HEALTHY BODIES

ACTIVE MINDS

Strategies to Increase Student Health & Academic Performance

Franklin County, Massachusetts
October 2014
On The Cover: Members of the Swift River School’s 100 Mile Club on the Club’s final day of the term, June 2014

Photo Credit: Micky Bedell, courtesy of The Recorder

Back Cover Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
# Table of Contents

- **Introduction** .......................................................... 2

- **Get Them Moving Before, During, and After School!** ........ 4

- **Support Walk to School Programs** ............................... 7

- **Create Joint Use Agreements** .................................... 8

- **Offer Good Food!** .................................................... 9

- **Design Smarter Lunchrooms** ..................................... 10

- **Invest in Farm to School Programs** .............................. 12

- **Leverage Local Partners and Resources** ....................... 14

- **Promote Water!** ..................................................... 15

- **Develop a Comprehensive Wellness Policy** .................... 16

- **Conclusion** ........................................................... 18

- **Inventory Spreadsheet** ............................................ 20
In the winter of 2013-14, Partnership for Youth (PFY) led the Communities That Care Coalition (CTC) on a project to promote promising practices that addressed increased nutrition and physical activity in local schools, as evidence shows that these two factors improve student health and academic achievement. Our history of promoting evidence-based strategies and programs influenced our belief that if schools and their stakeholders had a strong sense of what works, they would apply it. But first, we had to know what they were already doing!

With the CTC Regional School Health Taskforce serving as an advisory body, we set about interviewing schools while simultaneously researching areas of interest to the taskforce members. We reviewed the literature on physical activity in the classroom, gathered policy analysis on competitive food laws and practices, reviewed toolkits on local wellness policy resources, and took what we learned to schools, continually learning not only what the best practices are, but what was being applied in our region, and how. The Centers for Disease Control’s 2011 report “School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity” emerged as a lead guiding reference, as it recommends a variety of evidence-based practices to increase youth health. The CDC guidelines influenced our approach and line of questioning as we interviewed schools, for implementing these guidelines can increase the health of Franklin County youth, and in so doing, positively impact their academic achievement. The bottom line is that healthier students have better grades, attendance, and classroom behavior.

As we learned more about proven methods and how those methods are being applied in Franklin County, we built an inventory tool that documents evidence-based practices that increase nutrition and physical activity in schools, and indicates, based on interviews and surveys, which schools engage in those
practices (a copy of the inventory is included in this report on page 20). Franklin County is a region that collaborates, takes advantage of available resources, and shares information, so it was no surprise that as we inventoried what schools were doing, we continually heard that schools wanted to know what other schools in the region were doing as well. We believe that by sharing this information, we can “cross-pollinate” the practices we learned about.

We hope schools will see this tool as an impetus to call upon each other for inspiration and technical assistance, that schools will challenge each other to raise the bar still higher regarding youth health, and that community members and school stakeholders will recognize that Franklin County schools are at the forefront of shaping the food and fitness environment in which our youth live, learn, and play.

This report highlights those CDC guidelines that emerged as most salient in our school inventory project, and connects those practices to local examples. All Franklin County students deserve the opportunity to be healthy and successful. Congratulations to our schools for their work in promoting nutrition and physical activity as essential elements of increasing student health and academic success. Prevention works. It’s working here.

Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
The US Surgeon General’s recommendation for youth activity is at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. This recommendation includes vigorous activity, muscle strengthening, and bone strengthening activities at least 3 days a week.

In 2012, fewer than 30% of U.S. high school students were physically active at least 60 minutes per day in a given week. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CDC both note that school districts can play a crucial role in helping students achieve the minimum daily recommendation.

Our schools are key players in keeping our young people moving in a variety of ways – before school, in class, after school, throughout the region, our kids are walking, running, stretching, jumping, dancing…and learning!

Local Highlights

BEFORE SCHOOL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS

Hawlemont Elementary School looked into a BOKS (Build Our Kids’ Success) program after Principal Travis Yagodzinski was exposed to it through his own son’s school in Hatfield. Hawlemont received a BOKS activation grant which allowed them to implement the program Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the school year.

