

Wellness Councils in New York City Schools:

Policy and Program Implementation in the First Two Years

Marcela Betzer, MPH
School Wellness Program Coordinator
NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

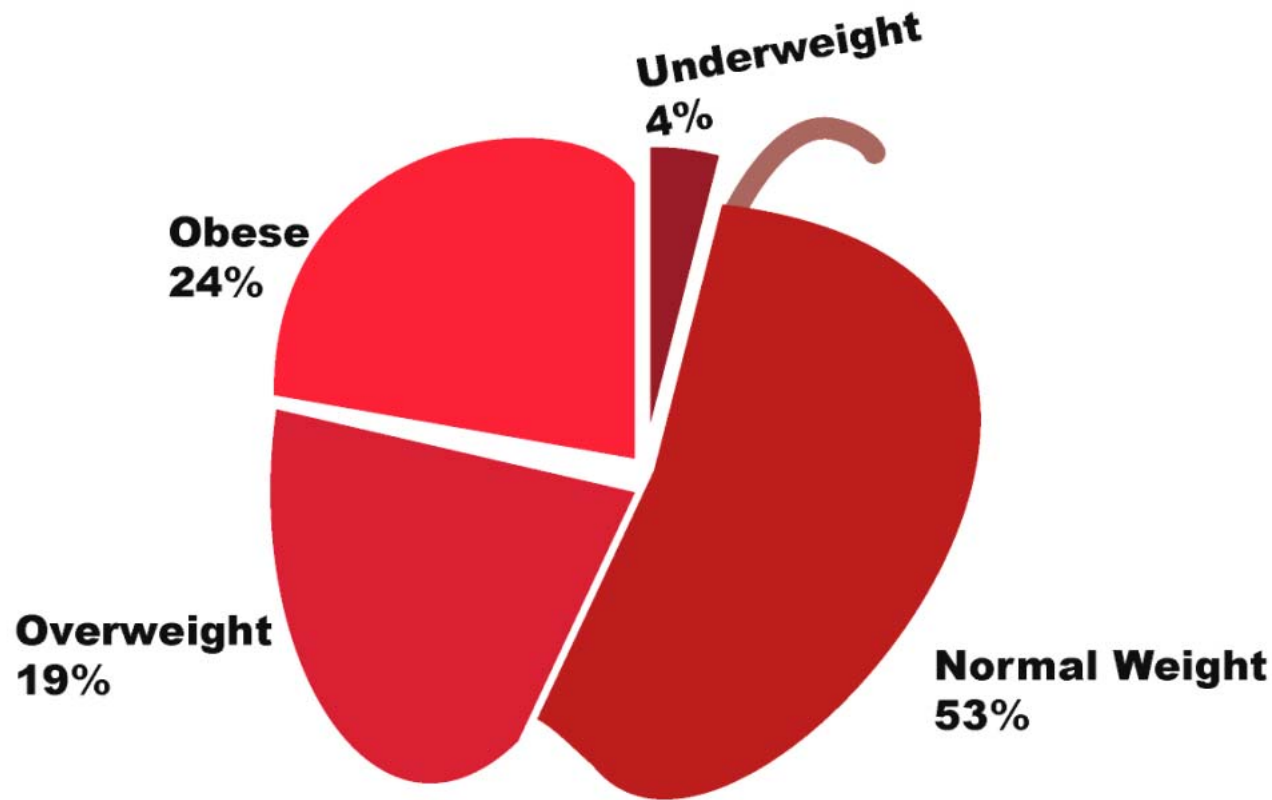


Overview

- Overweight and obesity in NYC schools
- Program planning process
- Overview of NYC Wellness Project program structure
- Barriers to implementation
- Lessons learned



