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# Childhood Obesity Prevention: Investing In Schools Makes a Difference



Delaware public schools not only educate nearly 120,000 students, they are among the leading social institutions serving the state's young people. Schools play an important role in influencing children's choices and behavior. With more than a **third** of its children and youth at an unhealthy weight, Delaware, like other states, is looking to schools for help in fighting the obesity crisis (Nemours, 2005). Current estimates put the health care costs associated with obesity in Delaware at \$207 million annually (Finkelstein, Fiebelkorn, Wang, 2004).

Children who are overweight are likely to stay that way, increasing their risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, various cancers, and other chronic diseases as they age. Studies have shown that 80% of children who were overweight at 10 to 15 years of age remained **obese as adults at age 25** (Whitaker, Wright, Pepe, Seidel, Dietz, 1997).

## The Importance of Investing in Healthy Delaware Schools

### Healthy Students are Better Students

- Students who are more physically active tend to have better grades and achieve higher test scores (Grissom, 2005).
- Students who participate in school nutrition programs are less likely to have discipline problems (Keeley, 2004).
- Aerobic fitness, a result of being physically active, is positively associated with cognitive function (Hillman, Castelli, and Buck, 2005).

### Delawareans Support the Campaign Against Obesity

- A majority of parents in Delaware are willing to support policies and programs to promote healthy eating and exercise and reduce obesity, even if it means paying higher state taxes (Nemours, 2006).
- 95% of Delaware parents believe that schools have a role to play in preventing childhood obesity (Nemours, 2006).

### Where could Delaware improve?

- 39% of Delaware's children watch three or more hours of television per day, greater than the national average (Nemours, 2005).
- 71% of Delaware students did not attend daily physical education classes (Nemours, 2005).
- In 2004, the average Delaware youth was physically active for less than 20 minutes per day. The Surgeon General recommends 60 minutes of daily physical activity (Nemours, 2005).
- 65% of kids who live within one mile of school are driven (Nemours, 2005).



*Planting the seeds for better health*

**37% of Delaware's children are overweight or obese.**

**(2006 Delaware Survey of Children's Health)**





# Childhood Obesity Prevention: Inve

## Our Formula for a Healthy Lifestyle: 5-2-1-Almost None

NHPS is taking a leading role to help people understand the causes and health implications of obesity and the best ways to promote healthier lifestyles among children and families.

5-2-1-Almost None is our formula for a healthy lifestyle.

- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.



- Spend no more than two hours per day in front of a screen (TV, video games, recreational computer time).
- Get at least one hour of physical activity per day.
- Drink almost no sugary beverages like soda and sports drinks.

## Progress to Date

Leaders in the fight against childhood obesity like Nemours Health and Prevention Services (NHPS) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, recognize the value of working through schools to help arrest this epidemic. With assistance from NHPS, school districts in Delaware are taking significant strides toward helping Delaware's children make the healthiest choices.

NHPS convened a summer workshop in which 11 school districts (serving 77,628 students) participated. Representatives from four districts shared their physical activity and healthy eating successes with the other participants. All are taking steps toward implementing school wellness policies to create healthier environments for students.

### Beverages for Sale in Schools (Competitive Beverages)

- All vending machines in the Appoquinimink School District (8,000 students) are required to offer water as a beverage option.
- By collaborating with a local dairy and offering non-fat milk in plastic bottles in all high schools and middle schools, the Brandywine School District (7,500 students) saw a significant rise in milk consumption.

### Foods for Sale in Schools (Competitive Foods)

- The Appoquinimink School District now celebrates birthdays with a monthly school-wide celebration, limiting food-focused classroom celebrations.
- Classroom snacks, such as animal crackers, yogurt, carrots and pretzels, may be ordered through the school cafeteria, in an effort to encourage healthier snacking in the Red Clay School District (15,500 students). A comparison of the price of snacks sold in supermarkets with what the cafeteria charges demonstrated that it is more cost effective to purchase snack foods from the school.

### Physical Activity and Physical Education

- Lancashire Elementary School, in the Brandywine School District, matches students with senior citizens as part of the school's Mileage Club. The pairs walk around the track during recess, counting their laps and forming a relationship that they both enjoy. Principal Peter Barry remarked, "It's an excellent way to bridge the younger generation to the older generation in the interest of being active and fit."
- With the goal of increasing daily movement for all elementary students, the Red Clay Consolidated School District created programs such as an after-school fitness club, a healthy heart challenge program, and a recess walking program. Schools have also purchased pedometers and equipment for Body Bingo, and held events such as a 5K run/walk, a family night in the school gym, and a healthy poster contest.

For more information about NHPS and our campaign to *Make Delaware's Children the Healthiest in the Nation*, visit: [www.GrowUpHealthy.org](http://www.GrowUpHealthy.org)

# Planting In Schools Makes a Difference



- CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health), an evidence-based program, is now used in 78 Delaware elementary and middle schools, incorporating physical education, nutrition education, and family participation to make a positive impact on children's health.

## Health and Nutrition Education

- Six elementary schools in the Christina School District have created vegetable gardens to enhance their delivery of nutrition education. Keene Elementary pioneered the school garden project, setting an example for both the district and the state.
- Information about *5-2-1-Almost None*, NHPS' campaign to Make Delaware's Children the Healthiest in the Nation, was distributed to all parents in the Christina School District during their annual back-to-school night. Community members also receive tips for practicing healthy habits in the *5-2-1-Almost None* column in the district's monthly newsletter.

## Staff Wellness

- Staff members in two schools in the Red Clay School District challenged each other in a "Biggest Loser" contest, losing a total of 167 pounds, and setting a healthy example for students.
- The Appoquinimink School District's wellness committee includes teachers, principals, and board of education members, as well as a representative from the human resources department. The committee believes that a commitment to staff wellness will lead to a healthier workforce and increased interest in and dedication to the fight against obesity.

**"We have held ourselves accountable in making healthy lifestyles and... programs part of our responsibility, part of our strategic plan and part of our district goals and objectives."**

**– Kevin Carson, EdD  
Superintendent  
Woodbridge School District**

## Next Steps: Building on Success

Policy makers can help ensure that every school in Delaware supports children in adopting healthy lifestyles, by

- 1** supporting the ability of Delaware school districts to offer opportunities for students to engage in 150 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity per week.
- 2** promoting the adoption of standards that support healthy choices for all food and beverages served or sold on school campuses; and
- 3** encouraging school districts to implement system-wide comprehensive wellness policies that address topics such as health and nutrition education, competitive foods and beverages, childhood nutrition, staff wellness and evaluation.

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