

# Alabama State Obesity Task Force's



## Approaches to Childhood Obesity

October 2008

## Strategies Used in Alabama to Address Childhood Obesity

To address obesity from a state perspective, in May of 2003, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) in conjunction with The University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB) convened a **State Obesity Task Force (OTF)**. More than 90 professionals statewide worked together to develop the State Strategic Plan for addressing obesity in Alabama, which was published in 2004. The State Strategic Plan addresses obesity throughout the life cycle.

Since publication of the plan, the individuals on the task force, as well as many other individuals throughout the state, continue to meet quarterly for implementation purposes.

This publication is a brief overview of approaches taken by the State Obesity Task Force and partners; it is not a comprehensive list of all initiatives, strategies, or programs used in Alabama to address childhood obesity. To view the plan, go to <http://www.adph.org/obesity>, or contact Miriam Gaines, Nutrition and Physical Activity Director (NPA), at [mqaines@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mqaines@adph.state.al.us).

## School Based Approaches:

In 2004, the State Superintendent of Education convened a **Student Health Task Force** to develop school-based recommendations to address healthy foods in schools, including vending and fundraising and physical education. The State Obesity Task Force had members on this task force as well. The recommendations which were passed by the State Board of Education in 2004 and revised in 2006 are ranked as some of the best in the nation in supporting the health of children.

The recommendations specified that schools should provide healthy food choices and address physical education options. Nutrition changes targeted foods served



through the cafeteria, in vending machines, and school stores; fundraising policies should utilize healthy foods or nonfood items; and teachers should use nonfood items as rewards for classroom performance in place of candy. School environment approaches included the recommendation to complete an assessment, such as The School Health Index, to identify potential areas for needed change. Physical activity recommendations included evaluating all physical education (PE) waivers; having PE taught by certified PE teachers in all grades; promoting lifetime, enjoyable activities; reviewing the quality of the classes taught; and limiting the students in

each class to a specified ratio of students to teachers. To view the state guidelines, see <http://www.alsde.edu/general/STUDENTHEALTHTASKFORCEJBMRECOMMENDATIONS.ppt>.

To help explain these recommendations to teachers and parents, ADPH staff partnered with the **Alabama Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics and UAB**. Through this partnership, a PowerPoint presentation, "Doc to School" was developed that reviewed childhood obesity in Alabama and how the school recommendations would have a positive impact. The presentation was provided to volunteer physicians who presented it to school staff, teachers, and administrators. More than 40 presentations were delivered. For more information contact Linda P. Lee, ([llee@aap.net](mailto:llee@aap.net)) Executive Director, Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics.

**Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK)** is a national partnership that addresses childhood obesity through changes in schools. AFHK works to improve children's nutrition choices, increase physical activity levels, and improve the school's environment, which will in turn improve the student's readiness to learn. The Alabama AFHK team developed healthy school guidelines, and provided each public school with handouts specific to healthy vending, healthy school stores, wellness policies, physical activity goals, and healthy parties. During the 2007-2008 school year, using an AFHK mini-grant, the Alabama team provided ten physical education teachers from low income schools with supplemental FitnessGram testing equipment to support the program. Regional teams are available for local support. For more information, contact Molly Pettyjohn at [mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us) or visit



<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>. (Go to 'team member center' and click on Alabama for state specific information.)

The **Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries** provides Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC). This program promotes Ag literacy for students in all grade levels k-12. The Department is an active partner with the State Department of



Education, works with schools to implement school gardens and has supported several childhood obesity initiatives, such as Kid Fit. (See below)

**Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL)** is a comprehensive physical education curriculum that incorporates nutrition information and uses heart rate monitors to teach children about healthy heart rate zones. After six months of implementation in schools statewide, results show significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness; decreases in Body Mass Index (BMIs) in children who are classified as overweight or obese; and improvements in nutrition behaviors, such as increased intake of fruits and vegetables and calcium rich foods. This project has been supported by private donations, Greater Birmingham Foundation, Blue Cross of Alabama, and the Alabama Power Foundation. Nutrition and Physical Activity (NPA) staff from ADPH has been trained on this program. For more information contact HEAL Inc., PO Box 660827 Birmingham, AL 35266, and email: [infor@healalabama.org](mailto:infor@healalabama.org).



