



Beyond the School Day: Utilizing After-School as Part of a School Wellness Strategy

It is Action for Healthy Kids' mission to utilize the school setting on many levels to help ensure that all children develop the lifelong habits necessary to promote health and learning. And opportunities to foster wellness don't end with the bell at the close of the school day.

It is universally acknowledged that after-school offers an invaluable chance to expand, build on, and enhance efforts that encourage good nutrition and physical activity. Every bit as much as the regular school day itself, after-school hours present the opportunity to engage diverse organizations, leaders, and volunteers — and of course kids themselves — in activities that support sound nutrition and increased physical activity. In fact, certain wellness-advancing activities are better suited to the period after classes end than in the classroom itself.

The initiatives featured in this field report summarize activities of three Action for Healthy Kids Teams that used the *ReCharge! Energizing After-School* program — a joint effort of Action for Healthy Kids and the National Football League — as a mechanism for enhancing nutrition and physical activity for students in after-school.

- The Tennessee profile focuses on the process of **bringing parents and the community** into the “after-school wellness loop.”
- The Colorado story shows the wisdom of **partnering with a local community organization** — in this case, the YMCA — on an after-school initiative.
- And in Missouri, the lessons learned were about effective ways to **train after-school personnel** in implementing an after-school program.

In addition, this report includes lessons learned in Alabama where the Action for Healthy Kids Team overcame a logistical challenge that many after-school programs face: **securing and retaining reliable after-school staff** — without whom no after-school initiative, no matter how worthy, can work.

Collectively, these Action for Healthy Kids Teams remind us of (1) the ways in which the after-school hours in general can be productively used to promote healthy eating and physical activity; and (2) how after-school activities can serve as an indispensable element in helping schools and districts meet their overall wellness goals.

AFTER-SCHOOL BY THE NUMBERS

- Nearly 17,000 public elementary school buildings (about 32%) operate before- and after-school programs. Almost 5,700 public middle and high schools operate after-school programs.
- There are approximately 37,300 additional after-school program sites run by other institutions, including community centers, religious organizations, national organizations, for-profit companies, and other groups.
- Public schools are the largest providers of after-school programs in terms of children reached. YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, religious organizations, and private schools round out the top five providers.
- Approximately 7 million K-8 students (about 20%) are enrolled in a center or school-based after-school program.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Afterschool Alliance, MCH Education

Tennessee

Bringing Parents and the Community into the “After-School Loop”

Parent and community involvement are key to the success of any after-school program. Parental participation is essential to contributing to a school-to-home continuum of wellness ensuring that sound nutrition and physical activity principles are supported and reinforced at home. And community support ranging from recreational organizations to dietary and nutrition specialists can bring invaluable resources, expertise, and authority to any wellness-focused after-school program.

That’s precisely why, in implementing the *ReCharge! Energizing After-School* program (see below) Tennessee Action for Healthy Kids identified parent and community involvement among its goals.

But where to start?

Mary Wilson, a veteran nutrition educator and charter member of the Tennessee Action for Healthy Kids Team, described how one school, Middlesettlements Elementary School, tackled the challenge.

Middlesettlements is one of 11 elementary schools in the Blount County School System, a suburban district 16 miles outside Knoxville. It had



Action for Healthy Kids, in partnership with the National Football League, developed **ReCharge! Energizing After-School**,™ the first nationally distributed after-school program that fully integrates nutrition and physical activity through teamwork-based strategies for youth in grades 3 to 6. *ReCharge!* focuses on four concepts — “Energy In” (nutrition), “Energy Out” (physical activity), teamwork and goal-setting. Since its introduction in fall 2005, *ReCharge!* has been distributed to nearly 8,000 after-school programs across the country, reaching over half a million students.

ReCharge! promotes national standards for health education, physical

activity and family involvement, as well as the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Each *ReCharge!* kit includes an instructor’s notebook with 29 hands-on lesson plans, equipment to implement the lessons, a training DVD, poster, healthy snack guide, NFL players’ cards and newsletters for families.

