

## The Need

Many ingredients go into making healthy kids. Two of the most important are good food and physical activity. Most children today don't get enough of either. The result is an increase in chronic illnesses, including Type II diabetes and childhood obesity. Schools are the public tables, at which many children eat two or even three meals a day. School is also a place that children spend a good portion of their waking hours. Research shows that transforming school food and increasing physical activity improves student health and academic performance, and lowers absenteeism. The NE Iowa FFI is helping schools meet the growing need to improve school wellness. Together, we grow healthy kids!

## Health Impacts

The Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative promotes healthy local food and increased physical activity opportunities in communities throughout six counties in NE Iowa.

We specifically invest in school wellness and messaging to create healthier schools in 20 public and seven parochial school districts. These efforts will help reduce childhood obesity.



## Regional Messaging Campaign

While schools are one place to influence healthy eating and active living for children, clearly families must learn more about ways they can support healthy living. Families are also key in supporting policy and practice changes in their local school districts. We believe the best way to implement an educational program and garner support for changes in schools is through a regional messaging campaign. The messages we develop, design and deliver through a variety of media will be useful in many rural communities.

The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative was awarded funding from the Wellmark Foundation to develop a regional media campaign to educate youth, their parents and other care givers, and key school personnel. An FFI Messaging committee is currently working with a communications firm to create the foundation for a regional campaign by defining our core values, refining our key markets and identifying broad messages.

The Regional Messaging Campaign took shape summer of 2011 and continues to evolve based on readiness. To gain momentum for a larger campaign, we focused on a narrow population where we could have the most success. The target audience for the soft launch are parents of K-3rd grade students in the communities of Elkader, Postville and Decorah.

## Our Objectives

***Develop models, tools, and thought leadership for a rural model for regional messaging about healthy choices and the importance of creating policy, systems and environmental change in schools and communities***

With technical assistance provided through the WK Kellogg Foundation, we drafted a communications plan for the campaign and a timeline for material development. The tagline— *Together, We Grow Healthy Kids*—aligns with our vision and our value statements. This Campaign focuses on *Steps for Success* which encourages parents to walk, eat, cook, and garden with their children, and inquire about school wellness policies. The steps promote real experiences for families around physical activity and healthy, local food.

## Material development...

After developing the tagline, the committee's next step was the creation of a visual identity that has collective buy-in and positive feedback.

The creation of materials has been intentional. The goal is not to create 'stuff' just to have 'stuff', but

rather create functional products that link to the *Steps for Success*. Most of the materials have been developed based on feedback from select groups and feedback from the graphic designer. The following materials have been developed in bulk, and include the tagline: postcards, window clings, long vinyl banners, posters, active living/recipe booklets, magnets, grocery shopping pads, reusable grocery shopping bags, and placemats that include the USDA *MyPlate* graphic.

### ***Assure that key messages are integrated into school wellness team materials***

In Fall 2011 the Communications Liaison and the School Wellness Outreach Team developed *What's up with Wellness?* newsletter, which was sent to school wellness team members and administration. Photos and stories of interest are collected by the School Outreach Team, while the layout and distribution is done by the Communications Liaison. The newsletter highlights wellness projects taking place in 16 schools throughout NE Iowa.

Based on demand, the School Wellness Outreach team started to distribute messaging materials to venues outside of the three selected communities in November 2011. We are looking for readiness and opportunities to spread the campaign.



1. Walk with your children. Show them that walking around town, to school or around your home can be enjoyable.

2. Eat a school meal with your children.

3. Involve children in picking out food, planning meals, and cooking.

4. Visit a school garden and volunteer to help plant or harvest.

5. Contact your child's school and ask about their wellness team and policies.

### ***Build relationships with people in target markets and messengers to increase quality of messages***

In order to build support in the pilot communities, the FFI held a community workshop in early August, 2011 to discuss the Campaign with about 30 community/school representatives and youth from each of the pilot communities. The groups identified events that could take place in their school or community to further the objectives of the Campaign, as well as brainstormed materials that would be popular.

As we prepare to move into a region-wide launch, the key will be to plug into existing venues to reach parents. We may also extend the Campaign's target audience to include pre-K students, as there are emerging opportunities to reach parents in the Head Start community.

### ***Work with FFI leadership to write local and regional Food and Fitness success stories.***

Media outreach is an ongoing effort. The NE Iowa FFI will look for media partnerships as the Campaign gains momentum in Spring 2012. The School Outreach Team and Communications Team will continue to write and/or pitch stories to local newspapers. We have also found video a great method for storytelling and sharing messages.

**Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative**  
[www.iowafoodandfitness.org](http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org)