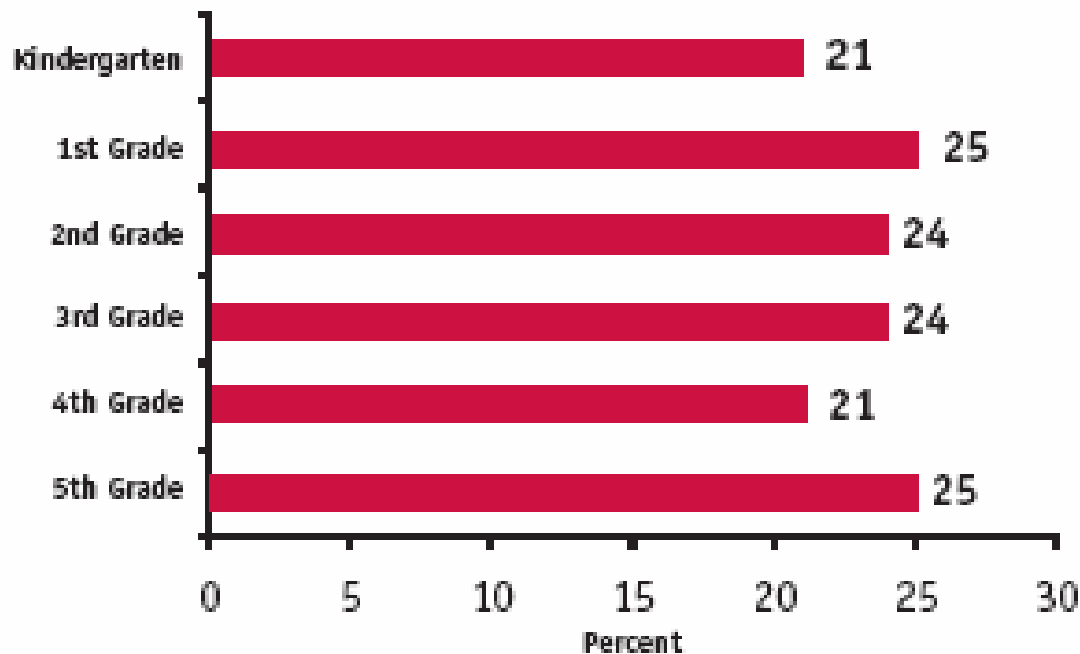
Only half (53%) of elementary school children are at a healthy weight



Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) \geq 95th percentile for age and gender; overweight is defined as BMI \geq 85th and $<$ 95th percentile for age and gender

Obesity Begins Early

Obesity is already common as early as kindergarten



- In all 6 grades surveyed, more than 20% of children were obese. Obesity is already a serious problem by kindergarten (21%).

How do NYC elementary school children compare to national levels?

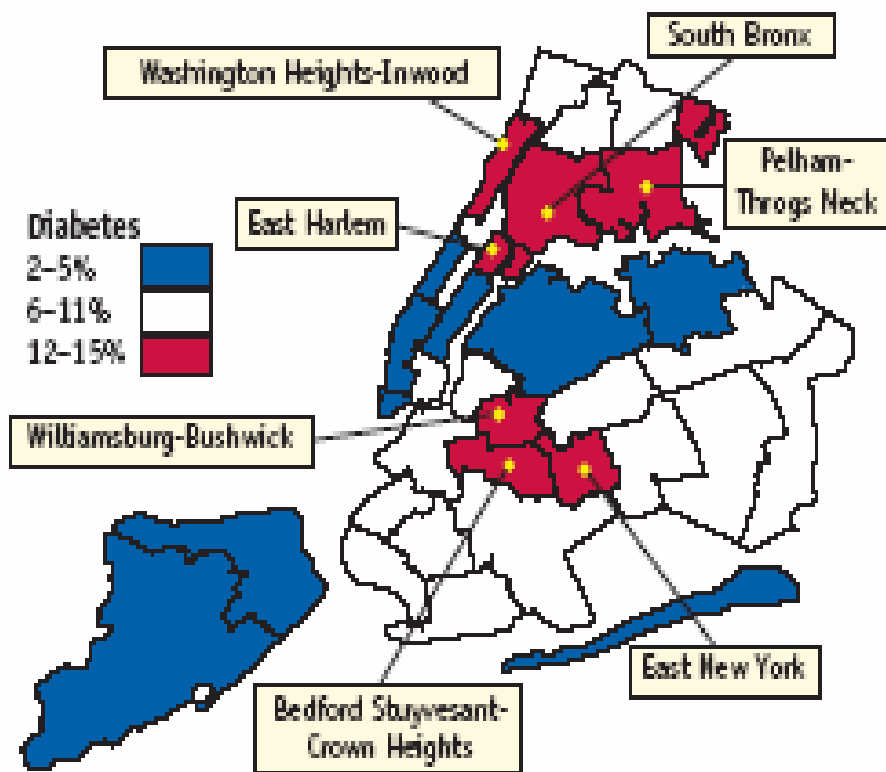
24% of children in NYC were obese in 2003, compared to 18% nationally in 2003-2004



