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Percentage of overweight, obese students reported for first time in Kenai
Report presented to school board at Monday meeting; more than a third of students overweight

ANCHORAGE — About 36 percent of students in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District are overweight or obese, which is similar to the percentage reported in Anchorage, the largest school district in the state. Last year Kenai district staff asked the state to help them determine the prevalence of obesity in their student population. The Kenai Peninsula Borough is now the third school district to partner with DHSS to help track childhood obesity in Alaska.

Across Alaska, about three out of 10 children are above a healthy weight. Dr. Ward Hurlburt, Alaska's chief medical officer, considers childhood obesity the predominant public health threat of this generation. Obese children are more likely than children of healthy weight to struggle academically and experience health problems, such as diabetes and asthma.

In 2012, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) launched the Play Every Day campaign to raise awareness about the risks of childhood obesity, encourage children to be more physically active, and promote the Healthy Futures Physical Activity Challenge in Alaska schools.

Dr. Andrea Fenaughty, an epidemiologist with DHSS, and Karol Fink, the department's obesity program manager, shared the new data with the Kenai Peninsula Borough School Board at a meeting Monday, Nov. 12. The department has been working with the Anchorage School District since 2003 and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District since 2010 to report height and weight measurements of students.

Tracking the height and weight of Alaska students over time provides an indication of whether childhood obesity is increasing or decreasing statewide. During summer 2012, for example, a department analysis of Anchorage School District data showed for the first time a small decrease in the

prevalence of overweight and obese students — from 38 to 36 percent — when comparing the 2002–03 and 2010–11 school years. Though small, the decline was statistically significant, or unlikely to be due to chance, Fenaughty said.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, the fourth largest school district in the state, has taken several steps toward providing a school environment that is not just focused on academic health, but also the physical health of students, Fenaughty said. These steps — such as banning junk food from school campuses and providing free and reduced fee breakfast and lunch — have been shown to improve the overall health and academic success of children, she said.

“While I am disappointed to learn that more than one-third of our students are overweight, I am encouraged that our district is making positive changes to improve our students’ physical health,” said Dr. Steve Atwater, borough school district superintendent. “This study’s results are an important first step for establishing baseline data that will help us measure the impact of our improvement efforts in this area.”

Fenaughty presented the following key findings to the Kenai Peninsula Borough School Board Monday:

- During the 2010–11 and 2011–12 schools years, school nurses recorded the height and weight of borough students as a routine part of the nurses’ annual student health assessment.
- DHSS data analysts used 7,656 height and weight values to calculate body mass index (BMI), an indicator of body fat and risk of obesity-related health problems. The values represented 41 percent of total student enrollment in the represented grades during that two-year period.
- In 2011–2012, the prevalence of overweight and obese Kenai public school students was 36 percent.

A complete report about the prevalence of overweight and obese Kenai students is posted at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/Obesity/resources.aspx>, under the title *Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity among Students in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, 2011–2012*.

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