



Institute for Community Health

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A story of success in Cambridge, Massachusetts: Overweight rates are lower and fitness rates are higher.

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Objective: describe a multi-year, multi-disciplinary healthy weight intervention and concurrent weight and fitness outcomes. Population: 3864 K-8th grade students in Public Schools in Cambridge, MA; 59.1% are non-white; 33.3% qualify for National School Lunch program Methods: Physical Education (PE) teachers and school nurses collect height, weight, BMI-for-age percentiles, and five fitness tests annually since 2000. One half percent annual increases of overweight and at-risk of overweight from 2000 (37.0%) to 2004 (39.1%), triggered a multidisciplinary team of researchers, educators, health care and public health professionals to mobilize healthy weight interventions. Programs and policies targeted individual, family, school and community – and included health and fitness “report” cards, PE enhancements, food service reforms, farm-to-school programs, family outreach, and community awareness campaigns. Results: Between 2004-2006, the proportion of students at-risk of and overweight decreased from 39.1% to 35.5% (CDC BMI-for-age categories), the proportion of students passing all fitness tests increased from 25.5% to 32.3%. Underweight stayed at 1.6%. While Black and Hispanic students were about twice as likely to be overweight in 2006 (24% and 25.6% respectively) as white (16.9%) and Asian (9.3%) students, overweight among all race/ethnicity groups, except Asian, declined since 2004. Likewise, overweight among students of lower income (eligible for free and reduced price school meals) also declined. Discussion: Cambridge Public School healthy weight promotion programs have benefited from collaboration, resources, and evaluation. Concurrent with increased programming, overweight has declined and fitness increased. However, sustainability of program elements will be a challenge in this diverse, urban community.