



Kansas Public Health Association

- Promoting and Improving Population Health in Kansas

Physical Activity & Nutrition Policies to Improve Health

The Issue:

Obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years. The percentage of obese children aged 6-11 years in the U.S. increased from 7 percent in 1980 to nearly 18 percent in 2012; the percentage of obese adolescents increased from 5 percent to nearly 21 percent. Risk factors tied to childhood obesity include cardiovascular disease, pre-diabetes, bone and joint problems, social and psychological problems.

Lifestyle habits such as healthy eating and physical activity can lower the risk of becoming obese as well as improving and maintaining children's health. All sectors of society impact these habits; however, schools play a particularly critical role due to the amount of time most children spend there. Schools can provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity.

A growing body of research indicates recess is crucial to healthy development. However, the average number of recess minutes had dropped from 37/day in 2001 to 24-27/day by 2008. In addition to the health benefits, recess serves as a necessary break from the rigors and structure of academics as well as offering cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. Physical activity also enhances academic performance by aiding concentration.

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 meant more children had access to healthy foods at school: they ate more fruits and vegetables and 90 percent of schools report successfully meeting nutrition standards. School nutrition program participation is increasing and food waste has not gone up under the new standards.

2016 Advocacy Priorities

Recess: Support development of legislation directing elementary schools to provide 20 minutes of supervised, safe, unstructured free-play recess each day that may not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons.

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act: Support reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.