For more information on *ReCharge!* and to access the **ReCharge! Training Center**, visit: www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

Partnering for Success

Action for Healthy Kids has formed national and state partnerships to distribute *ReCharge!* to after-school programs serving communities with the greatest need.

Action for Healthy Kids and LA’s BEST are working together to bring *ReCharge!* to children throughout the City of Los Angeles. LA’s BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) is a nationally recognized

program and provides a safe haven for nearly 26,000 children, ages 5 to 12, at 180 elementary school sites each day during the critical after-school hours — at no cost to parents.

In addition, Action for Healthy Kids is partnering with the National Afterschool Association to distribute 350 *ReCharge!* kits across the nation to after-school programs delivering services to areas with significant educational, economic and health disparities.

The NFL’s New Orleans Saints and the Louisiana Action for Healthy Kids Team have partnered to promote and distribute *ReCharge!* in Jefferson, Orleans and St. John Parishes, some of the most devastated areas from Hurricane Katrina. Eligible schools received a free *ReCharge!* kit and were entered into a drawing to train for an afternoon with New Orleans Saints corner back Mike McKenzie #34 at the Saints’ practice field.

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: INTEGRAL COMPONENTS OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM SUCCESS

- The federal child nutrition program feeds more than 1.1 million children at 26,000 after-school programs.
- After-school snacks increased 7% from FY 2004 to 2005, and 14% from FY 2003 to 2004.
- Food helps attract children to participate in after-school programs.
- The National Association of Elementary School Principals' 2006 report *Leading After-School Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* identifies physical activity and nutrition education as hallmarks of a successful after-school program.
- After-school programs can support school Wellness Policies and play an important role in combating childhood obesity by providing nutrition education and reinforcing healthy eating habits.

Sources: *Food Research and Action Center, Technomic, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National Association of Elementary School Principals*

approximately 100 students enrolled in an existing after-school program at the time it introduced *ReCharge!*

Identifying and Including “Distinguished Experts”

“It was very important to us to involve folks from the community at large at the beginning,” says Wilson. “And we couldn’t think of a better way to do that than by actually making them a part of our pre-launch training sessions of after-school personnel in the *ReCharge!* program.”

During the training sessions, guest speakers, who included dietitians from the Blount County Health Department and local dairy council, and physical education and sports specialists from the Wellness Council of Blount County’s Parks and Recreation, were invited to talk to the after-school personnel.

“We briefed the guest speakers, whom we called our ‘distinguished experts,’ on the goals of the *ReCharge!* program,” reports Wilson, “and on particular elements of *ReCharge!* that were relevant to their fields.”

What was the objective?

“Basically,” Wilson says, “the guest speakers were there to inform and inspire our after-school personnel, and to lend community presence to the *ReCharge!* effort. And of course to share their genuinely valuable perspectives on topics like teamwork and goal-setting, which are important *ReCharge!* themes.”

Wilson reports that the effort not only encouraged project buy-in on the part of key community figures involved in health and wellness, but that guest speakers added validity to the program goals in the eyes of after-school personnel. Moreover, the Tennessee Team reports that several invitees have indicated an eagerness to reprise their roles as *ReCharge!* training contributors next school year.

But that was only the beginning of the Team’s after-school outreach to parents and the community.

Food Fairs and Salad Days

Middlesettlements’ “Food Fair” was another successful attempt at encouraging community involvement in after-school learning. This event was specifically created as an element of *ReCharge!*, and was designed to expand the vital messages of the program beyond the after-school population.

Community groups such as the local dairy council and local/municipal child- and adult-recreation and sports associations were invited to set up booths at an informational outdoor fair held on school grounds. Here, they talked to students, parents, and visitors about nutrition topics, physical activity and sports opportunities nearby; answered questions; and distributed educational literature. Also distributed to fair attendees was information on healthy snacks which are part of the take-home materials provided through *ReCharge!*.

Notes Mary Wilson, “We’ve found on-premises, after-school food fairs and similar gatherings to be a really productive way for community groups to connect with kids, school staff, and parents. People come wanting to share their own information and literature, which is of course valuable — but they leave having learned about what we’re doing.”

