

Jovita Flores, *Parent* Chicago, Ill.



For Jovita Flores, there was no question that she needed to stand up for healthy food and physical activity in her neighborhood schools in Chicago's Little Village.

"In the Latino neighborhood in which I live, I see the number of kids who are obese increasing dramatically," she said.

"I saw friends' kids developing diabetes at a young age and I wondered how this could be happening. I observed in other neighborhoods that they have a healthy lunch with more fruits and vegetables at their schools and I realized that we don't have healthy lunch options at our own schools. I knew then I had to get involved."

Flores began by organizing; she stood outside the schools and recruited parents to join her cause. It wasn't long before she realized that engaging parents to change the school environment would first involve raising awareness of their own health choices and of the ways health disparities were disproportionately affecting the Latino community.

HSC Connection
Learn more about Parents United for Healthy Schools, at the HSC website.

Working with the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization and HSC's Parents United for Healthy Schools/ Padres Unidos Para Escuelas Saludables, Flores embarked on a full program of community change: walking groups, parent-led aerobics classes, gardening clubs to increase access to fresh vegetables, and the hugely popular nutrition class that she describes as more of a leadership and self-awareness course, "totally different from all the nutrition classes you know."

She worked with parents in the neighborhood to develop a recipe book with healthy versions of traditional foods, and convinced local restaurants to begin using healthier oils in their food.

As parents began making healthy changes, she said, they awakened to the severity of the problems at school and could advocate strongly to improve the food and fitness environment for their children.

"Parents said, 'Okay, I'm doing my part at home—but what are schools doing?'" she explained. Parents organized a rally for healthy schools, lobbied the state legislature to reinstate recess, and are becoming active in local school wellness councils.

Now, she said, the changes—both in her community and in herself—are "amazing."

"I knew I had to take care of myself, but I didn't know how," she said. "Now I feel like I have the perfect recipe."

Eva Detloff, *School Nurse* Barrington, Ill.



Eva Detloff's approach to healthy change created a balance of system-wide improvements and room for individual innovation. As a school nursing supervisor for her district, Detloff worked with a diverse wellness committee to implement policies that have brought healthier meals ("with higher standards than in most models," she said), a fresh fruit and vegetable bar to every cafeteria, nutrition education to elementary schools, healthier vending options to middle schools and high schools, and more plans on the horizon.

At the same time, it's allowing room for creative steps that range from after-school physical activity to grilled pineapple skewers for sale at high school football games.

"We're letting buildings look at their own culture and decide what changes to make first to improve wellness," she said. The goal is for the plan to be fully implemented in four years.

HSC Connection
Detloff participated in HSC's School Nurse Leadership Program and now serves on our School Nurse Advisory Committee.

Detloff's approach to change has been shaped, in part, by HSC's School Nurse Leadership Program.

"It's really helped guide me through the process," she said. "So much of what I've learned I could use right away with my committee, with my district. It's helped us make a lot of really good changes."

In particular, she said, the training led her to place additional emphasis on evidence-based practice, identifying measurable objectives and even tracking aggregated BMI percentiles for students in the district.

Many parents have been "thrilled" with the changes, she said, and students' response is clear from the high fruit sales at schools.

The only negative response she received was from people who misunderstood the policy and thought they may be forced to make specific changes themselves.

"We never told anybody they had to change something," Detloff explained. "Once people understood that, they were supportive of the policy recommendations. Staff and parents have seen the changes schools have made and are coming up with more ideas themselves. They're ready to go there. Every change is a step in the right direction—and it's very rewarding."

Share your story! *How have you created change in your school? Who have you seen pioneering innovative changes? E-mail tara@healthyschoolscampaign.org or call 888-HSC-1810 to let us know!*