

New program hopes to minimize obesity risks among elementary school students

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Credit: Flickr user USDAgov

Teachers are the secret weapon in a new program designed to fight childhood obesity.

The program – developed by FIU's Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work (RSCPHSW) and College of Education, and funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture – will allow researchers to train [teachers](#) to model healthy behaviors that include increasing fruit and vegetable intake, engaging in [physical activity](#) and reducing sugary beverage consumption.

[One out of three school-aged children](#) in the United States is overweight or obese. This increases their risk for developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer and, ultimately, premature death. Sixty-seven percent of Miami-Dade County adults are either overweight or obese.

As part of the program, veteran teachers serve as mentors for future teachers and together they work to implement lessons in the classroom to encourage children to eat right and exercise.

"Teachers play a key role in the development of children's nutrition and physical activity behaviors," said Catherine Coccia, an assistant professor of dietetics and nutrition at RSCPHSW. "We are excited about working with future teachers to help them promote healthy behaviors in the classroom."

Coccia will lead the team, made up of Dietetics and Nutrition faculty Kathryn Brogan Hartlieb, Adriana Campa and Fatma G. Huffman, along with Gwyn Senokossoff, a professor in the College of Education's Department of Teaching and Learning.

"A high number of FIU-trained teachers remain in the area and thus provide many interactions that impact the health of children living in southeast Florida," Brogan Hartlieb said.

The program will run through February 2017, during which the researchers will develop and implement a pilot study to help determine if the program design is effective. If the initiative is successful, they hope to expand their program to multiple schools and classrooms.

Provided by Florida International University

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