While Middlesettlements’ “Food Fair” is a daytime event, their “Salad Days” is strictly an evening get-together.

“Salad Days,” reports Wilson, “is an event in which *ReCharge!* students prepare a healthful, festive dinner-time meal for parents, held at school. In this case, however, students prepare salads using home-grown vegetables and greens from the school’s own on-premises Nature Garden. Special efforts were made to work in other food groups, and Middlesettlements’ “Salad Days” menu included whole-grain pasta salads, fruit salads, and other wholesome entrées — as well as dairy-based beverages.”

For several years, the Tennessee Farm Bureau funded a school-based garden as part of the school’s elementary earth-sciences curriculum. But planning a health-based meal-event for parents as part of the equation was the Tennessee Team’s way of tying in *ReCharge!* to an existing, related initiative. Vegetables such as lettuce, Swiss chard, and tomatoes were harvested and washed by students, and used as the basis for nutritious entrées and side-dishes. On the evening of this event, volunteer parents took part in meal preparation alongside students.

In addition to providing a meal that was especially meaningful and based on fresh foods, the event offered the advantage of connecting *ReCharge!* activities to the school’s elementary plant-biology curriculum, via the Nature Garden.

As Mary Wilson points out, “a mealtime event involving vegetable gardens goes a long way toward familiarizing students with principles of freshness, cultivation, harvesting, and proper meal preparation and storage. Kids — and parents for that matter — really do end up learning a lot about better nutrition.”

A Reference Library Just for Parents

To address the reality that many parents need information about the imperatives of good nutrition and physical activity, volunteers from the Tennessee Action for Healthy Kids Team created a special section of the school library just for parents. The “Nutrition Cart,” as it was known, was just that – a rolling reference library for parents to check out books and literature focusing on proper nutrition, balanced diets, becoming physically fit, and identifying warning signs of weight problems.

Parents were informed about the “Nutrition Cart” via notices sent home with students. The cart was stored in the library but was easily moved around the school, and parents were encouraged to access it during school visits and at after-school pickup time. Here’s what the cart featured:

• **Books and Cookbooks**

- *Snacking Habits for Healthy Living*
- (Nutrition Now Series, American Dietetic Association)
- *American Dietetic Association’s Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*
- *Overcoming Childhood Obesity*
- *Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids: An A-Z of Nutritional Know-How for the Well-Fed Family*
- *365 Foods Kids Love to Eat*
- *Guide to Healthy Restaurant Eating*
- *Nutrition for Life*
- *Eating on the Run*
- *365 Activities for Fitness, Food, and Fun for the Whole Family*
- *The Family Fitness Fun Book*
- *Healthy Snacks for Kids*
- *Snackivities*
- *The Kid’s Cookbook* (Williams-Sonoma)
- *Cooking Rocks: Rachael Ray*
- *30-Minute Meals for Kids*

• **Games**

- Food Pyramid Bingo
- 5-A-Day Bingo
- Fruit & Vegetable Race Board Game

• **Literature for Kids**

- *Cooking with the Cat (in the Hat)*
- *The Popcorn Book*
- *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food*
- *The Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners*
- *Cook-A-Doodle-Do*
- *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*
- *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*
- *Blueberries for Sal*
- *The Pumpkin Patch*
- *Oh My, Pumpkin Pie*
- *Miss Fiona’s Stupendous Pumpkin Pies*

Contributing to a Success Story

Wilson and the Tennessee Action for Healthy Kids Team report success on two levels.

“As far as the *ReCharge!* program itself goes, we definitely accomplished our goals of increasing knowledge of nutrition principles as well as communicating the importance of — and providing the instruction and venue for — more and better physical activity.

“But equally important,” she continues, “we were successful at bringing parents and the community into the loop. We’ve had numerous parents call and tell us that their kids have asked for foods at home that they learned about in our after-school ‘tastings’ — specifically yogurt and granola parfaits, that the kids love.”

