

New Garden and Nutrition Education Programs

Simply offering healthy options is not enough to motivate children to make healthy choices. Moreover, imposing restrictions rather than providing children with options to make healthy choices has long-term negative implications. With recent estimates of childhood obesity showing that approximately 32 percent of children are overweight or obese, it is clear a program that addresses multiple, obesity-related factors is necessary to successfully target this complex issue.

Central Sierra UCCE will be implementing the [Shaping Healthy Choices Program](#) (SHCP) which is a multi-component, school-based intervention composed of five components: 1) nutrition education and promotion, 2) family and community partnerships, 3) integration of regional agriculture, 4) foods available on the school campus, and 5) school wellness policies.

As part of the program, the UC Cooperative Extension team will provide 1) a standards-based curriculum with interactive classroom nutrition, garden, and physical activity education for fourth-grade students, 2) healthy cooking activities that link agriculture, food preparation and nutrition, 3) experiential nutrition and health-related activities at school events, 4) school garden technical support, 5) local grower and distributor connections to encourage regional sourcing, 6) support for increased fresh produce in the school cafeteria, and 7) the implementation of committees to integrate SHCP program activities into the school wellness initiatives.

Results provide a base for state and national dissemination of a school-based multi-component program to prevent childhood obesity. Preliminary analyses show that children classified as overweight or obese dropped from 56 percent to 38 percent after one year of implementation.