

Saving Our Kids from Obesity: Norman Elementary's Answer

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According to Dr. William Klish, a professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine, because of the epidemic of obesity, children today have a shorter life expectancy than their parents for the first time in 100 years. "We are in the middle of an epidemic that may have profound health effects on our children, as well as on us," said Klish. "If society does not act now to implement preventive measures, the increase of obesity will not stop." What is your school doing to save these kids?

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, results from a National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey indicate that an estimated 13 percent of children ages 6-11 and 14 percent of adolescents ages 12-19 are overweight. In fact, in the last two decades, the number of overweight children and adolescents in the United States has more than doubled – and the health implications of that increase are staggering.

At the school level, nationwide, only "8 percent of elementary schools, provide daily physical education or its equivalent for the entire school year for students in all grades in the school," according to the School Health Policies and Programs Study 2000. However, there are more and more states that are planning to provide daily physical education for the school year.

I am very happy to say our School Board and Superintendent have made the commitment for our students to have daily physical education beginning in the fall of 2008. We are in the process of building schedules for all of our K-5 students to have 30 minutes of physical education every day!! This may mean that our morning and afternoon recesses will not be occurring. However, our physical education teachers will be providing physical activities INSIDE as well as OUTSIDE. Students will have their regular lunchtime and outside recess time as they currently do at noon.

In the past, grades K-2 have always had physical education two times a week and, added just this year; grades 3-5 have physical education two times a week. As well as providing physical education, our students do have the opportunity to play outside at *least* two times a day and in some cases three times.

For our grades 3-5, a "walking course" has just been implemented and students are fired up about walking. Each child has a lanyard with a card and, as a "lap" is completed, a designated student equipped with a "smile punch" punches the lap walker's card as he/she completes a lap around the walking course! It is great to hear the goals of the students as some say "I plan to walk at least 50 miles this year!"

So what is Norman doing about the epidemic of obesity? We are moving ahead to make sure our students have the every opportunity for physical exercise by the way of providing physical education daily and outside opportunities as well!

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