“Parents have also told me that they’ve switched from white to whole-grain breads, and from cookies to nutrition-bars, as a direct result of the information we provided them as part of *ReCharge!* So the knowledge is getting out there, and we’re getting the parents involved. The results of our pre- and post-initiative survey to parents bear this out.”

And what about the community?

Answers Wilson, “When we’ve got dietitians from the health department and local dairy council talking to kids in the after-school program about the importance of sound nutrition, the kids are getting higher quality information and expertise and guidance than a nutrition ‘layman’ could ever provide. And it worked.

“We’d quiz the kids the following week, and they retained and remembered the information. It was the same with physical activities. When the kids learned a fun activity taught to them by our county recreational folks, the next day they couldn’t wait to go outside and do it. There’s something about the authority and enthusiasm of figures from the community that resonates with kids — and that adds an awful lot to the after-school mix.”

Colorado

Partnering with a Community Organization

Sharing resources with a local community organization and jointly tackling the challenges is an efficient way to lessen the burden of launching and running any wellness-based after-school initiative. And because of its presence in most communities and its longstanding commitment to wellness, the YMCA is an ideal partner.

Tami Anderson of the Colorado Action for Healthy Kids Team observes that the Team has always had a strong relationship with the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver. In fact the Y’s executive director of Before and After-School Programs is an active and enthusiastic Colorado Action for Healthy Kids Team member. This important connection was viewed as a perfect opportunity for Colorado Action for Healthy Kids to launch *ReCharge!* within the 21 established after-school sites run by the YMCA.

“As a result of the partnership, resources were profitably shared and pooled — with the Y even providing its own highly qualified staff for

LOCAL MARKETING AND OUTREACH PARTNERS

Joining forces with local marketing and outreach partners in creative ways can be a mutually beneficial way to share resources and to make an after-school initiative even more effective.

Sources of possible assistance with outreach and implementation include:

- Local community-based organizations
- The Department of Defense Food Assistance Program
- Peer education opportunities, such as those offered through Family, Career and Community Leaders of America; National Association of Student Councils; and American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences
- Action for Healthy Kids Teams
- Retail partners to provide healthy snacks
- YMCAs
- Boys and Girls Clubs of America
- Extension Services

ReCharge! training and implementation,” says Anderson, a Western Dairy Council staffer who, as a key Colorado Action for Healthy Kids Team member, served as her Team’s liaison with the Denver-area Y.

Similar Goals and a Focus on Nutrition Training

The YMCA of Metropolitan Denver had a specific internal mandate to become involved in the childhood obesity issue, so *ReCharge!* was naturally appealing to the organization.

“When partnering with a local organization,” Anderson says, “these kinds of shared goals and common missions are essential, so everyone involved is working toward the same end.”

Also important to remember when working with a Y is that a sharper focus on nutrition training can be important. How so?

“Well,” Anderson explains, “YMCA staff tends to be very familiar with, and conversant in, physical activity and physical education — but less so when it comes to nutrition topics.”

For this reason, Anderson recommends building the nutrition component into training, using the nutrition background information and healthy snacking materials in the *ReCharge!* program as a good starting point.

A Shared Agenda

Anderson points out that the national YMCA has its own well-respected publication, “The Y’s Way to Physical Fitness,” which the Colorado Team found thoroughly compatible with, and a useful complement to, *ReCharge!*

Reminds Anderson, “When partnering with a fitness- or nutrition-related organization on *ReCharge!*, it makes sense to integrate or reference any of that organization’s existing programs, philosophies and guidelines where relevant.”

The Colorado Team and the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver leveraged each other’s strengths in other ways, too.

“For example, Colorado Action for Healthy Kids benefited from use of the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver’s powerful information distribution capabilities,” says Anderson. In addition to the Team employing the communications tools provided in the *ReCharge!* kit and the online training center (see sidebar, p. 7), Anderson explains that “here in Colorado the Y assumed responsibility for additional promotion of *ReCharge!* — via flyers and materials of their own sent to involved schools, parents, and community sites.”

The Y also took an active role in participating in, promoting, publicizing, and creating community excitement around a Denver Broncos Spirit Day, organized by the Colorado Action for Healthy Kids Team in cooperation with the Western Dairy Council.

