Childhood Obesity and the Role Schools Can Play in Reversing Current Trends

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Health Policy Fellowship 2011

Abstract

The obesity epidemic is having a devastating impact on the youth in America. Since 1980, the percentage of obese children has doubled, and the percentage of obese adolescents aged 12-19 has tripled. Obesity in children has both an immediate and long term impact on both physical and mental health. Studies show that obese kids miss more school and score lower on academic achievement tests than healthy weight kids. The incidence of diabetes in children 10-19 is rising and approximately one-third of young obese children have two or more risk factors for heart disease, the number one cause of death in the US.

Oklahoma currently ranks as the 5th most obese state. Our high school students are the 9th fattest in the country and our adolescents and children are 17th most obese. Oklahoma has the country’s second highest rate of inactivity, and ranks sixth in rates of hypertension and diabetes. The economic impact of obesity is staggering: the estimated cost to Oklahoma is $854 million dollars annually.

To reverse the trend of obesity and poor health behaviors we need a long-term, well-coordinated approach to reach kids where they learn and play. A well designed and implemented school health and exercise program can effectively promote healthy behaviors that can be taken into adulthood. I recommend the Oklahoma State Board of Education enact the CDC’s comprehensive ten-step plan across all public school systems to ensure healthy children and a healthier Oklahoma.