

Vision for the HealthierUS School Challenge

Recognizing Excellence in Nutrition and Physical Activity

Background

The HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC) was established to recognize schools that are creating healthier school environments through their promotion of good nutrition and physical activity. Four levels of superior performance are awarded: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Gold of Distinction.

To qualify for the awards, a school must submit a formal application and meet basic criteria set forth by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). The HUSSC criteria reflect the recommendations of the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) published recommendations (April 2007) for foods that should be served in schools, outside of the organized school lunch meals. HealthierUS Schools must also have a local school wellness policy as mandated by Congress. Local school wellness policies support the HUSSC initiative and affirm that schools play a critical role in promoting student health, preventing childhood obesity, and combating problems associated with poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Goal

The overarching goal of the HUSSC is to improve the health of the nation's children by promoting healthier school environments. To help meet the goal, FNS identifies schools that have made changes to the school nutrition environment to (1) improve the quality of the foods served, (2) provide students with nutrition education and (3) provide students with physical education and opportunities for physical activity. Ultimately, FNS would like to see all elementary schools receive a HUSSC award.

Guiding Principles

- Schools receiving a HUSSC award will commit to meeting the criteria throughout their two-year certification period.
- Schools will meet all the School Meals Initiative (SMI) requirements including energy and nutrient standards and age-appropriate portion sizes on an ongoing basis.
- Schools will serve reimbursable meals that reflect good menu planning principles, such as serving a variety of healthier foods that look good, taste good, and appeal to the cultural sensitivities of the school and community populations.
- Schools will plan meals that emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; that include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and that are low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.
- Schools will offer foods that ensure that students can select a meal that meets all the HUSSC criteria. Such foods should be routinely selected by students, not just token foods to meet HUSSC criteria.