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CHILDHOOD OBESITY EPIDEMIC CAN BE ADDRESSED

The rapidly rising incidence of obesity among American children poses significant public health hazards that can be reduced through concerted strategies, according to research published in the spring issue of *The Future of Children*, a publication of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and The Brookings Institution. The strategies to reduce obesity include preventative public education, parental actions, medical policies, school-based programs, environmental changes, and regulatory policies.

Ten articles by leading scholars review the latest research on the causes and consequences of childhood obesity, and on interventions that may help reduce obesity among U.S. children. They examine why the share of overweight and obese American children has increased so dramatically.

Although no one cause accounts for the sharp rise in childhood obesity during the last 20 years, factors that play some role include increased television viewing and video/computer gaming, fast and unhealthy foods marketed to children, junk food in schools, working parents unable to cook nutritious meals or supervise active play, and a decline in physical activity.

The costs of obesity are not only shorter, less healthy lives, but rapidly rising economic costs

of treatment, and reduced productivity and earnings in adulthood. Articles also address obesity-related medical problems such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, asthma, orthopedic complications, and sleep disorders and how physicians are trained to treat obesity. The greater risks faced by minority and low-income children, and the roles of schools, parents, and public policy also are addressed.

As a societal problem, obesity may be most effectively prevented by involving children and parents, schools, medical schools and physicians, and government in taking a variety of actions. These could include:

- Schools limiting sales of non-nutritious foods, increasing physical education, and implementing obesity screening and referring obese students for needed treatment;
- The medical community ensuring that pediatricians are better trained to prevent and manage obesity;
- Government providing consumers with better information to make healthy food choices;
- Government regulating advertising to children of unhealthy foods;
- Communities enacting zoning and land-use policies that facilitate safe places for play and exercise; and

- Parents helping their children develop healthful eating and physical activity habits.

With increased public awareness and media attention to the issue, federal and state legislatures have begun reacting by — restricting advertisements for unhealthy foods directed at children, improving preventive care by pediatricians, and ensuring schools provide healthful and appealing food and give children strenuous exercise on a daily basis.

For more information or to access the journal, go to www.futureofchildren.org.

Percentage of Overweight and Obese Children, Ages 10-17

United States	31%
Utah	21%
Colorado	22%
Wyoming	23%
Minnesota	24%
Washington	25%
Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska, Oregon, South Dakota, & Vermont	26%
Connecticut, Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, & Rhode Island	27%
Oklahoma	28%
Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, & Wisconsin	29%
Arizona, California, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Ohio, & Virginia	30%
Alaska, Illinois, Missouri, & New York	31%
Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, & Texas	32%
Arkansas & Indiana	33%
North Carolina	34%
Alabama, Delaware, & Tennessee	35%
Louisiana, South Carolina, & West Virginia	36%
Mississippi	37%
Kentucky	38%
District of Columbia	40%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT On-Line Data System, www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/

AMERICAN VOTERS CARE ABOUT HUNGER AND POVERTY

In a bipartisan national poll commissioned by the Alliance to End Hunger and sponsored in part by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, an overwhelming majority said they would support a candidate working to reduce hunger and poverty in our country. Of the 1,000 likely voters polled, 85% considered a candidate’s position on reducing hunger and poverty to be an important factor in deciding whom to vote for Congress, while 66% responded as more likely to vote for a candidate for President who makes fighting hunger and poverty a major priority.

“Congressional candidates can not ignore hunger and poverty in the upcoming elections,” said Max Finberg, Director of the Alliance to End Hunger. “Voters have said overwhelmingly that a candidate’s position on hunger and poverty is an important factor in deciding their vote for Congress. Americans are telling us loud and clear that these are important issues, and this poll shows that Americans want to hear more from political leaders about real solutions.”

The poll also shows Americans have become more concerned about hunger and poverty in the U.S. and believe the government should do more.

- 48% of voters feel that the hunger problem in the U.S. is getting worse, up from 38% in 2003.
- 62% feel that the government spends too little money to reduce hunger in the U.S., an increase from 55% in 2003.
- 76% of Republicans and 90% of Democrats say a candidate’s position on reducing the hunger problem is important when deciding their vote for Congress.

Tom Freedman, a Democratic consultant who conducted the poll, said “the poll shows poverty and hunger are areas where voters say problems

are getting worse. These results show voters want action. This is an issue that has moved up voters' agendas." Jim McLaughlin, a Republican pollster who also conducted the poll said "the results show hunger is an issue of concern to Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. It's an issue where voters would love for politicians to take a break from partisanship and actually get something done."