**KidCheck** is an initiative from Governor Riley's Alabama Rural Action Commission (ARAC). It builds partnership between schools, area College of Nursing programs and organizations from across the state to bring free health care screening to school children in rural areas of Alabama. This is supported by the Alabama Power



Foundation and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Child Caring Foundation. For more information go to <http://www.alabamaruralaction.com/content.php?pg=162>.



The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, SDOE, the Alabama Power Company Foundation, and NPA worked together with a private businessman, Skip Smithwick, to develop an awareness program called **Kidfit**. Kidfit is designed to help school age children become healthier by making better decisions about fitness and nutrition. NPA staff reviewed the program for content validity. DVDs containing a brochure with information for students and their parents were provided to all children in kindergarten through the fifth grade in Alabama public schools. For more information, go to <http://www.kidfitamerica.com/index.htm>.

**Nutraliens** are space characters that teach nutrition education lessons. The Nutralien materials for classroom teachers are sponsored by Barber's Dairies. For more information visit, <http://www.barbersdairy.com/justforkids.html>.



**Wellness, Academics and You (WAY)** is a Institute for America's Health curriculum for classroom teachers that embeds physical activity and nutrition in teacher's lesson plans. Through support from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, teachers are provided with curriculum materials and one day training. For more information, contact Natalie Steed at [Natalie@healthy-america.org](mailto:Natalie@healthy-america.org) or visit <http://www.healthy-america.org/>.

To date, the largest study of obesity in Alabama school children was undertaken by the **Oral Health Branch (Dental)** of ADPH in collaboration with the Data Subcommittee of the OTF and NPA. In 2006-2007, 7190 third grade children from all nine dental districts in Alabama participated in a height and weight screening. This study found 17.9 percent were overweight and 24.6 percent were obese in third graders. When analyzed by gender and race/ethnicity, Hispanic males, Hispanic females, and black females had the highest rates of overweight and obesity. Parental incomes of the students were not accessed, but the participation rates for free and reduced price meals for the overall school were utilized. In schools where the percentage of students receiving free or reduced price meals was greater or equal to 50 percent, the percentages of students who were classified as overweight or obese were 17.9 percent and 26.0 percent respectively. The rates of overweight (17.9 percent) and obesity (23.1 percent) were slightly lower in schools where the percentage of students receiving free or reduced meals was less than 50 percent. For more information contact Linda Knol, PhD, University of Alabama, at [lnol@ches.ua.edu](mailto:lnol@ches.ua.edu).

The **Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (ASAHPERD)** promotes and supports healthy lifestyles of Alabama citizens by providing professional development opportunities for physical activity, physical education and health promotion professionals and publishing relevant research. ASAHPERD has been instrumental in providing the needed education for the physical activity component needed in school settings. They have also provided training on the School Health Index (SHI), a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tool used as a self-assessment and planning guide that enables schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their health promotion policies and programs. ASAHPERD collaborates with other groups on obesity and disease prevention strategies for the betterment of the State of Alabama. For more information, contact Donna Hester, Executive Director, at [www.asahperd.org](http://www.asahperd.org).



## After School Program Based Approaches:

**Healthy Weight Initiative** is a partnership between the NPA and the State Department of Education's Extended Day/Extended Year program. The Healthy Weight Initiative serves as a resource of nutrition and physical activity information for funded after-school programs throughout the state. A website and quarterly newsletter is offered to the after school programs to keep them abreast of the latest information and activities targeting child health issues. In-service trainings for after school program teachers, a yearly statewide conference on nutrition and physical activity issues, e-mail updates, website, and quarterly newsletter containing updates and resource information for grantees are all provided by NPA. In three years, the HWI partnership and NPA staff have conducted specific trainings for fourteen after school sites. Three statewide conferences for the HWI have been held since 2005 and the number of attendees increases each year. The July 2008 workshop, "Turn Off, Tune Out and Jump In" was held in Clanton, Alabama. Nutrition and physical activity materials are mailed to the after school sites on a routine basis to promote various campaigns such as National Nutrition Month, Fruit and Vegetable Month, TV Turn off Week, Go Red Campaign, and Family Meal Night. For more information, visit [www.adph.org/nutrition](http://www.adph.org/nutrition) and click on Healthy Weight Initiative.

