

A Children's Poster Contest on Healthy Eating

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Abstract

Objective: To encourage children in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades to learn about good nutrition and display their knowledge in an attractive poster. **Method:** A children's poster contest was conducted through schools in the Washington, DC metro area in conjunction with the 2004 National Health Education Week's campaign, "Healthy Eating – Every Bite Counts!". Posters were judged on a 100 point scale, and six winners were chosen for each grade level. The children with the winning posters received cash prizes and were honored at an awards ceremony at the Society for Public Health Education's (SOPHE) annual meeting. **Results:** Eligible entries were received from 76 students at 14 schools in the Arlington, VA and Washington, DC school districts. Almost all of the posters showed a good knowledge of nutrition by the students. **Conclusion:** National Health Education Week themes that are specific to children should encourage participation among schools, teachers, and parents. Partnerships offer possibilities for dissemination of public health education campaigns. A children's poster contest about healthy eating in schools in the Washington, DC area was successful in gaining 76 entries from 14 schools, and children displayed a high level of knowledge of which foods were healthy for them and a high level of creativity and artistic talent.

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Since 1995, National Health Education Week (NHEW) has been recognized as a federal health observance and is solely sponsored by the National Center for Health Education (NCHE). NHEW is celebrated during the third week of October. Since 1998, SOPHE has partnered with the National Center for Health Education to focus national attention on a major public health problem, provide public education on the issue and improve consumer's understanding of the role of health education in promoting the public's health. Each year a theme is selected for the week, materials and resources related to the theme, and program planning activities are developed, and disseminated to health education professionals and other stakeholders. Past themes have included healthy living, pediatric diabetes, asthma, medicine education, physical activity related to reducing obesity, and healthy eating related to reducing obesity.

A poster contest for children was conducted through schools in the Washington, DC metro area in conjunction with the 2004 National Health Education Week's campaign, "Healthy Eating – Every Bite Counts!". The contest encouraged children in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades to learn about good nutrition and display their knowledge in an attractive poster. Six winners were chosen for each grade, and they were honored with their prizes at the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) annual meeting on November 6, 2004.

The contest was co-sponsored and developed jointly by the Student and New Professional Caucus of SOPHE (SNP-SOPHE) and the National Capital Area chapter of SOPHE (NCA-SOPHE). Financial assistance was provided by Chartered Health Plan, a Washington, DC-based managed health care company for Medicaid beneficiaries receiving Temporary Assistance

for Needy Families (TANF). Educational assistance came from the Dole Food Company.

Method

The contest was open to children in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades in the Washington, DC area. Children were requested to develop a poster on 8-1/2 x 11 paper that depicted the theme of “Healthy Eating – Every Bite Counts!”. The contest was publicized to the schools by contacting the major school district offices in the Washington, DC area approximately 6 weeks before the deadline with a phone call, an official letter, and a flyer that they could distribute to their teachers and students. In addition, participating schools could receive nutrition and educational materials from Dole Foods, including Dole’s “5 A Day Adventures” CD-ROM. The popular “5 A Day Adventures” engages students in fun, action-packed adventures in “5 A Day Land” as they learn about nutrition, physical activity, and the importance of eating 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

In addition to the primary National Health Education Week theme, interested students could develop their own slogans around healthy eating. Some suggestions were given in the letter to the schools, such as:

- Put a Rainbow on Your Plate (Dole 5-A Day Campaign)
- Eat enough fiber to prevent certain kinds of cancers.
- Healthy eating helps you get up and go!
- Healthy eating puts a tiger in your tank
- Fish is a good way to get lean protein

The posters were collected from the students and judged by grade level. Judging was performed individually by members of SNP-SOPHE and NCA-SOPHE. Each poster received at least four scores, and all grade levels were judged separately by the same set of judges. All identifying information such as name of the child and school was removed for judging. The criteria for judging were as follows (Table 1):

Table 1
Judging Criteria for Poster Contest

| Category | Possible Points |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Attracts attention; holds interest | 20 |
| 2. Original | 20 |
| 3. Conveys a clear, favorable health message | 20 |
| 4. Good design, well-planned, easily read | 20 |
| 5. Accurate, factual information | 20 |
| TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS | 100 |

The scores for each poster were averaged to determine the winners. For each grade level, the following prizes were awarded: 1st place (\$100), 2nd place (\$50), 3rd (\$25), 4th – 6th places (Certificate). The winners were invited to attend an awards ceremony in their honor at the SOPHE annual meeting on November 6, 2004 at the Capitol Hilton hotel.

Results

Eligible entries were received from 76 students at 14 schools in the Arlington, VA and Washington, DC school districts. Almost all of the posters showed a good knowledge of nutrition by the students. The posters displayed a variety of themes around healthy eating, and the level of creativity and artistic talent was very high. It is not known whether any of the schools

requested the Dole Foods educational materials. Some of the teachers who gained the participation of their students were art or physical education teachers.

The poster entries were displayed in the main entryway of the national SOPHE conference, and an awards ceremony was held for the winners on November 6, 2004 (see Slideshow 1 [.EXE](#) or [.ZIP](#)). Many of the children enjoyed the ceremony with their family members and/or teachers joining them.

Discussion

It was encouraging to see that almost all of the posters developed by the children displayed a great knowledge of which foods are healthy for them. It is not known how much educational assistance was provided by the teachers. It could be that these students learned about healthy eating in conjunction with this contest, or the students who chose to enter may have already been aware of which foods were healthy for them. It would be interesting in a future project to be able to track the awareness of healthy foods and eating habits of children before and after a similar contest to determine if participation would influence knowledge and/or eating patterns.

The children seemed motivated by the monetary reward and the awards ceremony. They also enjoyed showing off their works of art to their family members and teachers before and after the ceremony.

The schools proved to be a good method of publicizing the contest. However, it is recommended to contact the schools more than six weeks prior to the deadline to allow for more time to reach the most appropriate people in the school districts to help promote the contest.

Summary

National Health Education Week themes that are specific to children should encourage participation among schools, teachers and parents. The partnership between SOPHE, NCHE, SNP-SOPHE, NCA-SOPHE and Charter Health Plan offers possibilities for dissemination of other public health education campaigns. Furthermore, a children's poster contest about healthy eating in schools in the Washington, DC area was successful in gaining 76 entries from 14 schools. Children in 3rd through 5th grades displayed a high level of knowledge of which foods were healthy for them and a high level of creativity and artistic talent. The children with the winning posters received cash prizes and were honored at an awards ceremony in their honor.

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