The poll was conducted by McLaughlin and Associates and Freedman Consulting, between March 27 and 29 via telephone by professional interviewers. The sample included 1,000 likely voters with a margin of error of +/- 3.1% at a 95% confidence interval.

***For a chart on the results, visit
www.alliancetoendhunger.org.***

HHSC ISSUES 30-DAY REVIEW OF NEW ELIGIBILITY SYSTEM

On May 4, 2006, Texas Health and Human Services Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins said progress has been made but more work needs to be done before the state resumes rollout of the new eligibility system designed to make it easier for Texans to apply for Medicaid, food stamps and other services.

The new eligibility system, operated by Bermuda-based Accenture LLP, includes four privately run call centers around the state. The call centers will eventually replace hundreds of local offices staffed by state workers.

Hawkins announced a delay in the rollout on April 5, 2006, and said the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) would review the system's readiness again in 30 days. He said the review showed significant progress in reducing call center abandonment rates and wait times, but additional training and technical improvements must be made before further rollouts. To improve performance of the new system:

- State staff are positioned with customer service representatives in the Midland call center to ensure that callers receive accurate information.
- New cases in the pilot area will not be processed at the San Antonio center until the system there is improved. The current system relies on manual data entry and is unable to process cases quickly enough, and it does not allow for sufficient reporting about the status of cases.
- New training is being developed for customer service representatives in the call centers after a state review found that call center staff were not equipped to handle some types of questions. An escalation process also has been implemented to ensure that complex policy questions are directed to state staff.
- Customer services representatives will receive additional system training. HHSC found that the representatives often are unable to conduct thorough records searches, leading them to tell callers that applications or information could not be located even though the information already had been entered into the system.

HHSC also will retain an additional 1,000 state workers and will pay retention bonuses to help keep state staff in place during the transition. This means HHSC will retain about 3,900 eligibility employees. There are currently about 4,800 regular-status eligibility employees. HHSC has hired more than 900 temporary employees to help offices experiencing high turnover during the transition.

Hawkins said HHSC would continue to work on improvement plans for the new system, a revised rollout schedule, and updated savings projections.

For additional information, go to the HHSC website at www.hhs.state.tx.us/consolidation/IE/IE.shtml.

TEEN'S HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES FOILED BY EARLY LUNCH, ETC.

Penn State researchers have identified three previously unreported factors that foil the efforts of high school students to make healthy food choices — early lunch, school income from soft drink incentives, and parents who bring fast food to the cafeteria for their kids.

The study is detailed in the February issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* in a paper, "Factors Associated With The Offering and Sale of Competitive Foods and School Lunch Participation."

The Penn State researchers sent surveys to school foodservice directors at half (271) of the public high schools in Pennsylvania and received 84% participation. The schools were representative of the entire population of high schools in Pennsylvania based on region, rate of free and reduced-price lunch participants, enrollment and percent rural.

Of the foodservice directors surveyed, 25% reported that lunch periods are scheduled before 10:30 a.m. and the researchers found an early lunch start predicted higher a la carte sales. A la Carte foods are those sold in addition to the federally-regulated meal program. These foods are primarily unregulated and may be of lower nutritional value.

The study found a la carte sales generate almost \$700 per day per school among the schools surveyed and \$450 of that income comes from the sale of a la carte items that have few federal requirements compared to the school meals.

Income from soft drink incentives also appears to play a role in the nutrition environment. The existence of soft drink machines owned by soft drink companies, for which the school or district receives a percentage of sales, predicted a higher number of vending machines per student. When there were more vending machines, there tended to be less participation in the hot lunch program.

These findings prompt consideration of tough issues; e.g., if changes are made in a la carte offerings and vending contracts which result in decreased sales, where will any lost revenue be found? Almost 85% of school foodservice programs receive no financial support from their school districts.

Some schools reported another factor affecting the school nutrition environment: parents. Enforcement of a policy prohibiting parents or students from bringing fast food into the cafeteria increased participation in the school meal program. About 25% of the foodservice directors reported having such a policy and that it was enforced. Another 28% reported that they had no such policy or recommendation.

The study was supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Health through Grant/Cooperative Agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information, contact the College of Health and Human Development Office at 814/865-3831 or healthhd@psu.edu.