The YMCA’s Point of View

Kimberley Armitage is with the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver, and serves as executive director of the Aurora (Colorado) Family YMCA. Her take on the Y’s collaboration with the Colorado Action for Healthy Kids Team is equally positive.

“It was actually surprisingly easy for us to launch *ReCharge!*, primarily because we simply had everything in place, including after-school staff. To

me, though, and I say this as someone who works with kids all day every day, the biggest measure of the initiative’s success is that the kids really enjoyed it. It’s so great to see kids in an after-school setting eating a snack that you know is totally healthy, and being active in constructive, fitness-enhancing ways.

“And the anecdotal evidence I gathered in terms of comments from parents was really gratifying. I’d hear things like, ‘I had no idea my child knew so much about food!’ or ‘My child is really into the whole energy-in-energy-out thing,’ or ‘Who’d ever imagine my kid would prefer granola to chocolate!’ It was really gratifying, and especially so since our two organizations pulled it off together.”

Missouri

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

- Action for Healthy Kids provides a technical assistance component — an online **ReCharge! Training Center**, with orientation materials, video demonstrations of *ReCharge!* activities, tips for effective program implementation and additional tools for after-school staff and trainers. It is available free at www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.
- Orientation and training sessions are extremely helpful in increasing the after-school program’s staff comfort level with the program. Trainers could include school staff or community-based volunteers with expertise in health, nutrition and/or physical fitness. In addition, your local Action for Healthy Kids Team may be able to help. Training tools are available on the Action for Healthy Kids website (see above).

Structured After-School Orientation and Training

Anyone who has ever been involved in launching an after-school program — or indeed any program or effort requiring competent supervision and specialized knowledge — knows that training is vitally important. The best-designed program can be ineffective or unused if those running it are improperly trained or untrained.

In launching *ReCharge!* during the 2005-06 school year, the Missouri Action for Healthy Kids Team was very much aware of this reality.

Twenty after-school programs in Missouri implemented *ReCharge!* — making efficient orientation and training of after-school personnel absolutely essential, according to Missouri Action for Healthy Kids Team member Erika Devore.

“In gearing up, we learned an awful lot about what works best in terms of training and getting people up to speed,” says Devore, whose Team tailored its own 90-minute training sessions for staff.

“Our sessions included a program introduction and overview, a careful review of the *ReCharge!* program’s ‘Getting Started’ section, and a group viewing of the explanatory DVD that comes with the program.”

As the Team structured *ReCharge!* training in a traditional train-the-trainer style, one staff member from each participating school was present. This generally was an after-school manager or supervisor, and, in turn, this person went back to share the training with other onsite, after-school staff.

“We worked through each district’s after-school director to set up the training sessions,” says Devore, “using him or her as our point-person.”

So what lessons did the Missouri Team learn about after-school training in general, and *ReCharge!* training in particular?

“The most important thing we learned was to concentrate on lesson specifics,” Devore says. “For example, *ReCharge!* is comprehensive enough that, for some staff, a broad overview of the program is less useful than picking out four or five specific, most-likely-to-be-used activities and understanding them in depth.

“We also learned that training sessions are a case of ‘the more the merrier.’ While train-the-trainer certainly works, we encouraged as many after-school personnel — not just managers — as possible to attend in-person trainings. The reality is that some after-school program managers, directors, and

supervisors are so busy that they can't be as hands-on about training and education with colleagues when they're on-site as they ideally should be."

Preparation, Continuity and Simply Finding Time

Devore stresses, for anyone making the leap into after-school program training, that, as much as possible, it's good to encourage or require staff to review program materials prior to arrival at training sessions.

"It made training much easier and saved a great deal of time when staff had done their homework and weren't coming at the subject cold. In our case, we worked through after-school program directors to make it clear that staff were expected to come to trainings already 'briefed' on the basics of *ReCharge!*"

Devore emphasizes, above all, that training is never over. Ongoing, on-site support is important.

