

For Immediate Release



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

A coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles

www.eatrightmontana.org

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Back-to-School: Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Succeed

Montana's First Lady, Nancy Schweitzer, is a well-known champion for education in Big Sky country. With her husband, Governor Brian Schweitzer, she has launched an exciting Math and Science Initiative to prepare Montana students to be leaders in the global economy. With her commitment to Montana's great teachers and innovative classroom activities, Mrs. Schweitzer also understands that healthy lifestyle habits have a major impact on children's success at school.

"We know that kids can't learn as well if they don't eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly," says Nancy Schweitzer, First Lady of Montana and mother of three. "I frequently join students for lunch in the cafeteria so I know that many school food programs are working hard to provide healthy meals. Montana has also been a leader in "recess before lunch" programs in schools. This is a great policy, since research shows that students tend to make healthier eating decisions if recess comes before lunch. Other schools are serving a smart morning snack like fruit, cheese, and whole grain foods."

Since 2006, when Congress mandated local school wellness policies, many Montana districts have developed impressive programs to enhance the nutrition and fitness of students and staff with support from the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and Montana Team Nutrition. For example, schools in Billings, Box Elder, Bozeman, and Lolo received awards in USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge; Bozeman and Laurel districts received state Worksite Wellness awards; Missoula and St. Regis serve breakfast in the classroom; and communities across the state are creating Farm-to-School coalitions.

However, when it comes to kids' nutrition and physical activity, schools are just one factor. Healthy habits start - and are reinforced - at home. Here are Mrs. Schweitzer's thoughts on simple ways that families can help kids eat smart and get fit:

- **Try it, you'll like it:** Kids don't always know that healthy food tastes good until they try it. Making healthy options fun, like "ants on a log" (celery, peanut butter or light cream cheese, and raisins) is another easy way to add nutrition.
- **Enjoy family meals:** Eating dinner is an important time for families to visit and for kids to share what they learned in school. An even better option is to cook the meal together.
- **Cook and learn:** There are lots of ways for families to integrate math and science in the kitchen, like learning how yeast works in baking bread. And a lot of math goes into cooking too, like using measuring cups and doubling a recipe.
- **Play together:** Take a family walk after supper or in the morning to start your day. Incorporate fun exercise, count how many steps are around your house, measure your stride and multiply.

Nancy Schweitzer sees lots of healthy opportunities for schools and families in the Treasure State. "Many Montana schools are able to buy food locally and fully prepare meals in the school kitchen which is a great wellness practice. Knowing what is in food and where it comes from can lead to healthy eating. Taking advantage of local and state parks to explore is another way Montana families can insure their children are fit, healthy, and ready to succeed."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm

It's All About Balance | Celebrating Healthy Families 2008