

Action Step Fact Sheet 2005 Children's Agenda



Health:

Reduce childhood obesity and related health issues by increasing public support for physical activity in schools and healthy food choices for all students.

What is the specific concern or issue affecting NH's children?

Obesity, physical inactivity and lack of nutrient density in the diet are risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer. Certain behaviors, which are often established during youth, contribute markedly to future major causes of death, including cardiovascular disease and obesity. Children who are overweight or obese are at an increased risk for developing chronic diseases as adults.¹ Addressing these issues with young people can lay the groundwork for lowering chronic disease rates in the future.

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States and threatens to impact the health and well being of numerous children and adolescents. This is the first generation not expected to outlive their parents. Studies have shown, nationally, 15% of children are overweight or obese.² New Hampshire data/study shows 22% of boys and 17% of girls of school age are overweight and another 20% are at risk for overweight.³ The increase in children who are overweight or obese is attributable to multiple factors including an increase in sedentary lifestyles and intake of high-caloric foods.⁴

Since most children and adolescents are enrolled in schools, schools present a unique opportunity to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Children's health and well-being play a critical role in their ability to come to school ready to learn and in their overall academic achievement.⁵ Schools alone cannot address the nation's most serious health and social problems, but they can serve, as a critical facility for bringing community organizations together to maintain the well being of young people.

Regular physical activity promotes numerous health, social and educational benefits in youth. It can help control weight, improve strength and endurance, reduce stress and improve self-esteem.⁶ Physical activity can increase concentration, reduce disruptive behavior and improve academic achievement.⁷

Proper nutrition is an important building block to a child's ability to learn and their overall health status. Effective nutrition policies promote and reinforce healthy eating habits, create supportive environments, and teach youth the importance of eating right.

What is the Action Step strategy to address the issue?

Support the requirement of daily physical activity and healthy food choices for pupils by:

- ◆ disseminating reports on the current childhood obesity epidemic in NH
- ◆ supporting the targeted public education campaign for regional meetings scheduled monthly from November 2004 through June 2005
- ◆ supporting the adoption of new minimum standards for Physical Education (PE) by the NH Department of Education that do not remove the current minimum standards for PE as is currently under consideration by the Board of the NH Department of Education

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- ◆ supporting legislative efforts currently under consideration, including proposed legislation (Requiring school districts to establish School Age Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committees to develop a school district policy recommending daily physical activity and healthy food choices for pupils to prevent childhood obesity and related problems) and future legislative efforts.
- ◆ building understanding and support from school administrators, teachers, parents and students

How does your proposal meet NH CAN's prioritizing criteria?

- ◆ **How many children in NH are affected?**
Over 250,000 school children attend NH schools.
- ◆ **What is the severity of the impact of the issue and the proposed strategy?**
Obesity rates for NH school children are significantly higher than national standards. Programs focused on increasing physical activity and improving the nutritional values of food intake have proven to be the only effective methods for reducing incidence of obesity.
- ◆ **What is NH CAN's unique ability to create or influence change?**
NH CAN's membership can provide much needed support to bring focus to this issue at a critical time when the Board of the NH Department of Education is considering removing physical education requirements from their minimum standards. The NH CAN membership worked with the Healthy Schools Coalition during the last legislative session to see HB1352 passed that required all schools to recommend daily physical activity. This action step builds off that success. In 2005, NH CAN partners are encouraged to:
 - attend public hearings to advocate for daily physical activity and healthy food choices in schools to address childhood obesity.
 - support the public education campaign by encouraging their constituents to attend regional meetings.
 - disseminate information contained in a Coalition press release/press kit in support of daily physical activity and healthy food choices as a component of a healthy school environment to address childhood obesity.
 - use Alerts and weekly Updates to call members to action and to keep members informed about this issue.
 - participate in a letter writing campaign led by the Coalition to legislators, SBE, local school boards, superintendents to promote/support daily physical activity and healthy food choices to address epidemic of childhood obesity.

What groups, organizations and individuals are/will be involved?

The NH Healthy Schools Coalition. The Coalition is the state affiliate of Action for Healthy Kids, the national childhood obesity initiative chaired by former Surgeon General, David Satcher, MD. Our purpose is to address the epidemic of childhood obesity by making changes in the school environment to increase the opportunities for physical activity, healthy food choices and health education as outlined in the Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, 2001.

Action Step Collaborators:

Key organizations and decision-makers from around the state participate in the NH Healthy Schools Coalition and will support this action step. This includes:

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- ★ NH Dept. of Health and Human Services and NH Dept. of Education
- ★ New Hampshire Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (NHAHPERD)
- ★ New England Food and Dairy Council
- ★ American Heart Association
- ★ American Cancer Society
- ★ American Association of Pediatrics
- ★ NH Dental Society
- ★ Manchester Health Department, WIC Nutrition Program, the 5 A Day Program
- ★ American Dietetic Association
- ★ Foundation for Healthy Communities
- ★ UNH Cooperative Extension
- ★ NH Food Service Association
- ★ Northern and Southern Area Health Education Centers

REFERENCES:

¹ Must A, Spadano J, Coakley E, Field A, Colditz G, and Dietz W. The disease burden associated with overweight and obesity. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 282(16). October 1999, pp1523-1529

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, School Health Program Guidelines: Nutrition and the Health of Young People. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/guidelines/nufact.htm>.

³ Martin, T. Helping New Hampshire's Children Become Their Physical Best, Anthem Healthcare Series, June 2004.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, The Surgeon General's Call To Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General; 2001.

⁵ National Governors Association. Improving Academic Performance by Meeting Student Health Needs. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, October 2000.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996.

⁷ National Governors Association. Improving Academic Performance by Meeting Student Health Needs. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, October 2000.