

## **ABC's and A Serving of Peas: Program Teaches Children Healthy Eating Habits and Reading Skills**

### ***Issue***

Only one in five children eats five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, as recommended by the National Cancer Institute. American children spend more time watching television, videotapes and playing video games than doing anything else except sleeping. Is it any wonder that approximately one in five children in South Carolina are now overweight?

In South Carolina, the percentage of low-income children between 2 and 5 years of old that are overweight or at-risk of becoming overweight has increased to 26 percent. As a result, physicians are seeing more children with hypertension, elevated cholesterol levels and Type II Diabetes.

### ***Intervention***

SC DHEC approached the Edgefield County First Steps director about partnering together to bring Color Me Healthy (a physical and nutritional activity program for four-five year olds) to local child care providers. When reviewing the materials, the First Steps director commented on how easily the curriculum could be used to promote literacy as well as health. In Edgefield County, approximately 30.4 percent were assessed as less than "consistently demonstrating" readiness for kindergarten in 2004.

Thanks to staff time and funds from the Preventive Health/Health Services Block Grant, a Color Me Healthy Training was offered on September 16, 2006. Five centers participated in the training and received the Color Me Healthy Curriculum. Providers were surveyed to gather information about the reward systems used in their center. Interestingly, many providers felt they were offering "better" choices by giving small packages of marshmallows or Gummy bears as a treat. All the providers acknowledged having parties. The items parents were requested to bring included: cupcakes, cookies, potato chips, juice, cake and brownies. When asked if the sign up sheet ever requested fruit or vegetables, the response was "No, that's too expensive. They won't bring it." However, the providers admitted the parents had never been asked.

### ***Impact***

The Edgefield County First Steps Director participated in the training and encouraged all of the centers to use it on a regular basis. As a thank you to providers for attending the training, First Steps provided each center 17 copies of books that were outlined in the Color Me Healthy lessons. The generous donation of books by Edgefield County First Steps will continue to promote literacy while reinforcing the message of healthy living. Four centers are using the curriculum on a regular basis. Their activities include:

- Color of the week. Every Friday, parents are asked to bring a fruit or vegetable in the appropriate color. The response from parents has been positive.
- One center is preparing a recipe from the newsletter each month for the kids to sample.
- One center highlights a color each month. A fruit or vegetable of that color is offered at every lunch.

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