



## **Support legislation and State rule-making changes to reduce the risks of childhood obesity and measure our progress**

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### **Issue Overview**

The increasing problem of childhood obesity is a risk factor that can lead to a wide range of chronic diseases (e.g., Type 2 diabetes, atherosclerosis, depression, high blood pressure, skeletal disorders, elevated cholesterol etc.). The risks may increase as an overweight or obese child grows older. There are also psychological and emotional problems that may be associated with overweight/obesity.

A statewide sample of medical charts by the FHC of 1,453 children in 2005 documented that one out of three children (32.8%) were overweight or obese. This is equal to *every child* in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Merrimack, Cheshire, Belknap, Grafton, Carroll and Coos counties (53,000+ children) being overweight or obese. Among children with private insurance 30% were overweight or obese compared to 37% of children in the Healthy Kids Program (Gold and Silver). Obese children are about three times more costly to care for and treat than the average insured child. Children may not learn and achieve their full potential if healthy eating and active living are not readily available where they live, learn and play.

### **Proposed Solution**

We propose new legislation that Body Mass Index (BMI) be assessed every year in school by a qualified person and that this be enforced through the school accreditation process. This information will be collected at the State level, for surveillance measurement at grades 1, 4, 7 and 10, providing anonymity of each child. Guidance should be provided to school staff to ensure that BMI is taken in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

We recommend that the NH Board of Education use its school approval rulemaking authority by October 2010 to support the sale and distribution of single serving size, nutrient dense foods in all schools during the school day ('bell-to-bell'). Nutrition standards should address the different school grade levels (elementary, middle & high school) for all food and beverages available for sale to students. We recommend that schools follow a national nutrition guideline such as the Institute of Medicine, American Heart Association-Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, or National Dairy Council Guidelines for foods sold in schools other than those regulated by the US Department of Agriculture school meals program.

### **Call to Action**

The FHC staffed the Legislative Commission to Prevent Childhood Obesity (HB 1422) and will continue to work with its partners to advocate for implementation of the Commission's proposed solutions. Partners include: NH Pediatric Society, NH Hospital Association, American Heart Association-NH, NH Public Health Association and UNH Cooperative Extension. Also, the FHC is coordinating the statewide Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Initiative and will seek to expand support for these solutions.