

The Medical Minute: Parents and schools can team up to beat obesity

August 25 2010, By Donna Kephart

With the launch of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign this past February, now more than ever schools are being placed at the forefront of addressing the childhood obesity epidemic. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in three children is considered obese or overweight, and the percentage of children who are overweight has tripled in the past 30 years.

It's no surprise that healthy students make better students -- research indicates that students who eat well and engage in regular physical active are more attentive, ready to learn and better able to take advantage of educational opportunities.

Back-to-school time is the perfect time to find out how your child's [school](#) might be encouraging kids to eat right and be active every day -- and to learn how you can help.

This school year, 830 schools throughout the commonwealth have committed to providing a healthy school environment to the students they serve through the nrgBalance Zone campaign, led by the Center for Nutrition and Activity Promotion at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital. By promoting nutrition and physical activity throughout the school year, these public and private schools (grades K-12) are helping youth establish good health habits for life. This year, parents and other caregivers are being encouraged to get involved so the health lessons children are learning at school can be supported at home as well.

The annual nrgBalance Zone campaign assists school health leaders with wellness policy implementation by providing school personnel with free programs, resources, outreach opportunities and professional development training. The goal is to help foster environments that support children eating well and being physically active.

The center leads fun, one-day events promoting apples in October, green vegetables in March, and outdoor play in April. It also provides schools with lessons and activities around walking and pedestrian safety, outdoor recreation, and nutrition education. To date, the campaign has reached nearly 2 million Pennsylvania youth.

Through the center's website, www.nrgbalance.org/, schools have access to free, online health education materials -- fact sheets, goal setting forms, newsletter inserts -- that can be used to educate parents on the importance of eating well and being physically active and tips to get started at home.

Also on the website, parents and caregivers can access information on how to eat healthier, including meal/snack recipes, tips for dining out, meal planners, grocery shopping lists and suggestions for making family time active time.

To find out if a school near you is participating in the nrgBalance Zone campaign, visit www.nrgbalance.org/schools and search by county.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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