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

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The United States is facing an obesity epidemic. This epidemic is having a devastating impact on youth in America.
Trends in Child and Adolescent Overweight

Note: Overweight is defined as BMI $\geq$ gender- and weight-specific 95th percentile from the 2000 CDC Growth Charts.
Source: National Health Examination Surveys II (ages 6-11) and III (ages 12-17), National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys I, II, III and 1999-2004, NCHS, CDC.
The economic burden of obesity and poor lifestyle is substantial.

The medical cost associated with obesity are estimated to be $100 billion dollars annually.
History and Background

- Oklahoma high school students are the ninth fattest in the country.
- Elementary and middle school students in Oklahoma are the seventeenth most fat in the United States.
- Obese children miss four times as much school than those with healthy weights.
- They also score lower on academic achievement tests.
Both negative and positive health behaviors are established during youth.

Adult behaviors are directly linked to patterns formed as children and adolescents.
History and Background

- Schools are excellent avenues for teaching kids how to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- A large part of daily caloric intake occur during school hours.
- Implementation of school health and exercise programs effectively promotes behavior that can be taken into adulthood.
- Physical activity improves academic achievement scores, classroom concentration, attention, and behavior.
Childhood Obesity and Health Impact

- Incidence of diabetes mellitus is rising; in some communities almost half of pediatric cases are Type II.

- 65% obese 5 to 10 year olds already have risk factors for heart disease.

- Obese children are at greater risk for bone and joint problems.
Childhood Obesity and Health Impact

- Obese children statistically become obese adults.

- Lifestyles resulting in obesity cause nearly 600,000 deaths per year.

- Obesity increases child’s chance for poor self-esteem and discrimination.
School Food Programs and Nutrition

- School food services must comply with USDA’s nutrition regulations for lunch and breakfast programs.
- New recommendations may update these standard to improve school nutrition.
- Many schools offer competitive food or al a carte foods generally high in fat, sugar, salt, and calories.
The sale of unhealthy foods popular among students is a source of revenue for schools.

Such revenue helps to provide funds for areas such as athletic programs, campus improvement, school materials.
Physical Activity in Schools

Physical activity may help improve academic performance (including grades and standardized test scores) in some situations. Increasing or maintaining time dedicated to physical education does not adversely impact academic performance.
Effective school exercise and health programs teach behaviors that can be taken into adulthood.
• CDC has identified 10 strategies to help schools prevent obesity by promoting physical activity and healthy eating.

• CDC and its partners have developed user-friendly tools that help schools effectively implement each of the strategies.
CDC Strategies: Coordinate Health Programs

Strategy 1: Address physical activity and nutrition through a Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP).

Strategy 2: Maintain an active school health council and designate a school health coordinator.

Strategy 3: Assess the school’s health policies and programs and develop a plan for improvement.

Strategy 4: Strengthen the school’s nutrition and physical activity policies.
CDC Strategies

- Parent/Community Involvement
- Health Education
- Physical Education
- Health Services
- Nutrition Services
- Counseling, Psychological, & Social Services
- Health Promotion for Staff
- Healthy School Environment
Strategy 5: Implement a high-quality health promotion program for school staff.

Strategy 6: Implement a high-quality course of study in health education.

Strategy 7: Implement a high-quality course of study in physical education.

Strategy 8: Increase opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.
CDC Strategies: Improve Nutrition

Strategy 9: Implement a quality school meals program.

Strategy 10: Ensure that students have appealing, healthy a la carte choices in foods and beverages offered outside of the USDA school meals program.
Stakeholders

- The Oklahoma State Department of Education
- The Oklahoma Association of School Administrators
- The Oklahoma Teachers Association
- Beverage and Food Companies
- The School Food Service
Recommendation

- The Oklahoma State Board of Education mandate that all public school systems enact the CDC’S comprehensive ten-step plan.
References