ADPH was selected as one of the 14 original intensive sites in the nation for the We Can! Program (*Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition*). This program, developed by the National Institutes of Health, is an obesity campaign targeting children between the ages of 8-13, their parents, and the community. The HWI partnership utilizes the We Can! program. The **CATCH Kids Club (CKC)** curriculum is one component of the We Can! program. Pre and post tests were administered as part of



CKC. The evaluation completed at Clark Elementary in Selma shows statistically significant increases in healthy eating attitudes and decreases in screen time. By the completion of the CKC curriculum youth had stronger intentions to limit intake of high-fat

and energy-dense foods by making such choices as frozen yogurt instead of ice cream. They had also decreased their weekend video and computer game playing. Evaluations from other sites are being analyzed. For more information, contact Molly Pettyjohn at [mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us) or visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/whats-we-can/alabama.htm>.



The **Joint Obesity Project** is an effort to work with after school programs already in the Healthy Weigh Initiative through using the CATCH Kids curriculum and by making an environmental change at the site. Environmental changes may include gardens, improved playgrounds, and/or revised snack patterns. After school leaders are collecting heights and weights of the children enrolled and will reweigh and measure the children at the end of the school year, after the intervention is complete. The partners include The Council on Prevention of Disease and Medical Care of the State Committee of Public Health, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Division, STEPS for a Healthier Alabama, Montgomery Area Wellness Coalition and the Department of Agriculture and Industries. For more information, contact Molly Pettyjohn at [mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us).



A new partnership between the NPA and the **Black Entertainment Television (BET)** Foundation is in the early stages of development. NPA staff will work through the Healthy Weight Initiative to support the BET Foundation Summer Camp for Girls to promote healthy lifestyles in young girls and their families. NPA staff will assist with recruitment from after school programs in Alabama and provide technical assistance in disseminating the appropriate nutrition information. The BET Foundation will reserve a specified number of spots for Alabama girls to attend the camp at no charge. For more information, contact Molly Pettyjohn at [mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us](mailto:mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us) .



## Community and Family Based Approaches:

The **Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources** invites you to "Step Outside<sup>®</sup>." They sponsor a series of hands-on days that include children's fishing lessons, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program for women 18 and older; youth dove and deer hunts, as well as walking trails for beautiful fall foliage. A special middle school program is the **Alabama's National Archery in the School's Program**, where children learn archery skills. For more information visit <http://www.outdooralabama.com/programs/>.

The **Alabama Sports Festival** is a statewide program that strives to instill in participants the importance of academic excellent while providing opportunities to be physically active and live healthy lifestyles. Each year, over 10,000 people are involved. Programs include public housing, tobacco use prevention, and walking. NPA staff works with the Alabama Sports Festival to provide nutrition information, as possible. For more information, contact Marc Ricker at (800) 467-0422 or visit <http://www.alagames.com>.

The **Alabama State Alliance of YMCAs** developed and implemented a statewide youth obesity initiative with funds from the Alabama State Department of Education. Participating YMCAs include Atmore, Birmingham, Brewton, Calhoun County, Chilton County, Dearborn (Mobile), Enterprise, Greenville, Huntsville, Legacy (Bessemer), Monroeville, Montgomery, Prattville, Selma - Dallas County, South Alabama, Tuscaloosa County, and the YMCA of the Shoals (Florence). The YMCA State Youth Obesity Task Force worked with medical professionals, physiologists and nutritionists to formulate a clear consistent message. The healthy message initiative, patterned after Maine's success, is "Y 5210": A Campaign to End Youth Obesity in Alabama. The healthy lifestyle components include 5 fruits or vegetables daily; 2 hours or less of screen time daily; 1 hour or more of vigorous exercise; and to consume 0 sugary drinks. The message is directed to elementary and middle school children. Materials and training programs have been provided to parents, educators, and child care staff. In addition, the Coordinated Approach to Child Health curriculum, known as the CATCH Program, curriculum was selected to use in the YMCA after school programs. For more information visit [www.alyouthobesity.org](http://www.alyouthobesity.org).

