School Influence on Childhood Obesity

Can schools really influence a child’s health?

Teachers and administrators are role models for children and have the ability to positively influence their lives. Children spend 35 hours a week in school and that is more than enough time for teachers and administrators to influence a child’s eating habits, increase their physical activity level, and educate them on the importance of good health. They can do so by:
- Taking a preventative approach
- Making changes in the cafeteria
- Incorporating physical activity into the classroom

What is a preventative approach?

A preventative approach is teachers and administrators realizing they cannot cure obesity but what they can educate children and lay the foundation for healthy habits. If schools take this mentality the school’s actions will be more successful and will eventually see results.

What changes can be made in the cafeteria to positively influence a child’s health?

Food Options
Most schools do not have healthy foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, as an option in the lunch line. Children cannot choose healthy foods if the foods are not available as a choice.

Food Preparation and Presentation
If healthy foods are prepared and presented in a way that is appealing to a child’s senses, meaning it smells and looks good, he or she may be more likely to choose those healthy foods for lunch.

Eliminating “Competitive Foods”
Competitive foods are junk foods i.e. French fries, chips, soft drinks, fried food, etc. Eliminating them would take away the temptation from children to make an unhealthy choice.

How can physical activity be incorporated into the classroom?

Children are confined to a desk for the majority of the school day. By including activities in the lesson plans that require students to get out of their desks and move around teachers are incorporating physical activity. Subjects such as math and science are ideal for incorporating movement. Activities such mini campus-based field trips, labs with stations and scavenger hunts are both entertaining and educational for the students and require them to leave the desk and be active.
If schools can make such an impact on a child’s health, why haven’t they been doing this all along and why aren’t they all doing it now?

Childhood obesity has not always been a problem; therefore there was no need to implement such changes until now. The research done in the field is, minimal so the techniques have not been perfected and the best way to measure success has not been developed. There is still a lot of trial and error. Most schools do not have the time and money for these trials. Not to mention the money needed to make such changes. Fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive and schools would also need to hire well qualified teachers who can incorporate activity into his or her lesson plans. Overall, many schools are not prepared to take on such costs. Some schools are taking on the costs and the challenge offers hope that they will one day develop a cost effect method that will yield the same positive results.

References