BOKS uses staff and/or parent volunteers to guide children through 20-30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during each session. Students engage in some free-play and running activity, while also learning and practicing specific new skills which are incorporated into relays or obstacle courses. Each session ends by teaching sportsmanship through team or individual games, and a cool down which includes a nutrition tip for the students to consider.

http://www.bokskids.org/
BUILDING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO THE DAY

The Mohawk Trail Regional School District incorporates minimum amounts of physical activity for all students as a matter of policy. Physical Education standards are cited for all grade levels (K-6 – minimum of 60 minutes per week all year; 7-8 – 45 minutes every other day all year; 9-12 – 85 minutes every other day for ½ the year), as are opportunities for physical activity (between lessons or classes in elementary school, and every 45 minutes in middle or high school) as well as elementary recess standards (minimum of 20 minutes). This means an elementary student in Mohawk is likely to get 75% of the recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise in the school day alone. Factor in before and after school program participation, and that percentage is even higher!

AFTER SCHOOL

Swift River School received an Active Schools Acceleration Project Grant from Tufts University to implement the 100 Mile Club®. The grant money allowed families to participate free of charge this year (next year families will be asked to contribute all or as much as they can afford of the $10 per student cost, and the school’s Parent Teacher Community Association will fundraise to subsidize families unable to pay).

Students in the club commit to running or walking 100 miles during a single school year. Students and families tally miles at recess, during the after-school Running Club, and at weekend Family Fun Runs organized at the school. Community benefit walks and runs can also be counted towards their 100 miles. Students are recognized and celebrated at various intervals – at 25 miles each student gets a tee shirt, at 50 they get a gold pencil, at 75 they get a wrist band, and all students who reach 100 miles get a gold medal at the end of the year. Students track their progress on a visible map outside the gym, and every child is recognized at an end of the year medal ceremony.

http://100mileclub.com/ • http://www.activeschoolsasap.org/
SPECIAL ACTIVITY EVENTS

In the fall of 2013, Orange Elementary Schools Physical Education teacher Jennifer Chernick received a flier promoting the Kids Fitness Challenge, an initiative sponsored by Bay State Games. The program, open to all Massachusetts elementary and middle schools, occurs for 1 week in the fall and for 1 week in the spring. The goal is to get the entire school population together and exercising for a minimum of 30 minutes. Schools that have 100% participation are then entered into a drawing for a $500 prize (there are 4 prizes of $500) for their school’s Phys. Ed. and/or Health program. The Boston Bruins Foundation funds the prize money. Jennifer came up with the idea of an annual Dance Party as a means to get over 300 people exercising together without having to factor in weather concerns. She then selected and taught the dances to the children, made a CD for each classroom teacher so they could practice with the kids in their classrooms, set up sections in the gym so each class had their own space to dance, built a stage for the event itself so the lead dancers could be seen by everyone, and sent out party invitations to all classes and to every school staff member, arranged for everyone to receive a healthy snack at the end of the dance party, and decorated the gym for the event itself.

Jennifer noted, “The Dance party was absolutely amazing! The entire school population participated! 349 students and staff! And to top it off, Fisher Hill School was selected as one of the $500 prize winners that Fall! To announce the wonderful news to the kids, I brought them all to the gym, we made the announcement, and we danced again!”

The Orange Elementary Schools Dance Party is now an annual event.

Orange Elementary School students at their prize-winning Dance Party. Photo Credit: Jennifer Chernick
Support Walk to School Programs

Did you Know?¹

In 1969, almost half of 5- to 14-year-olds walked or biked to school, as compared to about one in eight in 2009.

