

Utah

Elementary Schools Go for the Gold Medal

“Starting good choices at an early age—like being safe, eating healthy foods, and exercising—will make my students’ lives a lot easier when they are teenagers and adults.”

—Carolee Barrett, School Coordinator, Mountainside Elementary

Public Health Problem

Jessica, a 9-year-old student at Utah’s Mountainside Elementary, dreaded lunchtime because the other kids often made “fat jokes” about her. Jessica’s mother was concerned that her daughter had low self-esteem and was slowly falling behind in school.

Jessica is not alone. Almost one in every four Utah students in grades K–6 is overweight or obese. The lack of school policies and environmental supports for physical activity and healthy eating contribute to this ongoing epidemic of obesity among school-aged children. Utah’s elementary schools increasingly focus on student academic achievement, resulting in fewer opportunities for physical activity and nutrition education.

As early as 2001, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) recognized the emerging trend of childhood obesity. Studies showed that most overweight and obese children become obese adults. The increasing rates of obesity in Utah also meant an increase in the risk factors associated with heart disease and type 2 diabetes. To address these problems, UDOH created Gold Medal Schools, a program that gives new meaning to the age-old adage, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Taking Action

The Gold Medal Schools program was developed for the state’s elementary

schools. It is based on the core curriculum of the Utah State Office of Education and CDC’s guidelines for addressing overweight and obesity. The basic idea is to improve school environments by putting policies in place that make healthy foods available, address safety issues, promote tobacco use prevention, and increase the amount of time that kids are physically active.

With significant support from the Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant, the UDOH took these actions in 2009–2010:

- Partnered with the Utah State Office of Education, CDC, 12 local health departments, the Utah Parent Teacher Association, and the national Safe Routes to School program.
- Created healthy school environments by changing policies and improving school campuses with help from each school’s coordinator and a mentor from the local health department.
- Recognized schools for implementing policies at the Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Platinum Focus levels and provided up to \$1,500 as an incentive to participate.
- Focused on Title 1 schools, which are located in low-income areas with students at higher risk. These schools often need extra funding and may lack school policies to improve health.

Healthy People 2010 Objective

Overweight or obesity in children and adolescents

PHHS Block Grant Funding

Represents 50%–74% of total program costs

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For more information on the
PHHS Block Grant, go to
www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant

For more information on
Healthy People, go to
www.healthypeople.gov



Taking Action (continued)

The UDOH's efforts led to many positive changes in Utah's elementary schools, such as new places for students to walk, recess being held before lunch to stimulate appetite, and food not being used as a reward or punishment.

Impact

Jessica is well on her way to a healthy weight and is doing much better in school. Mountainside Elementary became a Gold Medal School and earned Bronze, Silver, and Gold medals, all in just 1 year!

During the 2009–2010 school year, the UDOH's Gold Medal Schools program

- Contacted nearly 200,000 students in 373 schools.
- Updated or implemented more than 6,400 policy and environmental changes to make schools healthier.
- Enrolled 10,000 teachers in faculty wellness programs.

- Set up a 1-mile walking course for each participating school.
- Offered resources for parents, teachers, and principals on the Gold Medal Schools Web site, including 15 training modules, a step-by-step guide, and lesson plans for teachers of K–8 students.
- Publicly recognized 12 schools as Gold Medal Schools.
- Supported nine schools to participate in Power-Up, a Gold Medal Schools program for middle and junior high students. These schools adopted 21 policy and 121 environmental changes.

According to a UDOH study, the rate of overweight and obesity among the state's elementary school students began to slow its growth in 2006. Future plans include finding ways to improve the Gold Medal Schools program, promote sustainability, improve evaluation efforts, and ensure that policies are enforced.

PHHS Block Grant Supports Utah's Healthy People 2011 Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with any of the 265 health objectives in *Healthy People 2010*.

Utah uses its funds to address seven health objective priorities, including

- Overweight or obesity in children and adolescents.
- Deaths from unintentional injuries.
- Rape or attempted rape.
- Public access to information and surveillance data.
- Elevated blood lead levels from work exposure.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to
www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/hp2010.htm