

FCS and Youth Programming

Texans are concerned about preparing youth for the challenges of the 21st Century. Family and Consumer Sciences faculty with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are working to provide high-quality programs that address the needs of Texas youth and their families. Priority areas for Family and Consumer Sciences in youth programming include improving the health, nutrition, and financial literacy of Texas youth.

Relevance

- Nationally, 19 percent of children ages 6 to 11 years are obese (95th percentile for body mass index [BMI] by age/sex).
- In Texas, 23 percent of fourth-grade children are obese (95th percentile for BMI by age/sex).
- Texas ranks 6th as the state with the highest childhood overweight rates.
- Childhood obesity is associated with increased risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, and adult overweight/obesity.
- Only 27 percent of high school students get regular, moderate exercise.
- The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that nearly 23.9 percent of Texas youth live in poverty, compared to the national average of 18.3 percent.
- The percentage of obese students in Texas is higher among minority populations.
- In the 2008 *Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy's* biennial national survey, high school seniors correctly answered only 48.3 percent of the questions. Texas seniors fared only slightly better than the national average by correctly answering 49 percent.
- The average 21-year-old in the U.S. will spend more than \$2.2 million in their lifetime.

Response and Results

Walk Across Texas is an 8-week walking program aimed at helping people of all ages increase their level of physical activity to help establish a habit of regular exercise.



Schools across Texas participate in the

program as a way to get children excited about being more active. In 2008, 480 youth teams were formed across the state, totaling 7,945 youth who participated in the program. The outreach and student participation included 6 percent African American, 49 percent Hispanic, 42 percent Anglo, 1 percent Asian, and 2 percent other. The youth walked over 430,000 miles during the 8-week program.

Additionally, schools across the state have access to over 275 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) physical activity lesson plans. The plans are divided into grade levels (K–10) and have varying subject matter areas, including math, reading, social studies, science, etc. Teachers often utilize the lesson plans as getting-started activities or as warm ups before walking. In 2008, the TEKS lessons were downloaded over 57,000 times.

The *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum was designed to improve knowledge and behaviors related to: snacking on fruits and vegetables, drinking milk with meals and water with snacks, encouraging at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and limiting screen time to two hours or less per day.



The curriculum contains three elements: lesson plans, take-home reading assignments, and student journals. The curriculum is based on TEKS and includes 20 lesson plans that address physical activity, MyPyramid, making healthy choices, and

goal setting. The lessons incorporate higher-level thinking and learning skills (i.e., opportunities to design games, commercials, menus). Family engagement is encouraged with eight take-home reading assignments and parent letters.

- In 2008, 28 counties participated in the delivery of *Balancing Food & Play*.
- To date, approximately 2,500 students have received the curriculum; 1,110 students were evaluated.
- At the conclusion of *Balancing Food & Play*, a statistically significant improvement ($p \leq 0.05$) in knowledge related to the core concepts (fruit and vegetables, beverage choice, physical activity, and screen time) was observed.
- At the completion of the curriculum, behavior changes included:
 - The percentage of students who reported “Always or Almost Always” drinking regular (non-diet) soda decreased from 27 percent (268) to 21 percent (202).
 - The percentage of students who reported excessive screen time (4 hours or more) usage decreased from 18 percent (197) to 11 percent.
 - The percentage of students who reported having 60 minutes or more of physical activity increased from 62 percent (619) to 72 percent (706).

The **Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program** (EFNEP) is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. A nationally recognized program, EFNEP is designed to assist low-income youth in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and changed behaviors necessary for nutritionally sound diets and to contribute to their personal development. These youth are at the greatest risk to suffer from hunger and are disproportionately affected by poor health.



EFNEP partners with schools, after-school care programs, community centers, recreation centers, and other youth organizations to provide interactive and meaningful nutrition education. Lesson topics include nutrition, food preparation and safety, and physical activity. In FY 2007-08, EFNEP enrolled 58,026 low-income youth. Results of the program evaluation indicate:

- 79 percent of youth increased their knowledge about basic nutrition;
- 80 percent increased their ability to select low-cost, nutritious foods;
- 90 percent improved practices in food preparation and safety; and
- 95 percent improved physical activity behavior or attitudes.

EFNEP is effective in reaching underserved, low-income youth. As a result, youth develop self-esteem, learn new food-related skills, and learn to work cooperatively in a group. EFNEP also targets parents of low-income youth for maximum impacts.

The National Endowment for Financial Education® **High School Financial Planning Program**® (NEFE HSFP) is a seven-unit program created to educate high school students about sound money management skills and help teens to develop positive behaviors related to money. In 2005, the Texas Legislature passed H.B. 492 requiring instruction in personal financial literacy in one or more courses to meet high school graduation requirements. AgriLife Extension and the Texas Credit Union Foundation work jointly to assist schools with this mandate by providing the NEFE *High School Financial Planning Program* curriculum and training to schools across the state.

In 2008, 71,585 Texas students received the student handbook and classroom instruction. A national impact evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum will be conducted by NEFE in 2009. Two previous studies have shown that students make changes in their financial behavior, which they sustain after the end of the learning experiences provided through the HSFP curriculum.

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