



Executive Summary

(excerpted from the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Pilot Evaluation Report Fall 2009)

The increase in overweight and obesity among children is a serious public health concern. In Massachusetts the prevalence of overweight and obesity among school age children is approximately 17%. In Boston, where half of the residents are of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, data from the Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) Head Start indicate that half of the preschool-age population they serve are overweight or obese. Obese children and adolescents are more likely to become obese adults. Therefore, it is important to promote healthful habits at a young age. Contributors to this problem are health behaviors such as high consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, insufficient physical activity levels and excessive television watching. Children's health behaviors are shaped at home, in child care and in the community.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures (HKHF) was developed to respond to the needs of Boston's parents and child care providers for hands on education delivered in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner and safe spaces for families with young children to be active. HKHF is an innovative community-based early childhood initiative combining evidence-based approaches to engage early child care

providers and families to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity among pre-school age children living in the Fenway, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain and Lower Roxbury communities of Boston.

HKHF partners with Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Head Start, the City of Boston's Boston Centers for Youth & Families (BCYF) and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) to provide programming, education and training. Financial support for these activities is provided by Northeastern University, Children's Hospital Boston, and the Boston Red Sox. In its initial year, HKHF worked with the following four ABCD Head Start programs: Parker Hill/Fenway, Native American Council, Jamaica Plain and Roxbury/Lenox.

HKHF consists of two main programmatic components: (1) Nutrition and Physical Activity Promotion in Home and Child Care; and (2) Community-Based Physical Activity Promotion for Young Children and Families. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) curriculum is used to improve nutrition and physical activity policies and practices through informational workshops, self-assessment, and targeted technical assistance among childcare staff at the four HKHF Head Start pilot program sites. The Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition (WE CAN!) is a caregiver wellness curriculum aimed to build skills that support caregivers of pre-school age children in making informed and healthful food choices, increasing physical activity, and reducing recreational screen time for their families at home. In the community, HKHF provides access to and promotion of physical activity through a Saturday Open Gym for children ages 3-8 and their caregivers to explore different ways to be active together. It incorporates age-appropriate activities adapted from evidence-based curricula (i.e., SPARK Early Childhood and I am Moving, I am Learning) staffed by trained Northeastern University students. Saturday Open Gym is held at the Madison Park Community Center.

HKHF accomplishments from the pilot year include the following. In *childcare*, targeted at the four Head Start pilot sites, 47 Boston-based early childhood providers were trained in nutrition and physical activity promotion using NAP SACC workshops in English and Spanish, providing 235 professional credit hours. Additionally, self-assessments and goal setting plans were completed. At *home*, 32 WE CAN! classes (8 class series with 4 classes/series) and two Supermarket Tour classes were delivered to 72 caregivers of Head Start children at the four pilot sites with high acceptability and retention. Two-thirds of caregivers came to 3 or more classes. In the *community*, 17 Saturday Open Gyms were offered during the summer and fall, which were supervised by 36 trained Northeastern University student activity leaders. Seventy three families attended one or more Saturday Open Gyms during summer and fall 2009.

HKHF uniquely combines evidence-based approaches to successfully engage early child care providers and caregivers to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity among culturally and linguistically diverse pre-school age children. The pilot year demonstrated high acceptability of the interventions among parents and child care providers, good feasibility for implementing all components of the intervention, initial evidence of parental behavioral intentions to reduce children's consumption of high fat and high sugar foods at home, and plan more physical activity for their children, and evidence of increased awareness among Head Start staff related to promoting healthier drinking behaviors. As one of the few initiatives designed specifically for preschoolers at high risk for developing overweight

and obesity, HKHF contributes in an important way to promoting healthier eating and physical activity among this group of children. Additional efforts to further evaluate the program with a controlled research design and a larger sample size, and to examine the effects of the program as a model to address childhood obesity in greater depth are important future directions for HKHF.

For more information on Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures or if you would like the entire report, please contact T.Agrawal@neu.edu or call 617.373.7615.



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