



## Healthy Schools:

# Cultural Language Schools Adopt Healthy Snack Policy and Nutrition Education Initiative

by Cathy Vue, MPH



Asian Services In Action, Inc.



The obesity rates among Asian American (AA) children have steadily increased over the past 10 years, causing obesity rates to level off with the general population. In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Asian Services In Action (ASIA) Inc., worked closely with two Chinese, a Korean, and a Hindu cultural language schools to increase healthy eating practices through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change strategies.

## Challenge

The prevalence of heart disease and diabetes is a growing health concern in the Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) population. This is because AAPIs are generally at a higher risk of weight-related health problems at a lower body-fat count than other racial groups. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases shows diabetes as the fifth leading cause of death in AAPIs between the ages of 45 to 64. Based on other research, 4,665 (or 7% of the population) AAPIs in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, are currently living with diabetes. One regional study showed 22.5% of Cambodians and 14% of Asian Indians have Type II diabetes. In addition, over 50% of refugees from Burma and Bhutan had elevated risk for Type 2 diabetes. The obesity rates in AA children have also steadily increased over the past 10 years, causing obesity rates to level off with the general population.

## Solution

In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, ASIA worked closely with 4 cultural language schools (2 Chinese, Korean & Hindu) to increase healthy eating practices through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change strategies. None of the four schools had nutritional guidelines for snack time or during community events. ASIA worked closely with each school to complete an assessment utilizing the CHANGE tool provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The tool allowed ASIA to assess each school's level of readiness and identify resources necessary for PSE implementation. The goal was for each school to adopt a policy focused on nutritional guidelines for snacks served to students and at community events.

## Results



*“As a parent, it makes me happy that the school is being proactive and invested in keeping my child healthy on every level.”*

*- Parent Chinese Cultural School*



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As a result, four out of the four cultural language school was able to adopt and implement nutritional guidelines for parents and administration to use during snack time and community events. The schools also made sure to be culturally conscious by ensuring that the ethnic foods selected were low in sodium and fat. In addition, the school also increased the use of fresh fruits and vegetables for students during snack time. One school specifically provided volunteer parents with a guideline showing examples of healthy snacks which were allowed.

## Sustainable Success

ASIA continues to work closely with the four cultural language schools by inviting each cultural language school to become key partners in a multi-sector AAPI serving coalition, Reaching Asian Americans Pacific Islanders through Innovative Strategies to Achieve Equity (RAISE), which is focused on healthy lifestyles through a PSE lens. The mission of RAISE is to eliminate chronic disease disparities and improve the health of Asian Americans (AA) in Cuyahoga County through preventive health initiatives. Through RAISE, each cultural language school was able to tap into different community resources in order to further explore how PSE strategies can be tailored to fit the cultural needs of their community.

### Get involved by:

Raising awareness on the disparities faced by AAs

Advocating for PSE changes to your local legislature

Joining a collaborative to improve your community

## Your Involvement is Key

The support of community members, policy makers, and leaders is fundamental in creating policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve health for Asian Americans.

To learn more about RAISE, please visit the website at: <http://www.asiaohio.org/programs/chp/raise/>



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