

An Initiative to Combat Childhood Obesity: First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* Campaign

Childhood obesity has recently emerged as a prominent concern in the United States, reaching far beyond the medical community alone. Research has shown that obesity, poor nutrition, and low physical activity may affect children's cognitive and physical outcomes.¹ In response, in February 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama launched the *Let's Move!* campaign with the intent to eliminate the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation.

Call to Action

The First Lady's plan is a public awareness effort that calls upon a variety of sectors to address the issue of childhood obesity.² The campaign identifies families, teachers, schools, doctors, chefs, athletes, and communities to be part of the solution. This collaboration among partners with diverse disciplinary focus, particularly government agencies, is a central component to the First Lady's campaign.

Let's Move! is also a dynamic initiative, augmenting the plan as the need arises. In the few months since its inception, the campaign has added *Let's Move Outside!* and *Chefs Move to Schools* components to provide opportunities for children and families to use forests, parks, trails, and playgrounds to engage in outdoor physical activity, as well as pair chefs with local schools to develop healthy meals and educate students about nutrition. The following overview provides a snapshot of the initiative in July 2010.

Let's Move! has four "pillars": three that focus on gaining knowledge of and access to healthy foods and one focused on increasing physical activity. The four pillars are outlined below.

A Plan for Healthier Foods

Empowering Parents and Caregivers focuses on providing parents with information to make healthy choices for their families. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is developing a new food pyramid and online interactive tools to help people make healthy food choices. It has also created a Food Atlas, an interactive database that maps health- and food-related information at the state and local level. This information includes, for example, the amount and types of food people eat at home, rates of diabetes and obesity, and how much money people spend at restaurants. Another collaborator, the American Academy of Pediatrics, is working to ensure that health care providers are knowledgeable about obesity, monitor children's Body Mass Index (BMI), and provide parents and children with suggestions on how to increase healthy eating and physical activity. On the consumer end, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is set to implement new front-of-package labeling guidelines to help people make informed, healthy food choices.

Providing Healthy Food in Schools sets an agenda for providing healthful meals in schools. This agenda includes enhancing the budget of the the Child Nutrition Act when it is reauthorized in September 2010. These additional funds would be used to improve the quality of school meals, ensure that schools have the resources to provide them, and expand the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to serve more students.

¹ Taras, H., & Potts-Datema, W. (2005). Obesity and Student Performance at School. *Journal of School Health*, 75(8), 291-295.

² The information presented in this factsheet was sourced from <http://www.letsmove.gov> in June and July 2010.

Sample Criteria for the HealthierUS School Challenge³

- ☐ Participate in the National School Lunch Program and be a Team Nutrition School
- ☐ Offer a different vegetable each day of the week, including dark green and orange vegetables and beans
- ☐ Offer a different fruit each day of the week, including fresh fruit
- ☐ Limit beverages to low-fat or fat-free milk, 100% vegetable or fruit juices, and water
- ☐ Provide nutrition education to students through multiple channels
- ☐ Provide students with opportunities to engage in physical activity (e.g. recess, PE classes, intramurals, clubs)
- ☐ Do not require or deny physical activity as punishment
- ☐ Do not use food as a reward
- ☐ Implement a Local Wellness Policy
- ☐ Submit an application!⁴

The USDA also plans to expand its HealthierUS Schools Challenge Program. This program provides recognition to schools that participate in NSLP and meet additional rigorous standards for food quality, students' physical activity, and nutrition education. To encourage participation, the USDA provides monetary incentives, educational and technical assistance materials, and a program toolkit. Currently, only seven schools in California are HealthierUS schools.⁵

Improving Access to Healthy, Affordable Foods addresses families' access to affordable healthy food in their communities. The USDA, U.S. Department of Treasury, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are set to invest \$400 million per year for the next seven years in an effort to eliminate "food deserts" – communities with little access to healthy foods – throughout the nation. This Healthy Food Financing Initiative seeks to bring grocery stores and farmers markets to underserved areas, as well as help existing corner stores carry healthier options.

A Plan for Physical Activity

Lastly, *Increasing Physical Activity* focuses on increasing children's physical activity both in and out of school. The President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition has set a goal to double the number of children who receive the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award during the coming school year. This award is a six-week challenge for both children and adults to commit to regular physical activity at least five days per week. The President's Physical Fitness Challenge will also

begin to focus on children's daily physical activity, in addition to the existing fitness tests. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education is collaborating with Congress to create a Safe and Healthy Schools fund that will support schools in improving physical education, school environment, and opportunities for students to be physically active in and out of school.

What Can Schools Do?

Let's Move! outlines several strategies schools can implement to help combat childhood obesity, including:

- **Create a School Health Advisory Council** that develops and applies healthy eating and physical fitness policies at school
- **Join the HealthierUS Schools Challenge** by following the food quality, physical activity, and physical and nutritional education criteria set forth by the USDA (see sidebar)
- **Make Your School a Healthy Worksite** through employee benefits and policies and by encouraging staff to model healthy behavior
- **Incorporate Nutritional and Physical Education into the Curriculum** to help students relate physical activity and healthy eating concepts
- **Plant a School Garden** to serve as both a physical activity and nutritional education tool

For more information, access the *Let's Move!* website at: www.letsmove.gov.

³ For the full list of detailed criteria, see http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/HUSSCkit_pp13-24.pdf.

⁴ See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/application.html> for application requirements and process.

⁵ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/California.html>