Local Highlight

This year, the Greenfield Public Schools successfully launched a walk to school initiative with two of its elementary schools. Federal Street School started the project in May of 2013, and the Discovery School at Four Corners joined the following October. In partnership with Mass DOT’s Safe Routes to School program and local cycling group Bike to Live, and through volunteer support from the Greenfield Sustainable Master Plan Committee, Greening Greenfield, school staff, and parent volunteers, these public schools were able to offer monthly walking days this past year. They expect to see the program continue to grow.

The monthly walk days were organized primarily as “park and walk” events, in which parents bring children to designated gathering points, about 1/2 mile from school, to join with other students, staff, community volunteers, and some parents to walk to school as a supervised group. In some cases, the route worked like a “walking school bus”, with additional students getting “picked up” as they joined the walking group along the way.

From spring to fall of 2014, Federal Street School’s participation grew to the point where they had to double their walking routes. Federal Street’s program grew from 2 initial walk routes to 4 routes from different directions, based on requests from parents. Discovery School at Four Corners offered one route through the surrounding neighborhood that several groups of students joined along the way. This past fall saw 80-100 students participating during the warmer months, with a courageous 35–45 students braving the cold!

In May 2014, both schools participated in pedestrian safety training with Safe Routes to School and WalkBoston. A Safe Routes to School coordinator also provided an assembly on pedestrian safety to Kindergarten students. The schools plan to incorporate the pedestrian safety training every year.

Regular walk to school days provide physical activity, model pedestrian safety behavior, and build family connectedness to schools.

Resources

Steps to Creating a Safe Routes to School Program: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/steps/index.cfm

Increasing community access to school physical activity facilities establishes an environment that supports physical activity. A joint use agreement is a policy that allows two or more entities (e.g., schools, community organizations) to share use of their facilities. Joint use agreements provide details about the facilities to be shared, such as the scheduling, management, maintenance, and costs of the shared facilities.

Local Highlight

Schools have a lot to gain by partnering with other local entities, but as Fisher Hill Elementary School Principal Maureen Donelan can testify, they have a lot to offer as well. Joint use agreements between schools and local groups can ensure larger community access to school resources – and in the case of the Orange Elementary Schools, it means more physical activity for local youth. By partnering with the Town Recreation Department, Orange youth can play soccer and other sports on the school fields after the school day ends. Donelan notes that the school is used for physical activity and recreation events sponsored by the town almost daily throughout the year.

Tracks, pools, and gyms can all be used by the larger community via joint use agreements
Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder

Resources

Resources to develop joint use agreement policies, procedures etc., can be accessed through:

The Massachusetts Joint Use Toolkit: Helping Kids and Communities Be Healthy and Active from the Harvard Law School Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, Fall 2013

National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN) at:
http://changelabsolutions.org/shared-use
Offer Good Food!

Local Highlight

A cornerstone of a quality school meal program is participation. As Cornell researcher Dr. Brian Wansink has noted, “It’s not nutritious if they don’t eat it.” Schools have to balance nutritional demand with costs and student participation. It’s not an easy balance, but it’s being accomplished in our region! Gill Elementary School’s Kitchen Manager Brenda Gravelle and her staff were recognized last year by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for their accomplishment in the statewide School Breakfast Challenge. Brenda and her staff raised and sustained an increase in school breakfast participation by over 35%! Brenda attributes their success to increasing the breakfast goods that were homemade and decreasing the amount of packaged foods.

Did you Know?

- Among students who participate in both the school lunch and school breakfast program, an average of nearly half of their calories comes from foods and snacks served at school.²
- Students who participate in a school meal program tend to consume more milk, fruits, and vegetables than those who do not participate.³


Resources


The National Food Service Management Institute has a 16-part print and video training series entitled “Culinary Techniques for Healthy School Meals” that is available at: http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=266
Lighting, product placement, and other marketing techniques can be applied to cafeterias in low-cost and subtle ways that allow students choices while nudging them in the direction of the healthier choice. Simply placing healthier foods earlier in the line, or placing white milk in front of chocolate milk, tends to change students’ selection and consumption habits. Some studies have found that simple changes have decreased student consumption of less nutritious food by 27%!


