and staff health, and use resources wisely.
- Gadsden County Florida suffers disproportionately from health and academic disparities, ranking in the lower half of Florida school districts in percent of students meeting standards in reading, math and writing.

Program

- The Florida Coordinated School Health Program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provided funding, training and intensive technical assistance to Gadsden County to implement a district-wide coordinated school health program.
- The Gadsden County school district formed a planning and advisory committee, Gadsden County Wellness Approach to Community Health and used the results of participating schools' *School Health Index* assessments to develop a coordinated school health strategic plan.
- The plan, approved by the district school board, has forty-five goals and covers all eight components of the coordinated school health model, emphasizing nutrition and physical activity.
- Each of twelve schools in Gadsden County receive two thousand dollars yearly for a Healthy School Team to implement activities consistent with the district strategic plan.

Impact

After just one year of implementation, the school district:

- Required a daily fifteen-minute recess for all students up to grade six and for some sixth grades
- Adopted a policy that encourages physical fitness for students and discourages the use of physical activity as punishment
- Prohibited sales of carbonated beverages during meal periods
- Required compliance with the Florida state guideline of a 20-minute seated eating time
- Required each school to include a wellness goal in its School Improvement Plan
- Partnered with the Coordinated School Health Program to provide professional development to promote lifelong healthy nutrition, tobacco avoidance, and physical activity.

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