

Ossining School District Embraces Wellness

Issue

Nationally, the prevalence of overweight among children aged 6-11 more than doubled in the past 20 years while the rate among adolescents aged 12-19 more than tripled. Among 2-19 year olds, 33.6% are overweight or at risk for overweight. 34% of Westchester County students (ages 4-10) that participated in a Body Mass Index screening project were overweight or at risk for overweight. Overweight children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high insulin levels. They are also more likely to become overweight adults at increased risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers. Healthy lifestyles can lower the risk of overweight and related diseases.

Research shows that school programs can effectively encourage physical activity, healthy eating, and reductions in television viewing time. Emerging research documents the connections between physical activity, good nutrition, physical education and nutrition programs, and academic performance.

Intervention

Ossining Union Free School District (UFSD), a Westchester County district with six schools and approximately 4,200 students, actively promotes wellness for their students.

In October 2003, the Westchester County Department of Health met with Brookside School's newly formed PTA wellness committee to discuss promoting wellness to 2nd and 3rd graders. Fit Kids was developed and kicked-off in January 2004 with a press conference and visit to the school by Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano.

Brookside School designated ten "Wellness Wednesdays" in 2004, which included: wellness messages announced over the PA system; special events reinforcing the health messages; and materials sent home for parents. Fit Kids expanded to the remaining Ossining elementary schools in September 2004, and Anne Dorner Middle School (AMD) and Ossining High School (OHS) joined in 2005. Claremont School developed a walking program for its 4th and 5th graders. AMD and OHS built fitness centers.

Impact

Since 2004, Ossining UFSD:

- Set-up a district wellness committee;
- Completed the CDC's School Health Index (SHI) needs assessment and developed school action plans;
- Developed a comprehensive wellness policy;
- Allocated \$10,000 per year to support the wellness program;
- Negotiated the food service contract in June 2006 based on the wellness policy, vastly improving school lunch menus.
- Participated in Westchester County Executive's Mayor's and Supervisor's Challenge with a community walk to school event;
- Was awarded the New York State School Health Alliance's Healthy Stars silver award in June 2007 for promoting school health;
- Tied for first place in the New York State Education Department 2006-07 Best Practices Awards in the "Promoting Healthy Choices/Nutrition Education" category.



Other successes include:

- School lunch menus in Ossining are now in accordance with the wellness policy;
- Beverage choices are limited to nonfat/low-fat milk, 100% fruit juice and water;
- Fresh fruit and whole grains are served daily;
- Zero trans fats are used and appealing low-fat options are available for meals and a la carte offerings;
- Menus have a new look and include "food facts" and designation of healthy choices; and
- Students have more opportunities to be physically active and the initiative has gained support from parents and the entire community.

Importance of Impact

A healthier school environment can encourage Ossining students to develop healthy lifestyles that will have a positive effect on their health and academic performance, and last a lifetime.

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NYS Healthy Heart Program