"We learned that Action for Healthy Kids Team members shouldn't just visit *ReCharge!* schools and observe, but ideally should schedule actual hands-on help sessions, even months after training has taken place. We were constantly 'on call' for our schools — to support, advise, troubleshoot."

Last but not least is the question of simply making time for training —

Alabama: Finding and Keeping After-School Staff

Sometimes the most immediate and urgent hurdle for after-school programs is locating, and retaining, competent staff.

In Pike County, Alabama, two schools — Troy City Elementary and Banks Elementary — were the focus of the Alabama Action for Healthy Kids Team's efforts to employ *ReCharge!* within an existing after-school program serving 110 students. Team member Christy Hill reports that her group decided that "tapping into the nearby educational community was the way to go."

It worked. The Alabama Team partnered with nearby Troy University, a local undergraduate and graduate liberal-arts school with a history as a teacher's college and a commitment to community involvement.

"The Team's aim," explains Hill, "was to enlist a paid volunteer student, or students, from the university to work specifically on *ReCharge!* at both Troy City and Banks, implementing numerous elements of the *ReCharge!* curriculum in the role of an aide." Among the lessons the Team learned:

- Ads placed in campus publications should describe the modestly paid positions as providing not just a part-time paycheck, but invaluable experience for students majoring in nutrition, nursing, physical education, and other fields.
- Students can be hired for as little as 10 hours per week — Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons between 3 and 5 o'clock.
- One-on-one training of student volunteers or paid interns is essential — particularly since some student staff have never before held an education job.
- College students can be especially helpful with the evaluation components of after-school programs such as data collection and interviewing.
- Commitments to coursework and class schedules can sometimes present a conflict — try to get a student to commit to your after-school program for an entire semester, or even a school year.
- A wide spectrum of academic majors has relevance to after-school — not just physical education but such majors as health promotion, kinesiology, social marketing, exercise physiology, and dietary science.
- The hours spent working in an after-school program can, depending on the professor and school, contribute to course credit and/or teacher-certification for students — so many students will view taking part in an after-school program as an opportunity, not just a part-time job.
- High-school students also make good assistants — not qualified to oversee children's activities, but helpful nonetheless in everything from signing after-school participants in and storing backpacks to serving snacks and delivering younger children to parents when they arrive for pickup.

STRONG PUBLIC DEMAND FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- 90% of the public agrees that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children to go after school.
- 84% of the public favors use of school facilities after hours.
- Parents of 15.3 million children not currently participating in an after-school program want them to participate (rate of unmet demand is highest among African American and Hispanic families).
- 75% of voters believe that federal or state tax dollars should be used to expand daily after-school programs and to make them accessible to all children.
- 69% of two-parent families and 71% of single-parent families with young children report having work schedules that require parents to seek after-school childcare.

Sources: Afterschool Alliance, Coalition for Community Schools, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, The Rose Institute

which is why Devore recommends training over the summer if practical.

“Time is always a challenge. If at all possible – and obviously in many cases it’s not – I would advise anyone planning orientation and training for after-school programs to do so during the summer, to take advantage of the luxury of time and to really familiarize staff with the fine points of the program. Having an entire day to spend on training, rather than just a 90-minute workday session, is obviously a huge plus.”

Success: In the End Dependent on Staff

Erika Devore goes so far as to say that the success of *ReCharge!* in Missouri is a direct reflection on after-school staff, and the training they receive. “Candidly, we were very lucky in terms of having really motivated, caring after-school staff.

“Without exaggeration, the great results we got in terms of boosting our kids’ knowledge of, and commitment to, better nutrition and physical activity I trace directly back to how carefully the staff was briefed, prepared, familiarized, and trained.”



ABOUT ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Action for Healthy Kids is the only nonprofit organization that addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished, and sedentary youth by focusing on changes within schools. This national, grassroots, public-private partnership of 60 organizations and government agencies representing education, health, fitness, and nutrition, supports the efforts of Teams — comprised of more than 9,000 volunteers — in all states and the District of Columbia. Action for Healthy Kids was founded in 2002 by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, in response to the *Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change.

To learn more about Action for Healthy Kids, visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.