

Here's how you can make a difference in the nutritional environment at your school:

First, **visit your school's lunchroom and dine on the food served.** No, we're not kidding. You should actually eat the food served, so that you will have a clear understanding of how and what the students are being fed. Take note of the foods/beverages available with both the regular meal and for a la carte or vending sale. Read labels on any packaged offerings and ask to see ingredient lists for foods served as part of the meal. Invite other parents to do the same, to raise awareness about the foods/beverages available at your school. You would be surprised at the number of parents who do not really know what the students are being served or what the students are actually consuming. As you dine among the students, notice what they are eating.

Educate yourself!

- Visit the websites listed in the toolkit, provided by your GA PTA Health and Wellness Committee.
- Purchase a copy of Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. This book will prove to be an invaluable resource as you work to improve your school's nutritional environment.
- Familiarize yourself with your school and district's Wellness Policy. Is your school living up to the Wellness Policy?
- Find out who are the individuals involved in your school's federally mandated School Health Council or Wellness Committee. Your Principal should know who is participating on this council. This "council" is something mutually exclusive of PTA's Health and Nutrition Committee, however many schools invite their PTA Health and Wellness Chairs to participate on the School Health Council as well.

If your PTA does not currently have a **Health and Nutrition Committee, start one!** You must contact your PTA Presidents to start the process. If your PTA does have a Health and Nutrition Committee, join it and get involved!

Build or further develop your PTA Health and Nutrition Committee. Seek out other parents who are interested in joining your committee. Advertise for new committee members in your school newsletter, school paper, PTA publications, teacher blogs or school websites.

With approval from your PTA and Principal, **conduct a school wide survey** to gain understanding of parents' current attitudes/knowledge of the nutritional environment at your school. In your survey, include questions about the school lunch and a la carte offerings, foods served as part of birthday celebrations or class parties, foods/beverages served as part of fundraising events and as classroom rewards. Did you know that the Cobb County Wellness Policy states that food should not be used as a reward? Contact your ECCC PTA Health and Wellness Committee for a sample survey so that you don't have to "reinvent the wheel". With permission from Administration and PTA leaders, share the survey results in a school publication.

Get to know your school's Cafe Manager and Cafe Workers. Make sure they understand that your intent is to IMPROVE the nutritional environment for the students/faculty so that more parents can feel confident in allowing their children to participate in the school lunch program. Find out what challenges they face on a daily basis. Did you know their pay is based on # of lunches served and the \$\$\$ a la carte sales produces. If we all work together we can ask that the foods sold to our children be healthy items – which should be a higher priority than revenue. Make sure your Café Manager and employees understand that the request for healthier items is not a personal affront to them. In fact, some schools who have upgraded their a la carte choices have offered to have their PTA committee "market" these items to help boost sales.

For additional resources or information, please contact your GA PTA Health & Wellness Committee Kim Arasin at arasin5@bellsouth.net and Natalie Rogers at fluffyjune@yahoo.com