Tips for a Successful Wellness Event for Families/Communities

Go where families are already gathering.
- Partner with other groups and expand an existing event (PTA/PTO meeting, Back to School night, literacy event, science fair, community celebration, etc.).

Plan a fun theme to generate interest in your event.
- Use *Back to School*, *Harvest Fair*, or a favorite community sport. Carry out the theme with decorations and activities to make the event attractive and fun for all.

Combine important functions to make it convenient for families.
- Use the same event to register students for school, collect necessary forms, sign up for special programs, and complete paperwork for free/reduced price meals.

Hold a community Health Fair or Health Carnival.
- Appeal to a wide range of ages – preschool to seniors – by partnering with other community organizations and agencies to provide health screenings and activities.

Invite a dynamic keynote speaker.
- Feature a local celebrity or honored individual, sports figure, fitness expert, or a health professional (MD, RD, dentist, etc.) for a rally and invite the community.

Put students in the program.
- Parents and grandparents will always come to watch children perform. Include the choir, band, dance line, jump-roping team, JROTC, sports teams, cheerleaders, etc.

Begin publicity early and advertise event widely.
- Use a variety of ways to promote events to different audiences (backpack flyers, church bulletins, electronic signboards, newspapers, radio and TV PSAs, etc).

Add delicious nutrition and fun fitness to the agenda.
- Serve tasty, healthful snacks (work with the Child Nutrition program) and get everyone involved in some active fun (check with PE teacher for activities).

Send useful information home with all attendees.
- Plan for door prizes and encourage exhibitors to provide useful give-away items. Everyone likes FREE stuff, especially practical items such as simple recipes.
Checklist for Successful Wellness Events for Families/Communities

Planning a major event requires significant amounts of lead-time and attention to many details. For a smaller event, planning may only take a few weeks notice and a much shorter checklist. Here are two excellent resources for planning toolkits for major events:

**Texas Extension Nutrition and Physical Activity Fair Planning Guide**
This comprehensive guide is so detailed that it comes in four PDFs. The second file (Appendix) is a 33-page checklist with everything-you-need-to-know for a major health fair event, from the first planning meeting to the evaluation.

**NOTE:** The links in this guide are for Texas resources. Equivalent Mississippi resources are available in most cases from the [Office of Healthy Schools](https://www.msstate.edu/) and/or [Mississippi State University Extension Service](https://extension.msstate.edu/).

**PTO Today: School Family Nights**
The PTO national organization offers three free toolkits (if you provide school information) for *Go Green Nights®*, *Family Reading Night®*, *Family Movie Night®*. While these toolkits do not necessarily have a wellness focus, they can easily be adapted to include nutrition and physical activity.

Any event, large or small, has some very essential items that need to be on your checklist:

**TIMING:**
- Does the planned date/time of your event conflict with any other popular events in your community? If it is planned for the same date/time, is there any way to combine the two events for even greater attendance?
- Is the date/time of your event convenient for the intended audience? Is it at a time of day that makes it easy for families to attend?
- Do you have enough preparation time to organize it and do the necessary publicity?

**PARTNERS:**
- What in-school partners might want to work with you on this event? Child nutrition? Physical education, reading, math, and/or science teachers? PTA/PTO or student groups?
- What community partners might want to work with you on this event? MSU Extension agents? American Heart Association? Local hospital and/or health department? Individual health care providers or groups, like medical auxiliary?

**PUBLICITY:**
- How can you maximize the publicity to promote this event to potential attendees? How will you work with the district public relations office to get the message out?
- How can you maximize coverage of the event in the local media? Who needs a special invitation to attend and cover the event for local newspapers, newsletters, TV, and radio?

**RESOURCES:**
- What materials and information from the Office of Healthy Schools can you use to make your event a big success? Do you need any technical assistance from one of the Office of Healthy Schools staff?
- What useful resources can you send home with families? What information or “freebies” can your in-school and community partners
- What do you need to make your event “sparkle”? What decorations might help make this an event to remember? How can art classes and students help you make it memorable?
Sample Successful Wellness Nights for Families/Communities

Reading Events:
- Family literacy events have become very popular in schools across the country. Reading nights – reading mornings or lunchtimes – are a great to get families into schools and to get children and adults reading together.
- Many literacy events have a theme (hat night, pajama night, extreme reading, etc.), so adding nutrition and physical activity is a natural! Teachers and librarians can find books on eating smart and being active, while you add fun activities for families, like:
  - Build a healthy snack (reading the recipe).
  - Plan a simple supper (reading MyPyramid).
  - Active games (read the instructions before you play).
  - More reading event ideas on Education World

Math Events:
- Like family literacy, math events are also drawing big crowds in schools from coast to coast. Math events help get students excited about math, familiarizes parents with the math curriculum, and encourages families to continue the fun of math at home.
- Themed math-nights are popular – and incredibly easy to integrate with nutrition and physical activity. Just think of all the ways that numbers are involved in shopping and cooking – and in measuring fitness levels. Here are three fun ideas.
  - Investigate the Nutrition Facts on food labels.
  - Multiply and/or divide your favorite recipe.
  - Graph pulse rates and other fitness measurements.
  - More math event ideas on Education World

Science Events:
- Physical activity, nutrition, and other health messages can also be a great fit with science events. Find out what types of science nights or fairs are planned in your district and discuss possible coordinated activities with science teachers and other planners.
- Science and health messages can be combined with other subjects, such as art. For example, classroom nutrition lessons about how calcium builds bones could be combined an art project to make, paint, and display small papier-mâché cows. Other combination ideas include:
  - How does heart rate change during activity and sitting? (Fitness + math)
  - How does a seed grow into a carrot? (Biology + nutrition)
  - How does your body make vitamin D? (Chemistry + nutrition)
  - More science event ideas on Education World

Nutrition-Fitness Events:
- It’s easy to plan a family/community event with a nutrition and fitness focus. Many groups, including your MSU Extension agent, have developed games and activities to engage folks in the fun of wellness. Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge is an excellent example.
- The free, downloadable kit provides step-by-step instructions for both an event and four-week challenges to help students and families eat smarter and move more. An event can be tailored to time available (after-school, evening, or weekends) by using one or more of five stations.
  - Triple Pass and Score with Nutrition!
  - Five Food Groups Search and Rescue
  - Energy In/Energy Out Tag
  - All Foods Fit Relay
  - Training Camp