**Local Highlight**

**ACTIVE PROMOTION OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

Research shows active promotion of fruits and vegetables goes a long way toward getting kids to eat them, and at the Gill-Montague district’s Sheffield Elementary School, cafeteria manager Ann Annear and her staff do just that. Active promotion of fruits and vegetables is part of an overall approach to “choice architecture,” where school cafeterias are designed as an environment that makes it easy to make healthier food choices. At Sheffield Elementary, staff remind students to eat a full color palette of vegetables with prominent posters lining the cafeteria walls, and seasonally decorate their salad bar to keep it eye-catching and fun for students. This easy marketing raises the bar from offering healthy foods, to promoting them.

Posters such as this adorn the Sheffield Elementary School cafeteria, and are free to schools. Order them at: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/dig-posters](http://www.fns.usda.gov/dig-posters)

OTHER SMARTER LUNCHROOM DESIGN STRATEGIES:

- **Salad Bars** – Move salad carts into a high-traffic area, forcing students to walk around the healthy offerings.
- **Naming** – Add adjectives to the names of menu items to make them sound more exciting and tasty.
- **Milk Placement** – Move the white milk in front of the chocolate.
- **Lunch Line Placement** – Place the food items you want kids to take first in the serving line.
- **Taste Testing** – Letting children taste test new healthy items while they are waiting in line gives students an opportunity to experiment without being forced.
- **Time** – Offer healthy “grab and go” options to get kids through the line quicker.
- **Lighting** – Increase the light on healthier options to make them more appealing and noticeable to students as they go through the line.
- **Signage** – Use attractive signage to promote healthier products.
- **Kid-Friendly Options** – Especially for younger students, offer cut up fruit and vegetables in different shapes.
- **Decrease Size of Unhealthy Items** – Decrease the size of unhealthy items to make them less appealing (example: offer small cookies).
- **Eye Level** – Place healthier food options at eye level.
- **Keep Unhealthy Food Options Less Visible** – Keep foods such as ice cream under an opaque top to make them less noticeable.
- **Appropriate Bowl Size** – Using smaller bowls will help ensure students don’t overeat.

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Resources

- Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs at Cornell University: [http://www.ben.cornell.edu/index.html](http://www.ben.cornell.edu/index.html)
- Project Refresh Toolkit. Includes a planning checklist, evaluation tools, as well as resources for healthy nutrition promotion, equipment, and food display. (Maryland State Department of Education. 2010.): [http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Maryland/ReFresh.pdf](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Maryland/ReFresh.pdf)

Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
Invest in Farm to School Programs

The Pioneer Valley is an agricultural region, and that shows in our schools, almost all of which implement some form of Farm to School initiatives. Farm to School initiatives look different all over the nation, but by definition a Farm to School initiative will involve at least one of the following:

- **procurement** of locally sourced food;
- **educational activities** related to agriculture and nutrition;
- **school gardens** where students engage in hands-on learning.

**Did You Know?**

Children who grow their own food are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables and to show higher levels of knowledge about nutrition. They are also more likely to continue healthy eating habits throughout their lives – eating fruits and vegetables in childhood is a predictor of higher fruit and vegetable consumption in adulthood.

**Local Highlights**

- Greenfield’s Discovery School at Four Corners worked with local non-profit Just Roots, whose mission is “Increasing access to healthy, local food by connecting people, land, resources and know-how,” to create school gardens. The school worked with Just Roots Farm to create school gardens. Just Roots also piloted its first student snack market at The Discovery School at Four Corners in the fall of 2013. For eight consecutive weeks, the library hall at The Discovery School at Four Corners was converted into a Just Roots Snack Market on Tuesday mornings. Students arriving at the first “sampling” station were able to choose a fruit or vegetable to sample. At the second station, students were given a sticker to mark their preferences on a like/dislike chart. At the third station, students had the opportunity to use a special

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Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
coupon to “purchase” a snack sized portion, similar to making a purchase at a farm stand or farmers market. Just Roots staff presented a variety of fruits and vegetables each week in a colorful display, and encouraged the children to try new items and expand their palate. http://justroots.org/

Students in the Gill-Montague School District are growing vegetables and greens that are then used by the school cafeterias. All high school science classes spend time on the on-site greenhouse, while many elementary students spend time in classroom or school-wide gardens.

