

## **Talking Points: Healthy School Foods**

- Childhood overweight/obesity is a national concern; one-in-four NY children are obese.
- Childhood obesity is associated with serious health problems, such as heart disease, asthma, cancer, osteoarthritis, and Type II diabetes in children; childhood obesity is directly related to poor nutrition and inactivity.
- Since 1897, NYS PTA has worked to promote nutritional and physical well-being for all children and youth. Early efforts included promoting physical education, nutrition and hygiene education, and the provision of hot lunches.
- Beginning in 2004, NYS PTA adopted resolutions for Healthy School Foods, inclusive of plant-based (vegan) options; to raise awareness, educate and fund programs regarding Healthy Choices; and for Elimination of Transfats in School Foods, inclusive of meals, a la carte and vending machines options, and after-school and fund raising events.
- Schools are learning models for children; children spend one-third of their day in school and many children eat several meals a day there; schools can influence healthy behaviors.
- Education regarding healthy food choices begins with parents. School foods and physical activities should support important messages on wellness that parents impart at home.
- Setting limits on school foods containing cholesterol, sodium, fat, sugar and calories and determining and setting appropriate portion sizes contributes to developing healthier eating behaviors in students.
- NYS PTA supported the 2007 Galef/Lavalle School Foods and Beverage bill to set forth portion size and nutrition requirements for the sale of school foods and establishment of procedures for engaging school wellness committees.
- Governor Spitzer's 2007 Healthy School Foods Act, a more comprehensive bill, included added provisions for physical exercise and to address concerns about local cost and local control and best represented NYS PTA's position; the 2007 Legislative Session ended without passage.
- NYS PTA is a member of NYS Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance (NYSHEPA), a coalition of community and advocacy groups working with the NYS Dept. of Health; also collaborates with Clinic Plus to ensure children's physical, nutritional and emotional well-being.
- As part of Governor Spitzer's proposed 2008-09 Executive Budget (Article VII), the Healthy School Foods Act has been reintroduced to the NYS legislature. Changes to address concerns of outside interest groups include requirements for: science-based standards; NYSED to set regulations; prohibition of the sale of candy, soda gum and sweetened foods; funding to provide free lunch for those covered by reduced lunch program and to reduce the cost of healthier foods; accountability measures regarding standards and physical activity compliance; amplification of federal wellness requirements.
- NYS PTA seeks the following key components in the Healthy School Foods Act:
  - Age appropriate science based standards that are periodically reviewed by health experts.
  - Sufficient time to eat breakfast and lunch
  - A requirement that schools not use food or beverage as rewards
  - A requirement that elementary children have a "recess" period and that schools not be permitted to withhold recess as discipline
  - Establishment and implementation of nutrition and physical education competencies
  - A strict accountability plan