

North Carolina

Taking Coordinated School Health Programs Statewide

Public Health Problem

An estimated 27% of North Carolina's high school students are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight, less than 20% eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, and less than 50% attend physical education classes at least once a week, according to 2003 state data.

Program Example

The North Carolina Healthy Schools Initiative was formed by the Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Health and Human Services to improve the health of all North Carolina young people by addressing overweight, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes through school health programs. Working closely with the state Board of Education, the initiative has enacted the Healthy Active Children policy, requiring every school district in the state to establish and maintain a school health advisory council and to carry out action plans that incorporate CDC's model of coordinated school health. The policy, passed by the state Board of Education in 2003, also ensures that appropriate amounts of physical activity and recess will be provided for all students and that recess cannot be taken away from students as a punishment. North Carolina Healthy Schools has also played a key role in developing and launching individual diabetes care plans for all students with diabetes enrolled in state schools. The initiative is now developing nutrition standards for all school foods, including food served in school cafeterias and at school fundraisers. In addition, the state Board of Education recently renamed one of its strategic priorities to "Healthy Students in Safe, Orderly, and Caring Schools." This change represents a shift in the board's attention and renewed recognition that North Carolina students need schools to support their efforts to be healthier.

Implications and Impact

The passage of the Healthy Active Children policy in North Carolina underscores the importance of coordinated school health programs in addressing and reducing the prevalence of health risk behaviors among young people. North Carolina can now serve as a model for other states that want to launch statewide school health programs.

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