Resources

CLASS GARDEN RESOURCES:
Seeds of Solidarity Cultivating Healthy Communities: School Garden Manual:
http://seedsofsolidarity.org/school-programs/

Slow Food USA Garden guide -
http://www.slowfoodusa.org/children-food#view

PROCUREMENT RESOURCES:
Massachusetts Farm to School Project:
http://www.massfarmtoschool.org/

EVALUATION RESOURCES:
Evaluation for Transformation: A Cross-Sectoral Evaluation Framework for Farm to School:

6. Canaris, 1995; Koch, Waliczek, & Zajicek, 2006; Pothukuchi, 2004
Leverage Local Partners and Resources

In Franklin County, the spirit of collaboration blends nicely with a common-sense approach to using what one has readily available, and we have a wide variety of programs, services, and supports that link students and families to opportunities for greater health practices. In a region saturated with institutions of higher education, verdant farmland, social activists, nonprofits, and artists, our schools have effectively partnered with some great local providers.

Local Highlights

- Greenfield’s Federal Street School partners with Greenfield Community College’s Nursing students for educational field trips to GCC, with units focusing on nutrition and exercise.

- Whately Elementary School uses the Henry Gets Moving Program coordinated by UMass. *Henry Gets Moving* is a children’s book about Henry the hamster, who struggles with weight and health issues, but with support from family and friends successfully integrates healthy changes into his lifestyle. UMass students volunteer to go into schools to read *Henry Gets Moving* and conduct the four session lesson plan involving the main themes of the book. When possible, students receive donated copies of *Henry Gets Moving* to bring home to share with their families. [http://henrygetsmoving.com/](http://henrygetsmoving.com/)

- Deerfield Elementary has used FoodPlay, a locally based, Emmy Award-winning company that uses live theater to engage kids in concepts of healthy eating and active lifestyles. FoodPlay also offers video/DVD kits, books, curricula, and educational materials to promote healthy habits in schools, homes, and communities. [http://foodplay.com/](http://foodplay.com/)

*Photo Credit: FoodPlay Productions*
Much like smarter lunchroom movements are about making the healthy choice the easy choice, water promotion seeks to make water readily available, and a more desirable choice than sugar sweetened juices, sodas, or energy drinks. Water promotion runs from updating or maintaining plumbing infrastructure to ensuring lunchrooms have water available in them. It might also involve issuing water bottles as part of a water promotion awareness campaign in school, or by embedding water promotion in policy. Regardless of how it happens, successful water promotion results in students in fewer calories and less sugar, as well as staying hydrated, which studies have linked to cognitive function.

**Did You Know?**

While the USDA does not consider potable water part of the National School Lunch Program reimbursable meal, it does allow for reasonable costs associated with making water available at school meals. USDA guidance and examples of reasonable costs can be found at: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP28-2011_osr.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP28-2011_osr.pdf)

**Local highlight:**

Four Rivers Charter School installed water fountains with a spigot for at-fountain drinking as well as a spigot for quickly and easily refilling water bottles, allowing the healthy choice to be the easy choice for students and staff alike.

**Resources**

- The CDC offers a School Drinking Water Toolkit that ranges from needs assessment to planning and evaluation at: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/pdf/Water_Access_in_Schools.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/pdf/Water_Access_in_Schools.pdf)
- California Food Policy Advocates has also published a toolkit to support water promotion which can be found at: [http://waterinschools.org/pdfs/WaterWorksGuide2014.pdf](http://waterinschools.org/pdfs/WaterWorksGuide2014.pdf)
- Model Wellness Policy language for increased water access can be found at: [http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/wellness-policy-water](http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/wellness-policy-water)
Develop a Comprehensive Wellness Policy

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required school districts that participate in the USDA National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program to develop a local wellness policy that addresses nutrition education and nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school campuses.

The passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 updated Local Wellness Policy requirements and placed greater emphasis on evaluation and sharing progress of local wellness policy implementation with the public.

Local Highlight

The Pioneer Valley Regional School District has a Wellness Policy that goes beyond the letter of the law to articulate a philosophy of wellness, and makes the connection between student health and wellness and an inclusive, respectful school climate. Pioneer’s Wellness Policy notes that students should receive consistent messages and support not only for healthy eating and physical activity, but also for self respect and respect for others – that “healthy students come in all shapes and sizes”.

Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
Pioneer’s Wellness policy notes the importance of consistency in messaging, school climate, and expectations for faculty and staff to model healthy decision-making in their own food and physical activity choices. The Policy also includes footnotes, links to resources, and appendices that provide examples and ideas.

By moving policy beyond stating what is expected and what is prohibited, and towards a policy that articulates philosophy and provides the necessary resources to align with that philosophy, Pioneer creates an environment in which their students can make healthy choices the easier choices.

Resources

The John C. Stalker Institute of Food and Nutrition is a resource specific to Massachusetts, and integrates federal and Massachusetts laws to guide stakeholders in the creation of wellness policies. They can be accessed online at: http://johnstalkerinstitute.org/wellness/

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) updated 2 chapters to its Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn series. “Chapter D: Policies to Promote Physical Activity and Physical Education”, and “Chapter E: Policies to Promote Healthy Eating” were both updated and re-released in 2013. All chapters in the series are available for download at: http://www.nasbe.org/project/center-for-safe-and-healthy-schools/fhrtl/
Conclusion

This report outlines the numerous ways local schools are creating a culture of health and promoting academic achievement by committing to nutrition and physical activity. It’s happening in lots of ways, in all of our schools, through the efforts of many people.

We started this project knowing some creative things were happening, and wanting to know more. We learned along the way that much, if not all, of the ways schools reported themselves going above and beyond the letter of the law, were connected to evidence that what they were doing makes students healthier, and better learners. It’s not just that schools are doing this work. It’s that it’s working!

So what’s next?

Our hope is that schools will use this report and inventory tool to communicate with each other, to share what they do and how, and to reflect on what more they could do. We challenge schools to identify how to expand on their success, and do the next innovative thing for their school or district. Each school will decide for itself what the next steps for a healthier school environment are, but trends overall in our inventory combined with the evidence point toward some general recommendations to consider.

Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder
The practices being done the least in our region are also some of the most cited by a variety of credible sources as effective practice. Moreover, these same practices can be implemented at little to no cost! We encourage schools and districts to consider how the following can be implemented, improved, or institutionalized:

- joint use agreements
- walk to school programs
- smarter lunchroom design
- water promotion
- comprehensive wellness policies

Within our region, our schools have a great deal of expertise. The inventory tool contains contact information for each Franklin County school. We encourage schools to contact each other, learn from each other, and use each other as resources, for the efforts already underway are exciting, innovative, and effective. The standard our schools have set is high, and can only go higher. Thank you to the Franklin County Schools for their ingenuity and commitment!

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**General/Comprehensive Resources**

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/l062yk/07-278_HSPFramework.pdf

**Funders to Watch For**

Action for Healthy Kids: [http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources/school-grants](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources/school-grants)  
Active School Acceleration Project Funds: [http://www.activeschoolsasap.org/acceleration-grants](http://www.activeschoolsasap.org/acceleration-grants)  
Let’s Move Active Schools: [http://letsmoveschools.org/resources-grants/](http://letsmoveschools.org/resources-grants/)
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This inventory is the result of interviews and surveys, and was validated through each school's administration in the late spring of 2014.
Healthy Bodies, Active Minds:
Strategies to Increase Student Health & Academic Performance
Franklin County, Massachusetts • October 2014

http://frcog.org/
http://www.communitiesthatcarecoalition.org/