WHYVILLE'S VIRTUAL CAFETERIA

Sponsored by the School Nutrition Association, the Whyville Cafeteria is Whyville's most recent initiative to bring nutritional awareness to children aged eight to 15. The virtual community is a graphical virtual world where children from around the world interact and learn together through educational activities ranging from math and science to art and civics. In November 2005, Whyville introduced virtual eating to its citizens, with support from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA).

The program, *WhyEat*, allows Whyvillians to plan their meals and eat breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner — virtually. With the Whyville Cafeteria, they can sit down at a virtual dining table together to share and discuss their food choices. Nutritional information is shown with every food, and citizens are held responsible for their choices.

Whyville.net is owned by Numedeon, Inc., a privately held company in Pasadena, CA. The virtual community was launched in 1999 by scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs interested in exploring new ways to creatively engage young learners over the Internet.

To find out more, visit www.whyville.net.

HEALTHY SCHOOL BEVERAGE GUIDELINES FOR U.S. SCHOOLS

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a joint initiative of the William J. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association, has worked for months with representatives of PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Cadbury Schweppes, and the American Beverage Association to establish new guidelines to limit portion sizes and reduce the number of calories available to children during the school day. Under these guidelines, only lower calorie and nutritious beverages will be sold to schools. This is the Alliance's first industry agreement as part of its Healthy Schools Program, affecting close to 35 million students across the country.

The guidelines cap the number of calories in school beverages at 100 calories per container, except for certain milks and juices whose nutritional value warrants the higher number of calories. Under the agreement, the beverage industry will work to spread these standards to 75% of the nation's schools prior to the 2008-2009 school year, with full implementation targeted by the 2009-2010 school year.

Under the new guidelines, elementary schools will only sell water, juices with no added sweeteners, and milk. Middle schools will apply the elementary school standard with slightly increased portion sizes. High schools will add no calorie and low calorie drinks, such as bottled water, diet and unsweetened teas, diet sodas, fitness water, flavored water, and seltzers, as well as light juices and sports drinks.

For more information, visit www.healthiergeneration.org.

TV VIEWING AFFECTS PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S INTAKE

A recent Penn State laboratory study, "Does Eating During Television Viewing Affect Preschool Children's Intake?," shows preschool children who usually eat meals at home while watching television (TV) ate one-third more lunch when shown a cartoon video during lunchtime versus eating lunch without TV. The children who did not eat in front of the TV at home, actually ate significantly less on the days the lunchtime cartoon was shown compared to the days on which there was no video. The *Journal of the American Dietetic Association (JAMA)* published the results in April.

Twenty-four children, ages three through five, and their mothers participated in the study. The children were all normal weight, predominately European American and middle class. On two separate days, the children were served lunch in small groups and shown a 22-minute video. On two other days, the children ate lunch together but were not shown a cartoon. The same lunch was served on both the TV days and the non-TV days.

To measure the children's eating habits at home, mothers were asked how frequently the child eats snacks while watching TV, how frequently the child eats other meals while watching TV, and how frequently the TV is on when meals are eaten together as a family. The mothers also reported on their child's daily TV watching. According to these reports, on average, the children watched 1.5 hours of TV daily and eight of the 24 children (33%) usually ate meals or snacks while watching TV.

The researchers write, "This finding suggests the possibility that children who are given opportunities to eat while watching TV may become less sensitive to internal cues to satiety."

For more information, contact the College of Health and Human Development Office at 814/865-3831 or healthhd@psu.edu.

TOP 10 FUNCTIONAL FOOD TRENDS

Health is going to remain a powerful influence on consumers' food choices in the coming year, as Americans seek out more convenient, better-tasting and more effective food and beverages, according to the latest issue of *Food Technology* magazine. The nation's top ten trends involving functional foods, currently a \$36 billion-a-year market and growing, are:

- 1. Kids At Risk:** Children are increasingly at risk for being overweight, and for having high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. Reformulating children's products to be more nutrient dense while lower in fat, calories, sugar and sodium will be a focus.
- 2. 100 Calorie Cut-off:** Weight-conscious shoppers are choosing lower-calorie and reduced portion sizes more than selecting reduced-fat and low-carb products. Chefs predict portion size will be the next big restaurant trend.
- 3. Phytochemicals:** Sales of products carrying an antioxidant claim jumped nearly 20% last year. One of every four consumers says they eat fruits or vegetables to prevent disease; one-in-three eat them to feel healthy; and nearly nine-of-ten to stay healthy.
- 4. Multiple Benefits:** Two-thirds of consumers have used foods to help prevent obesity, slightly more than those seeking to prevent high cholesterol, or prevent heart disease.
- 5. Healthy Fats:** The popularity of omega-3 fatty acids are leading consumers to opt for healthier oils and avoid other fats. Low in saturated fat is the most appealing fat-directed label claim. Half of all shoppers try to avoid trans fats.
- 6. Mature:** With more than 100 million Americans over 50 years old by 2010, food products will likely cater to their health concerns and dietary preferences. Currently, more than half of all consumers who fill a prescription also purchase related food products while shopping, e.g. buy low-fat milk while filling a heart medication prescription.
- 7. Glycemic, Gluten, Grains:** At least one major trend analysis predicts low glycemic index foods will be a leading trend this year, despite the lack of scientific consensus on the topic. The gluten-free market is now increasing its presence on restaurant menus. Multifaceted health benefits of whole grains are gaining recognition.
- 8. Natural:** Organic sales could climb to more than \$14 billion this year but household penetration is not predicted to significantly increase.
- 9. Performance:** Two of every three Americans are very concerned about their energy levels. Needing extra energy is noted as the top reason why adults eat functional foods.
- 10. Fun:** Healthier versions of our favorites are popping up everywhere — alcoholic beverages made with 100% fruit juice, soft drinks claiming to burn calories, even vending machines color-coding snacks and beverages to make healthy selections easier.

The full story and the latest issue are accessible at www.ift.org/foodtechnology.

GRANTS

Texas Department of Agriculture requests proposals for agricultural projects designed to foster an understanding and awareness of agriculture in elementary students from certain Texas urban school districts. Up to \$2,500 may be awarded in a single grant cycle. Proposals must be received by 5:00 p.m., 06/15/06. Contact Catherine Wright at 512/463-7700 or e-mail Catherine.Wright@agr.state.tx.us with questions. See www.tda.state.tx.us for details.

National Gardening Association recognizes outstanding programs via the Healthy Sprouts Awards — using the garden to teach about nutrition and hunger in the U.S. To be eligible, a school or organization must plan to garden in 2007 with at least fifteen children between the ages of three and 18. The deadline is 10/15/06. For more information, visit <http://assoc.garden.org>.

CALENDAR

June 4–10, 2006: Summer Food Service Week. The U.S. Department of Agriculture intends to raise public awareness of the benefits of summer meals for poor communities and to encourage additional summer meal sites.

July 16-19, 2006: School Nutrition Association 60th Annual National Conference. Los Angeles Convention Center. For more information, go to www.schoolnutrition.org and click on the “Meetings & Events” section.

September 16-19, 2006: Grassroots and Groundwork Conference. Radisson Riverfront Hotel, St. Paul, MN. This conference brings together hundreds of people dedicated to reducing poverty and building community. For details, visit www.grassrootsandgroundwork.nwaf.org.

HUNGER REPORT

The Bread for the World Institute (BFWI) annually publishes a report on the state of world hunger. As part of the BFWI’s commitment to anti-hunger education, the report analyzes the causes of and solutions to hunger.

Frontline Issues in Nutrition Assistance: Hunger 2006 argues the fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger is to improve nutrition assistance programs. Nutrition assistance programs have been proven highly effective and affordable. *Hunger 2006* calls for strengthening these programs.

Download or purchase the publication at www.bread.org/learn/hunger-reports.

PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICIES

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) recently published a Parent Outreach Brochure to encourage more parents to get involved in creating local wellness policies for their school district. The brochure was designed for parents who may be unaware of the opportunities that exist for them to get involved in this important process.

With many school districts behind in developing their policies, time remains to get more parents involved. Local wellness policies will be stronger and more effective if they include input from parents.

The brochure emphasizes the importance of making afterschool and summer programming a part of the wellness policy, particularly timely as the Summer Food Service Program and other summer programs begin. FRAC strongly advocates for afterschool and summer programming to be an integral part of local wellness policies as decisions that are made for the health and well-being of students should not be limited solely to the traditional school day.

For the brochure, go to www.frac.org/pdf/parent_outreach.pdf, or to get a copy in Microsoft Publisher format, e-mail abylander@frac.org.

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Archived issues of the *Food Journal* are available on-line at www.taca.org.

The *Food Journal* welcomes your comments and ideas for stories.

Call 800/992-9767, ext. 206, or e-mail comments and suggestions to foodjournal@taca.org.



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