**BodyWorks** is a program for mothers and daughters administered through the ADPH, Office of Women's Health. The BodyWorks program encourages the development of healthy girls (ages nine through 15) and strong women, as it focuses on parents as role models. The program provides hands-on tools to make small, specific behavior changes to prevent obesity and help maintain a healthy weight. A train-the-trainer model is used to distribute the tool kit through community-based organizations, state health agencies, nonprofit organizations, health clinics, hospitals, and health care systems. Seventy-three (73) providers and community representatives from around the state have been trained and are conducting sessions throughout Alabama. For more information contact Jessica Hardy at [jhardy@adph.state.al.us](mailto:jhardy@adph.state.al.us)

A new group in Alabama is the **Fresh Air Families**. The purpose of this group is to get families to go outside together for no cost fun activities. They may be camping one weekend or bird watching the next. Different activities are scheduled across the state. For more information contact Verna Gates at <http://www.freshairfamily.org/>.



**Steps to a Healthier Alabama (STEPS)**, an initiative from the Bureau of Health Promotion and Information, is in the last year of a five year funding cycle from The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The STEPS initiative promotes programs that encourage small behavior change to reduce the burden of obesity, diabetes, and asthma. Physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use are targeted through worksite, community, and school based programming in the seven (7) central Alabama counties participating in STEPS. For more information, contact Heidi Hataway at

[hhataway@adph.state.al.us](mailto:hhataway@adph.state.al.us) or visit <http://www.adph.org/steps>.

The **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** nutrition program administered through ADPH addresses childhood obesity for children age two through five. The program encourages breastfeeding, healthy eating patterns, and increased physical activity. Of the 120,000 persons served monthly, over 58,000 children and 34,000 infants are reached. For more information about the Alabama WIC program, contact Carolyn Battle at [carolynbattle@adph.state.al.us](mailto:carolynbattle@adph.state.al.us)

## Medical Based Approaches:

The Children's Hospital in Birmingham runs a **Children's Weight Management Center** for significantly obese children from throughout the state. But, unfortunately, the wait for appointments is now approaching 6 mos. In most cases, treatment for childhood obesity is not covered by insurance and many families do not have the resources to pay for services out of pocket. For more information contact Heather Austin at [heather.austin@chsys.org](mailto:heather.austin@chsys.org).

## County Specific:

**Jefferson County Childhood Obesity Task Force (JCCOTF)** is a citizen-led working group entrusted by the Jefferson County Department of Health to lead and coordinate efforts addressing childhood obesity in Jefferson County, AL. The group includes a variety of partners and organizations in Birmingham including the Jefferson County Department of Health, YMCA, Jones Valley Urban Farm (JVUF), Children's Hospital, Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners, United Way and many others. The blueprint developed by Jefferson County Department of Health entitled "Road Map To Health" is used for an implementation tool for the Task Force. A community food assessment in the East Lake neighborhood is being completed through the partnership with the Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners. For more information visit <http://www.gbcbf.org>. In preparing for the findings, discussions are centering on community gardens, a mobile farmer's market, and various educational programs.



Support from the President of Birmingham's City Council has been important in expanding the process as a model to follow throughout Jefferson County. JCCOTF members work with the Jones Valley Urban Farm and the *Seed 2 Plate* program. They provide field trips to JVUF provide farming,

nutrition, and cooking lessons to children in grades K-8 in the Birmingham area. School children have increased their knowledge of the food system, growing and preparing their own food, and choosing to eat healthier foods since taking part in the program. Visit [www.jvuf.org](http://www.jvuf.org) for more information. For more information about the Jefferson County Childhood Obesity Task Force contact Bree Garrett at [www.jvuf.org](http://www.jvuf.org).



The **Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners (GBCFP)** work to promote access for all community residents to a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community, self reliance and social justice. The goals are to support the development and enhancement of sustainable, community-based strategies to improve access to and use of healthful nutritious food (particularly in low-income areas); network and facilitate community partnership and activities; promote implementation of policies and programs that support sustainable and just community food systems; be a resource for community residents and groups in food systems work; and to support local community food efforts. In sponsoring the *Food Summit 2008*, groups were able to share information on efforts around the state and region to expand Alabama's food access with ways to improve Jefferson County's current food supply system being explored. The long term goal is to increase the access of fresh, nutritious, affordable food to all children and their families. The groups included, but were not limited to, the YMCA Youth Center in Birmingham, farmers and farm group leaders, neighborhood presidents, community activists, religious leaders, nonprofit advocates, media, and county extension agents. This information will be compiled to provide advocacy around creating healthy living environments and creating policy tools. For more information on the BGCFP contact Burgin Fowlkes at [burginfowlkes@bellsouth.net](mailto:burginfowlkes@bellsouth.net).

