Examples of Effective Parent-Provider Partnerships to Benefit Children

“It is our job as early childhood professionals to educate children and their families and to help them develop healthy practices early in life. Although some parents have reservations about our staff regulating their food choices for their children, they have been very cooperative with us and understand the reasoning behind the licensing regulations. They also want their children to be as healthy as possible. We provide parents with lists of acceptable food items and include easy recipes in our monthly newsletter to help them make good choices for their children.”

– Kelly McCullough, Director, St. John’s Lutheran Early Learning Center

“As a provider, I educate and involve the families in every way possible. For the topic of nutrition, I will ask families to provide a list of foods the child likes during the interview process. From there, I talk a little bit about what types of food I serve. I provide some basic information from the Nemours training books, such as portion sizes and what types of foods should be offered at meal times. Conference time is an opportunity for me to ask families for their guidance in their child’s education which includes nutrition. Providing information to assist with their child’s needs helps to form a trusting relationship. Once a relationship is established, passing along valuable information becomes useful.”

– Brigette Shellenberger, Family child care provider

“It is no secret that young children spend a large amount of time attending out of home child care programs. Therefore, it is our responsibility as teachers and administrators to work with children’s families to support healthy lifestyles, including good nutrition and daily physical activity. The current Office of Child Care Licensing Rules support this process of working with families to ensure our children’s health. As adults, it is our responsibility to make sure our children are healthy. When children see adults place importance on healthy food choices, they will also begin to see the significance of healthy eating. One simple way this can be achieved is by sitting down to each meal with your child.”

– Daniella Jackson-Marvel, Educational Lab Specialist, Delaware Technical and Community College Child Development Center

References

16. National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. Why Delaware Should Maintain Nutrition Regulations for Child Care

Key Delaware Child Care Regulations for Nutrition

The following are key regulations that promote healthy eating in the child care setting:

- Only 100% fruit juice may be served, and only one serving per day is allowed. No juice is allowed for infants under 1 year of age.
- Only fat-free or 1% (low-fat) milk may be served to children age 2 years and older. Whole milk must be served to children 12 through 23 months of age.
- Calories from fat are limited to no more than 35% of total calories in fried and pre-fried meats and fried and pre-fried fruits/vegetables.
- Cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of sugar per serving.
- Whole grains are required one time each day.
- Sweet grains may be served one time every two weeks for snacks only (not for breakfast, lunch or supper).
- Processed meats can be served only once every two weeks.

Background

Delaware, organizations in the early care and education field are fostering the healthy growth and development of young children and also helping to address childhood obesity. Collaboration among Delaware’s Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL), Delaware’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), sponsors of child care centers and family child care homes, local food vendors and Nemours Health & Prevention Services (NH&PS) made possible comprehensive changes to standards for physical activity and nutrition in the child care setting. These new regulations were put in place for child care centers in 2007 and for family child care homes in 2009.

Impact of Nutrition on Child Development

Early childhood is a time of rapid development — in the brain and also in many of the body’s biological systems critical to good health. A child’s experiences and environment during this critical time affect his or her immediate development and also subsequent functioning.

Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child has identified the three foundations of health as a stable and responsive environment of relationships; safe and supportive physical, chemical and built environments; and sound and appropriate nutrition.

Studies show that sound and appropriate nutrition is not necessarily the norm among U.S. children, many of whom consume diets that are high in added sugar and fat, and low in healthy foods and beverages like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low- and non-fat dairy. Proper nutrition is critically important during the early years. Deficiencies in key nutrients, such as vitamin D and iron, can negatively impact a child’s physical and cognitive development and lead to increased risk of heart disease.

Children exposed to healthy foods early are more likely to prefer and eat healthy foods and to develop eating habits that promote healthy growth and can continue throughout childhood. Establishing preferences for nutritious foods increases nutrient intake and can potentially decrease caloric intake, decreasing the risk of obesity and future chronic disease.

National Recognition for Delaware’s Child Care Regulations

Delaware’s standards for physical activity and nutrition in child care are a model that continues to attract national attention. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education

Summary:

Delaware’s child care regulations promote the healthy growth and development of children in licensed child care settings by establishing requirements for adequate nutrition and physical activity and limits on “screen time.” Development of these strong regulations resulted from statewide collaboration and coordination among public, private and nonprofit organizations committed to promoting healthy behaviors among young children. Delaware is gaining national recognition as a result of the improvements child care providers are making to include more physical activity in the day to serve more healthy foods as parts of meals and snacks.
Why Delaware Should Maintain Nutrition Regulations for Child Care

Delaware is not unique in regulating the quality of all food served in child care. Several other states regulate the nutritional quality of both meals and snacks served to children. These states include:

- North Carolina: "Meals and snacks served to children in a child care center shall comply with the Meal Patterns for Children in Child Care Programs from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which are based on the recommended nutrient intake judged by the National Research Council to be adequate for maintaining good nutrition. ... When children bring their own food for meals or snacks to the center, the child care provider must provide additional food necessary to meet those requirements." 56

- Ohio: "Parents or guardians may provide food for the children's meals and snacks if the center meets the following requirements: ... has supplemental foods from all four food groups on the premises and readily accessible during meal times. Supplemental foods are needed to fulfill one-third of the child's recommended daily dietary allowances if the center does not provide meals or snacks that meet the nutritional needs of the child." 57

- Mississippi: "Meals served to children in programs that serve meals and snacks to children shall meet the requirements of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's CACFP Meal Patterns." 58

- Delaware: "Regulations for Early Care and Education and School-Age Centers and the Delaware Rules for Early Care and Education and School-Age Centers require that all meals and snacks served in child care centers align with the CACFP Meal Patterns. CACFP is a federal program that serves nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. Delaware's regulations specify nutritional requirements for food prepared and served by the center and food supplied by parents and guardians. In doing so, these regulations are meant to ensure that while in care, all children receive the healthy foods and beverages they need for their growth and development." 59

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Other State Regulations on Food

- Mississippi: "Meals and snacks served to children in a child care center shall comply with the Meal Patterns for Children in Child Care Programs from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which are based on the recommended nutrient intake judged by the National Research Council to be adequate for maintaining good nutrition. ... When children bring their own food for meals or snacks to the center, the child care provider must provide additional food necessary to meet those requirements." 56

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Parent Support for Healthy Foods in Child Care

Recent survey and focus group findings show parent support and a desire for increased collaboration between parents and guardians and child care providers to ensure children eat healthy foods. Focus groups conducted by NHPF in conjunction with the Team Nutrition grantii revealed that parents are concerned about the food they purchase and serve to their families and want more information on how to help their children lead healthier lives, such as tips on motivating them to eat healthy foods and resource materials for packing healthy lunches. Parents and guardians are looking to their child care providers for support to help bridge the gap between the child care setting and the home environment. 61

Through focus groups, the Attawm Institute found parent support for Delaware's child care regulations on nutrition, with most parents and guardians who pack their children’s lunches stating that the new guidelines have positively impacted what they buy for their whole family. 62

Survey results have yielded similar evidence of parent support. NHPF’s survey of directors and teachers in 146 licensed child care centers in Delaware revealed that 71% of directors and 71% of teachers responding to the survey agree that parents support implementation of their center’s nutrition and physical activity standards. 63

More information on the Let's Move! Child Care initiative and how child care providers can promote healthy choices is available at: http://healthyletshandlehigh.org.


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