

## **Penn State, government, industry helping children pick healthier foods**

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A new initiative to improve children's nutrition education and increase the amount of healthy foods available in schools is a collaboration among Penn State researchers; Pennsylvania's Departments of Health, Education, and Agriculture; Pennsylvania food manufacturers and food distributors; and school districts across the state.

The project, led by Penn State and supported for two years by an \$800,000 grant from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), seeks to improve children's understanding of nutrition and help them make smarter [food choices](#). The funds come through the Pennsylvania Department of Health as part of the CDC's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding.

Researchers will increase the amount of nutrition information available in schools and at home, including innovative menu labeling systems for use in cafeterias across Pennsylvania. These menu systems will be age appropriate and will target everyone from kindergarteners to high school seniors. Children will have a baseline level of nutrient information, which will help them make healthier choices. Then, in conjunction with school districts and foodservice providers, Penn State will test the effectiveness of the labeling system.

"Penn State, with its tradition in nutrition and food innovation, was the perfect partner to develop and implement these initiatives," said Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Everette James, who is playing a significant role in the project. "The College of Health and Human

Development and the Center for Food Innovation are centered on how to improve nutrition for children in Pennsylvania. The health of children is already important to schools and now we're making it the top priority."

A major focus of the project is finding effective ways to share nutrition information with parents. Peter Bordi, associate professor of [hospitality management](#) and principal investigator on the project, plans to take a multimedia approach by using the Internet, new technologies and old technologies such as informational handouts.

"What may work for one school district may not work for another," said Bordi. This component is designed so that "parents can sit down and teach their children to make healthier choices -- in practice, not in theory," says Secretary James.

Penn State's Center for Food Innovation, directed by Bordi, will work with foodservice organizations to ensure that children have access to healthy, affordable foods in schools. The research team will identify ten foods that meet or exceed nutrition guidelines for both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Prices of these foods' prices will be reduced to be more competitive with other foods in the schools.

CFI, which regularly performs sensory testing to better understand why people like or dislike certain foods, will test new foods created in conjunction with food organizations such as ARAMARK Education, Metz & Associates, and Nutrition, Inc.

"The children will be able to give us feedback and help us create appealing, healthy foods," said Bordi. "You can't develop foods for kids if you can't get their input."

This project is being launched in conjunction with another new project

headed by the Department of Health that ensures that children get at least thirty minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in school.

"The CDC tells us that more than half of chronic disease is preventable and it makes up nearly 75 percent of our health care costs," said Secretary James. "We're tackling two of the major factors that lead to chronic disease -- poor nutrition and lack of physical education."

"Ultimately, we hope that children will take this education outside of school so that it can impact their everyday life as well. It's exciting that we can all make a difference in our children's lives," said Bordi.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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