

New Law Jumpstarts Healthy Habits Among S.C. Children

Issue:

For the first time in modern history, children may not live as long as their parents. Because our youngsters now spend an increasing amount of time plopped in front of television and video game screens, these sedentary activities could put their health in jeopardy. Twenty-six percent of South Carolina's low-income children between 2 and 5 years old are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Type 2 Diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in overweight children, and South Carolina's obesity-related medical costs **have** already topped \$1 billion (2003). Physical activity and healthy eating are the key components in keeping our kids healthy, and schools are **critical** venues to promote healthy lifestyles at an early age.

Intervention:

Members of the SC Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, and the SC State Department of Education attacked this problem by working with state lawmakers to pass the Student Health and Fitness Act of 2005.

Rep. Bobby Harrell of Charleston introduced the bill, which increases the amount of physical activity kindergartners through fifth graders get in physical education classes and improves healthy food choices at school.

Some of the act's components are:

- Increasing the amount of PE instruction kindergartners through fifth-graders must receive. By 2008-09, students will receive 90 minutes weekly of physical education and 60 minutes of additional physical activity time for a total of 150 minutes per week;
- Measuring effectiveness of the physical education and health education programs in all public schools;
- Providing for a PE Activity Director to coordinate all school physical activity;
- Providing certain nutritional standards for elementary schools;
- Providing 20 minutes a day for children to eat lunch once served;
- Establishing district- and elementary school-level coordinated school health advisory councils; and
- Providing for a weekly nutrition component for the health curriculum.

Impact:

The act will:

- Increase the students' levels of physical activity and increase their healthy food choices.
- Increase accountability in areas of PE and health education. Reports measuring the effectiveness of meeting the law's requirements will be shared with superintendents, principals, school administrators and parents.
- Information from the physical education and health education program assessments will be used to provide professional development to improve these programs in schools.
- Make children aware of benefits gained from physical activity and healthy food choices.
- Improve the overall health of our children, therefore creating healthier adults in the long run.

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