

**Title:** Physical Education for Progress Grant

**Principal Investigator:** Virginia Chomitz, PhD

**Award:** On October 1, 2003, ICH was awarded an evaluation sub-contract for the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) Grant received by the Cambridge Public Schools from the U.S. Department of Education. This grant seeks to address inadequate student physical activity levels that lead to obesity/overweight and socially inappropriate behavior by increasing students' opportunities for activity.

**Background:** This physical education enhancement project builds on the on-going efforts of a community-wide coalition to promote healthy weight in Cambridge. It links the Cambridge Public Schools, ICH, and the School Health Department (of the Cambridge Public Health Department and the Cambridge Health Alliance) and augments their work on the Health and Fitness Report Card Project, which informs parents of K-8 public school children of their children's weight status and fitness level.

The Cambridge Public Schools serve over 7000 students in 20 schools (pre-K-8 and high school) with six Title I schools. District-wide, 40% of students receive the federal lunch program with several schools enrolling more than 70% low-income families, over 30% of whose home language is not English. 2001 obesity surveillance data collected by the Cambridge Physical Education teachers indicates that 23% of children ages 9 to 13 were overweight (according to BMI above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile) which is substantially higher than national rates of 14%. Also, 67% of elementary students failed fitness testing.

**Goals:** The goals of the project are to 1) encourage Cambridge children to exhibit a physically active lifestyle. 2) assist Cambridge children in achieving and maintaining a health-enhancing level of physical fitness. 3) result in Cambridge children who can demonstrate responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.

**Methods:** Evaluation will be conducted by the Institute for Community Health. Guiding questions include: 1) Was there a decrease in the rate of students overweight? 2) Was the overall quality and access of physical activity enhanced? 3) What new equipment was purchased and how was it utilized? 4) What was the participation level in new early-morning and extended-day physical education classes and how did students benefit from the new offerings? 5) How did students perceive new non-traditional physical education opportunities? 6) Was there a change in students' daily physical activity levels? 7) What was the benefit of professional development classes to physical education staff's ability to lead classes? 8) How was the physical education curriculum enriched by physical education staff during professional development sessions? 9) How was family awareness of children's weight and fitness status increased?