



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Massachusetts Pilot Program Helps Boost Students' Nutrition, Fitness Habits

Boston-area middle school students are improving their fitness and eating habits through a pilot program supported by the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation's Childhood Obesity Initiative, the Boston Globe reports. Piloted for all Millis, Mass., students in seventh and eighth grades, the semester-long Foundations of Health and Fitness program is one part class instruction and two parts physical fitness, with daily activities including a sugar lab and weight training. Students, who also participate in traditional physical education every other day, keep a daily log of their activities. In addition, they undergo a series of flexibility, cardiovascular and strength tests and measure their body mass indices (BMIs) at the start and end of the semester to indicate whether they have improved during the 90-day program. According to the course leader, all 200 students who participating during the 2006-2007 school year, the program's first year, displayed improvement in at least one fitness area, and 81 percent of students who were initially considered overweight lowered their BMIs. MetroWest's 2006 Adolescent Health Survey indicated that 20.4 percent of local students in seventh and eighth grades and 19.9 percent of high school students were overweight or obese. Though these measurements are better than state and national obesity rates, the foundation plans to continue supporting interventions and thus far has invested \$1.85 million to curb childhood obesity locally. The foundation's president, Martin Cohen, notes that the efforts aim not only to raise awareness about the issue but also to create effective programming that addresses both physical activity and nutrition (Kocian, *Boston Globe*, 2/7/08 [registration required]).



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