

South sets example for healthy eating

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

Pop, candy and oversized portions are gone from Williamsville South High School.

In an effort to combat the growing childhood obesity problem, staff and a committee from the high school formed its own nutritional guidelines.

Elvin Simmons, principal of Williamsville South, said from the start, seven years ago, the changes were widely accepted in the district.

"This is good for the kids. How are you going to argue with anything told to us from data and national (obesity) trends," he said about the guidelines.

While opposition to the removal of foods and beverages from the school could have been expected, Simmons said everyone from students to staff, parents and committee members, responded well.

He added that Coca-Cola and Pepsi, distributors in the school also were flexible to the new policy of stocking juices instead of pop. Pop machines for the

faculty have also been replaced. Simmons said he had heard from other districts who made the change that there would be a dip in sales and then an increase, and that is what has happened at South.

Also candy from vending machines, cafeteria and the school store have been removed. Fund-raisers have not been affected by the policy.

The Billies Bistro, offering salads, wraps and 100 percent frozen juice drinks, has become popular with the students, even prompting them to ask for additional healthy entrees.

"We do not legislate outside of the school day, but with organizations, such as booster clubs, we tell them hey, try and follow the guidelines if you can," Simmons said.

In addition to removing unhealthy choices, South has engaged in educating students to make their own decisions when it comes to a healthier lifestyle.

"We have a nutritional and physical plan for the year; students in their senior year can follow it and get an end-of-the-year report," he

said. "Then when the students are in college they don't have to worry about the freshman 15 because they will know how to design a lifelong commitment to physical fitness and how to eat properly."

Simmons said the guidelines are working to promote healthy eating, even when it is not required. To kickoff the 2006-07 school year one club had cider, peaches and low-fat cookies instead of pizza, wings and pop.

Also, the annual Valentines Day charity fund-raiser, "Crush Day," no longer sells cans of Crush soda but low-fat cookies instead. He has also seen students more observant of what they choose to eat, including reading nutrition labels.

South High School started its investigation after a school nurse reported approximately 28 percent of the students were obese and that there was a significant increase in type-1 juvenile diabetes.

"We felt we had an obligation to address (obesity) through better education to students, and offer alternatives during the school



Williamsville South High School students R.J. Gramp and Joel Decker make their selections in the lunch line last Friday. The school has developed guidelines to combat obesity in students, including removing pop and candy from the school.

Photo by John Rusac

day," Simmons said.

Many of South's changes started two years ago, and Simmons said the school nurse will re-evaluate the percentage of obese students in the next year.

The high school has also changed the physical education curriculum to help increase the

level of students' cardio-activity.

A district Nutrition and Fitness Policy is also being reviewed by the School Board to further promote healthy lifestyles, but the students and staff at South are staying on top of the trend.

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Nutrition policy goes before Williamsville Board of Education

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

Youth obesity is on the rise and schools are beginning to respond to the problem.

Many of today's lunches, either brought from home or purchased at the cafeteria, contain overly processed, unhealthy foods, putting students in a losing situation with obesity.

Many return home from a day of learning to sit on the couch for hours, not motivated to get the recommended daily hour of exercise.

Approximately 30.3 percent of children ages 6-11 are overweight and 15.3 percent are obese, and for adolescents ages 12 to 19, 30.4 percent are overweight and 15.5

percent are obese, according to the American Obesity Association.

In an effort to stop the growing problem, the Williamsville Central School District is focusing on changing the food offered at the schools and on promoting activity.

In addition to the district's already implemented Wellness Program, which educates students on responsible life choices, the district will be introducing federally mandated guidelines on nutrition and fitness.

The district began looking at forming a policy in April, a few months after being notified of the new federal requirements.

Thomas Matuski, assistant superintendent of finance and man-

agement services, said the district's Nutrition and Fitness Policy is the result of suggestions from staff, parents and PTA representatives.

With the first reading completed at the Williamsville Board of Education's Sept. 12 meeting, the final policy could be adopted after the second reading.

"Technically the policy was supposed to be in effect July 1," Matuski said. "I

believe after listening to the Board of Education at the

“We looked at government health department studies... there is a serious concern concerning obesity in our country and children.”

— Thomas Matuski,
assistant superintendent

September meeting they will be in a position to do a final review and likely adopt the policy at the October meeting.”

Under the new policy, food and beverages sold or served at the schools will meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including a variety of fruits and vegetables, 2 percent, 1 percent and fat free milk and more whole grain options.

Under New York State Education guidelines, districts will be required to provide in the middle and high schools a certain number of foods that have less than 35

percent of their calories from fat.

Unlike previous policies, the new district Nutrition and Fitness Policy will also address foods sold or offered at after-school events, for fund raising and for classroom snacks. Unless additional changes are made to the policy, PTAs and booster clubs will be encouraged to follow the policy and offer healthier options but they are not required to do so.

The second part of the policy addresses fitness and increasing the time spent by students being active in clubs, sports and physical education classes.

"We looked at government health department studies that have been coming out in recent months and the past few years, and there is a serious concern concerning obesity in our country and children," Matuski said. "The policy is meant to provide direction to families and students."

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