

School Nutrition: Healthier School Lunches

The Healthiest Schools in America

The USDA has applauded more than a thousand schools for ramping up nutrition and physical activity programs. Here, what five districts are doing to keep kids healthy

By Hollis Templeton **fitbie**

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Image: Allison Strupeck, D300 Supervisor of Communication Services

Community Unit School District 300, Illinois

Unlike many child nutrition advocates, Eric Knutson's background is not in [dietetics](#). A grant specialist and a chief school business official intern for District 300, Knutson spent more than 25 years working as an accounting and finance professional before applying his corporate savvy to work with a social purpose. As the HUSSC project manager for D300, Knutson helped 17 elementary schools in

the Carpentersville, IL, district receive Bronze or Gold certifications, while only 21 elementary schools in the state received HUSSC grants this year.

To win over food service providers, who depend on high participation in the school lunch program to stay in business, Knutson partnered closely with the district's food supplier, Aramark, stressing the importance of a mutual business goal: Increase average daily participation so that more kids are eating **healthier foods**—and more healthy foods are being sold in the cafeteria. The key to Knutson's success with students: understanding the concept of socialization—the idea that kids are more likely accept changes to cafeteria food offerings if they hold beliefs and attitudes that healthy food is good and that eating right is something they want to do.

Rock Star Nutrition

Target the kids, and adults will follow. This has been Knutson's strategy for engaging D300 students, teachers, and school board members in developing and adhering to school wellness policies. His secret weapon: Jill Jayne, RD, "rock star nutritionist" and host of the *Jump with Jill* show. Using \$56,000 that he received from Illinois Nutrition Education and Training Program and HUSSC grants, Knutson booked Jayne for 22 performances in D300 elementary schools and worked with the rock star nutritionist to develop three videos that promoted the HUSSC.

Armed with catchy song lyrics, upbeat **dance moves**, and a hip wardrobe—the same tools that advertisers use to get kids to eat junk food and camp out in front of the television—Jayne encourages students to eat right and exercise. Kids leave *Jump with Jill* assemblies with eight take-away messages: Respect your body; eat breakfast daily; eat vegetables to keep skin, hair, eyes, bones, and muscles healthy; fuel your body with healthy food for sustained energy; exercise frequently; drink water instead of sugary drinks; get enough calcium; and take a second look at media messages geared toward getting you to make unhealthy lifestyle decisions.