

# Health is Academic!

*[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Host] Research shows that when students eat healthy and are more physically active, they do better in school. With the help of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, communities nationwide are putting this research into practice to help fight childhood obesity. Joining us we have Terry O'Toole, Senior Advisor with the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at CDC, along with Annie Lionberger and Sergio Rosas who are here to share how schools are making positive, healthy changes that not only benefit students, but also parents, teachers, and community members across the country. Good morning and thank you for being here today.

[Terry O'Toole] Good morning.

[Host] Terry, tell us a little more about the link between healthy eating, increased physical activity and improved academic performance.

[Terry O'Toole] Well first of all, there's some great news for both parents and kids. We have research that shows that when kids are physically active and they eat healthy, they actually do better in school. In fact, kids who earn As are about twice as likely to get the recommended amount of physical activity every day. And we also have research that links children's healthy eating habits to improved academic performance. And so, we can conclude that health is, in fact, academic. And so, we know that our schools do play a critical role in helping to educate our children, not just about reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also about healthy eating and physical activity.

[Host] And Terry, why is the CDC focusing on healthy changes at the community level?

[Terry O'Toole] We have seen for some time that communities are doing lots of great things to make healthy living easier, and more affordable, where people live, learn, work, and play. And so, we're helping communities to do things that are simple, low-cost, and effective so that kids can eat healthier and be more physically active every day.

[Host] That's great to hear. Thank you, Terry. Now we'll hear from Annie Lionberger in Chicago. Annie is the Senior Manager of Student Wellness in the Office of Student Health and Wellness at Chicago Public Schools. Annie, tell us about your work in Chicago.

[Annie Lionberger] We really recognize, as Terry was saying, that interconnection between health and academic performance. So we're really trying to make health and wellness a priority at all of our schools across the district. And we recognize that many of our students spend the majority of their waking hours at school. So we want to give them opportunities to be physically active, to be exposed to new and healthy foods, and we're doing that in a lot of really exciting ways. One of those ways is that actually, for the first time in over thirty years, all of our elementary schools now offer daily recess for twenty minutes every single day. So we've been working really closely with schools to make sure that that time is active, that it's fun, and that

students really have a chance to re-energize and go back into their classrooms focused and ready to learn.

[Host] Thank you, Annie. With us, we also have Sergio Rosas who is the Executive Director of the National City Collaborative Family Resources Center in San Diego, California. Sergio, tell us about what's going on in San Diego County.

[Sergio Rosas] Yes, in San Diego County the initiative started back in the fall of 2010 and it involved about seven different school districts. And in the area of nutrition, specifically, we were able to implement a program called "Breakfast in the Classroom" which allows each student in the school to receive a meal at their desk while they're preparing the morning activities and the agenda with the teacher. We feared that there was going to be a mess; you know spilled milk everywhere and this and that. But the reality was that the desks are cleaner, the kids actually are not getting as much sick. You know, they're not reporting to the nurse's office. And in one school we had a participation rate of only about 26 percent of the students had breakfast and within three months we jumped that to about 92 percent which immediately we saw the impact on attendance, tardiness, improved academics. And we started with one school back in January of 2011 and today, half of our schools have implemented this "Breakfast in the Classroom" program with the support not only of the teachers, the school management team, but also parents that volunteer and come in and assist with the serving of the breakfast.

[Host] So, parents can take part in these healthy changes as well?

[Sergio Rosas] Of course, yes. In one case, at Central Elementary School in National City, we have 700 students that begin the day doing the Electric Slide and the Macarena and all that. If you can imagine 700 students, their teachers, and parents that come in to drop off their kids, dancing to the same music for about ten minutes or so before school starts; it's quite a sight to see.

[Host] So how can students, parents, and teachers learn more about bringing programs like this to their schools? What can they do?

[Terry O'Toole] Parents and students can check out our website at [MakingHealthEasier.org](http://MakingHealthEasier.org), and there they can see what other communities are doing across the country and get some ideas. And then they can check with their schools directly. Parents can ask principals, "What are you serving in school meals?" and they can also speak up for physical education. For example, tell your school principal that you want regular physical activity and physical education as a regular part of the school day.

[Host] Well, thank you Terry, Annie, and Sergio for being here today. Again, for more information about these programs and to learn what you can do to create positive, healthy changes in your community, visit [MakingHealthEasier.org](http://MakingHealthEasier.org).

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.*