

## The Relationship Between Student Health and Learning

- Research clearly shows that nutrition and physical activity are directly linked to academic achievement.
- Children who eat well and are physically active learn better, while poorly nourished and sedentary children tend to have weaker academic performance and score lower on standardized achievement tests.
- Poor nutrition and hunger interfere with cognitive function and are associated with lower academic achievement in underweight, normal weight and overweight children.
- Emerging research suggests that lower academic achievement is associated with being overweight.
- Participation in breakfast programs is associated with increased academic test scores, improved daily attendance, better class participation and reduced tardiness.
- Numerous studies have found that regular physical activity supports better learning. Student fitness levels have been correlated with academic achievement, including improved math, reading and writing scores.
- Research also suggests that decreasing physical education may undermine the goal of better performance, while adding time for physical activity may support improved academic performance.



**Source:** The information above was provided by the *Action Guide for School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*, Connecticut State Department of Education, February 2006, page 4.

## The Impact of Obesity

- Obesity is increasing rapidly in the United States, affecting adults and children and people of all races, ethnicities, and income levels.
- Since 1980, the percentage of overweight children ages 6 to 11 has doubled, and the percentage of overweight adolescents ages 12 to 19 has tripled. Childhood obesity has both immediate and long-term serious health impacts.
- In 2002, 16 percent of 6-19 year-olds were overweight.
- Rates of overweight were higher among Mexican American boys (25.5 percent), non-Hispanic black girls (23.2 percent), and American Indian youth. Non-Hispanic white adolescents from lower-income families are more likely to be overweight than their counterparts from higher income families.
- In some communities almost half of pediatric diabetes cases are type 2 diabetes, which was once believed to affect only adults.
- In one large study, 61% of overweight 5-to10-year-olds already had risk factors for heart disease, and 26% had two or more risk factors for the disease.
- Overweight children have a greater risk of social and psychological problems such as discrimination and poor self-esteem.

## The Impact of Obesity

- Overweight children have a 70% chance of being overweight as adults – facing higher risks for many diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and several types of cancers.
- The costs of treating obesity-related diseases are staggering and rising rapidly: direct health costs rose from \$52 billion in 1995 to \$75 billion in 2003.
- Good eating habits and regular physical activity are critical for maintaining a healthy weight. Unfortunately, less than 25% of adolescents eat enough fruits and vegetables each day. More than a third of students in grades 9-12 do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity.

## The Role of Schools In Preventing Childhood Obesity

Reversing the obesity epidemic requires a long-term, well-coordinated approach to reach young people where they live, learn, and play. Schools have a big part to play. Working with other public, voluntary, and private sector organizations, schools can play a critical role in reshaping social and physical environments and providing information, tools, and practical strategies to help students adopt healthy lifestyles.



- More than 95% percent of young people are enrolled in schools.
- Students have the opportunity to eat a large portion of their daily food intake and to be physically active at school.
- Schools are an ideal setting for teaching young people how to adopt and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.
- Research has shown that well-designed, well-implemented school programs can effectively promote physical activity and healthy eating.
- Emerging research documents the connections between physical activity, good nutrition, physical education and nutrition programs, and academic performance.

### Information adapted from the following sources:

The Role of Schools in Preventing Childhood Obesity, The State Education Standard, National Association of State Boards of Education, December 2004.

Make a Difference at Your School! CDC Resources Can Help You Implement Strategies to Prevent Obesity Among Children and Adolescents, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.