

Alaska Obesity Facts: School Policies & Practices Impacting Childhood Obesity

WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS?

Schools are in a unique position to influence healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. Improving policy requirements for the school nutrition environment, physical education, physical activity and quality health education helps to create healthy students. Healthy students have higher grades and standardized test scores, higher graduation rates, fewer behavioral concerns and lower absenteeism rates. Healthy successful students grow into healthy successful adults.¹

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The 2015 *Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey* indicates that among high school students:



Unhealthy Dietary Behaviors

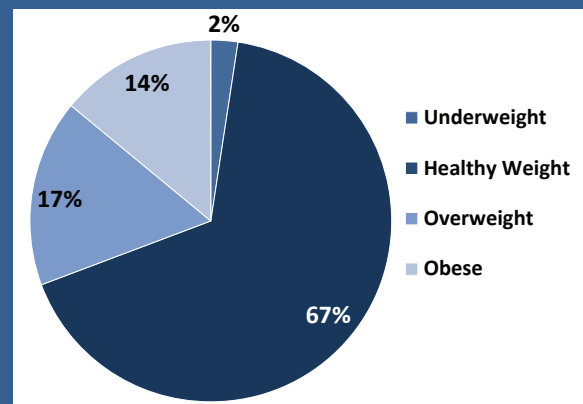
- 90% did not eat 2 fruit servings and 3 vegetable servings daily
- 46% reported drinking 1 or more sugary drinks per day



Physical Inactivity

- 79% did not meet the physical activity recommendation of 60 minutes every day²
- 57% did not attend physical education (PE) classes in an average school week
- 53% reported 3 or more hours of non-academic screen time on an average school day

WEIGHT STATUS, ALASKA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, 2015



OVERWEIGHT > BMI 85TH - 95TH PERCENTILE, OBESE BMI > 95TH PERCENTILE BASED ON SEX- AND AGE-SPECIFIC REFERENCE DATA FROM THE CDC. [HTTPS://NCCD.CDC.GOV/DNPABMI/](https://nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/)

The 2016 *Alaska School Health Profiles* survey of principals and health teachers in schools with grades 6-12:

School Nutrition Environment



- 75% allowed less nutritious foods and beverages (e.g. candy, baked goods) to be sold for fundraising purposes
- 10% priced nutritious foods and beverages at lower cost while increasing cost of less nutritious foods and beverages
- 42% placed fruits and vegetables near the cafeteria cashier where they are easy to access
- 44% always/almost always offered fruit or vegetables at school celebrations
- 57% prohibited all advertising and promotion for candy, fast food restaurants, or soft drinks



Professional development

- 24% of health education teachers received professional development on nutrition and dietary behavior in the past two years
- 39% of physical education teachers received professional development on physical education or physical activity in the past year

Physical Activity



- 43% did not offer opportunities for students to participate in physical activities before the school day



Health Education

- 42% taught all 20 key nutrition and dietary behavior topics in a required course³
- 49% taught all 13 key physical activity topics in a required course³



Wellness Policies and Committees

- 36% had a wellness committee, school health council, or other group that offers guidance on policies or coordinates activities on health topics
- 23% included objectives on physical education and 12% included objectives on food and beverages available at school outside the school meal programs in their School Improvement Plans

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What Can Alaska Students Do?

- Increase fruit and vegetable intake – at least 2 fruits and 3 vegetables a day
- Reduce screen time – no more than 2 hours daily for non-academic purposes
- Increase physical activity – 60 minutes every day
- Limit sugary drink intake

What Can Alaska School Districts and Schools Do?

- Adopt the State of Alaska Gold Standard Local Wellness Policy (aka Student Nutrition and Physical Activity policy)⁴ which includes the following:
 - Increase the number of physical activity opportunities throughout the day by implementing Alaska’s Physical Activity in Schools Law^{5,6}
 - Increase the number and frequency of physical education opportunities
 - Ensure all foods and beverages served and marketed in school are nutritious and promote health
 - Increase number of comprehensive health education classes emphasizing the importance of good nutrition and physical activity
 - Provide professional development opportunities for health and physical education staff
- Increase district graduation requirements to require a full credit of PE and full credit of Health rather than a single credit of Health and/or PE
- Promote and support school staff to attend the annual School Health and Wellness Institute⁷

School Wellness Policies are school or district-based physical activity and nutrition policies created to reduce childhood obesity. All districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required to have a USDA compliant wellness policy.

What Can Alaska Community Partners and Parents Do?

- Become familiar with your school or district’s wellness policy
- Join your school or district wellness committee to provide input on the development and support of a comprehensive Wellness Policy such as the State of Alaska Gold Standard Wellness Policy⁴
- Support healthy fundraising such as a yard sale, a student art and crafts fair, a healthy foods student cooking competition, or a walk-, run-, dance-, bike-, or skate-a thon⁸
- Create healthy school celebrations such as extra recess time, a scavenger hunt, healthy prizes or gifts like pencils and stickers, or let the students choose a healthy snack⁹
- Increase the state graduation requirements to require a full credit of PE and a full credit of Health rather than a single credit of Health and/or PE

REFERENCES

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