

Many Nebraska schools have acted to better ensure their students are healthy.

Some schools have banned junk food and sugar-sweetened soft drinks from vending machines and reduced the number of fried foods on their school lunch menus while increasing the fruit, vegetables and whole wheat items available to students.

Nebraska schools are supporting physical fitness by providing more opportunities for students to participate in physical education classes, recess and making time for activity breaks in the classroom. The schools are establishing safe routes to school and sponsoring walking and wellness clubs.

Nebraska schools have long since set in policy rules strengthening their ban on tobacco products and addressing bullying.

Many Nebraska schools have taken the lead in adopting their own policies to better ensure children are healthy and are now going further, adopting practices outlined in the state's Coordinated School Health Policy approved in March by the State Board of Education. The state policy encourages schools to strengthen their own existing health initiatives by coordinating their efforts to better ensure that they address the full range of their students' health needs.

That school health policy also calls for an increased focus on health education, physical education, health services, nutrition services, counseling services, staff wellness, building a healthy school environment and increasing community and family involvement.

School districts are encouraged to appoint school health coordinators to oversee student health initiatives developed by district-wide health councils and school building teams.

Nebraska schools have taken the lead. The schools are expanding their efforts. However, Nebraska schools alone cannot do the job. Ensuring that all Nebraska children are healthy

requires the involvement of Nebraska families, health care workers, business and community organizations as well as our local and state policy makers.

Children's health should be important to everyone, just as student learning is.

And, healthy children do learn better.

Information on the Nebraska Coordinated School Health initiative is available at: <http://www.education.ne.gov/PEHealth/index.html>. For more information on how to help, contact Julane Hill, coordinated school health director, Nebraska Department of Education, 402.471.4352 or email julane.hill@nebraska.gov.