

**Relevance**

Too many adults and children weigh too much. Texas is now the 19th most obese state in the nation. The obesity rate among children is especially concerning, as it foretells a lifelong struggle with weight-related poor health and its associated increased need for medical care. Best practice behaviors associated with healthful weight have been identified and include an eating pattern consistent with MyPlate, increasing physical activity, and decreasing sedentary behaviors. For children to adopt best practice behaviors, education, skills building, family engagement, and community support are required. School-based interventions, which include family engagement, augment and reinforce other obesity efforts.

**Response**

A multi-disciplinary team developed an integrated, interactive third-grade enrichment curriculum on nutrition and physical activity. The curriculum is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and is titled *Balancing Food & Play*.

The *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum was designed to improve knowledge and behaviors related to the following four educational constructs:

- snacking on fruits and vegetables,
- drinking milk with meals and water with snacks,
- encouraging 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and
- limiting screen time to two hours or less per day.

The curriculum contains four elements: 20 lesson plans, 8 take-home reading assignments, 4 parent letters, and a 41-page journal for each student. The 2nd edition of the *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum incorporates the Food Guidance System called MyPlate. The MyPlate icon serves as a reminder for healthy eating and illustrates the five food groups.

During 2014, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agents in 13 counties recruited local third grade classroom teachers to participate in this program. They received permission to implement this school-enrichment program, and 832 students completed the curriculum. To date, 4,817 teacher manuals and 2,726 student journal masters have been downloaded from the website (http://balance.tamu.edu).

**Results**

At the completion of *Balancing Food & Play*, students were more likely to correctly identify food and physical activity best practice recommendations.

Self-reported student behaviors related to physical activity, soda consumption, and screen time – all of which are associated with obesity – improved during
the time that Balancing Food & Play was taught. The percentage of students who reported:

- getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity increased from 56% to 77%,
- drinking soda almost never or never increased from 32% to 40%, and
- limiting screen time to 2 hours or less increased from 81% to 91%.

Student responses in 2014 to the question, “What changes have you made since starting Balancing Food & Play?” include:

- “I don’t drink sweet tea or soda anymore, and I get more physical activity everyday dancing on my Wii system.”
- “Well, I used to stay inside all the time; now I’m outside more and watch less t.v. I am also eating healthy fruits and vegetables, and I’m stronger.”
- “I have been eating healthier snacks now, like apples, carrots and cucumbers instead of chips, and I have been limiting my screen time to 2 hours or less each day.”
- “I started eating healthier, more vegetables and drinking milk with my meals. I also get at least 60 minutes of play and physical activity, which I didn’t used to get.”

Texas Counties Participating in Balancing Food & Play in 2014.