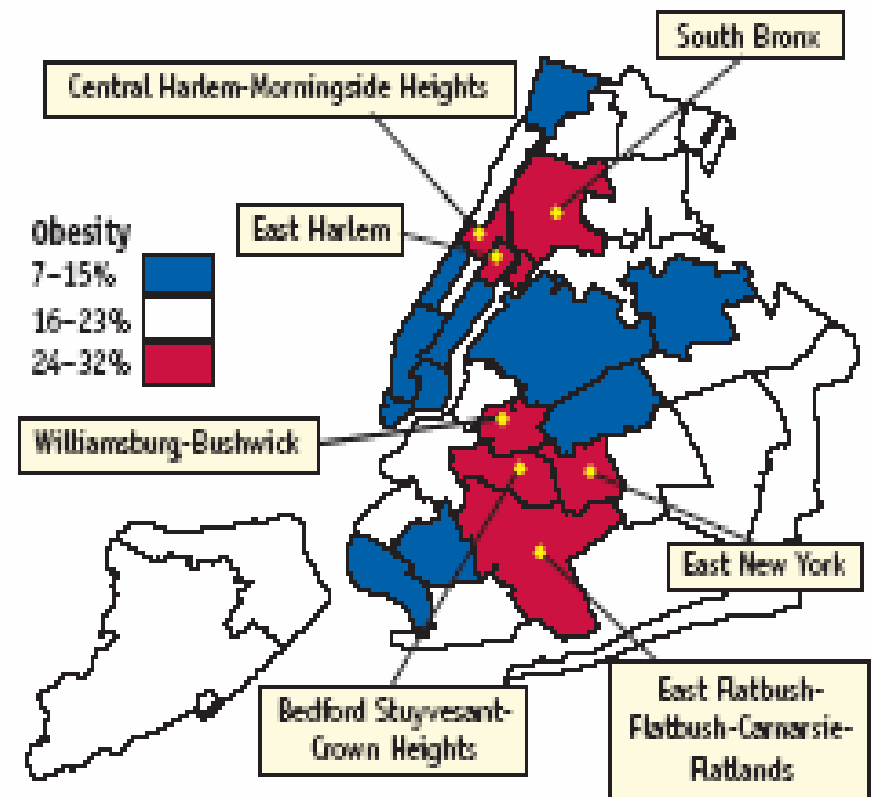
SOURCE: 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)

Neighborhood Health Disparities

Diabetes in NYC's Neighborhoods



Obesity in NYC's Neighborhoods



Addressing Health Disparities in NYC

District Public Health Offices:

- **South Bronx**
- **East and Central Harlem**
- **North and Central Brooklyn**
(Bedford-Stuyvesant & Bushwick)



Physical Activity in NYC Schools: Behavioral & Environmental Assessments

Behavioral:

- High school students are not getting 30 minutes of daily physical activity
 - 48.9% of students do not have daily PE class
 - 10% of students did not participate in any form of physical activity in the past 7 days

Environmental:

- PE regulations are not enforced
- Lack of physical activity after-school programs



NYS DOH Healthy Heart Grant 2005-2010

- Reach 100 schools over 5 years
- Major objectives in original grant:
 - Increase physical activity opportunities in NYC schools
 - Implement Wellness Councils in schools
 - Implement wellness policies in schools



What is a Wellness Council?

- Group of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students who:
 - Assess the school health environment
 - Work towards improving nutrition and physical activity for the entire school community
 - Implement policy and environmental changes



Federal Mandate

- National WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 stated that . . .
 - all school districts with a federally-funded school meals program must develop and implement wellness policies that address nutrition and physical activity by the start of the 2006-2007 school year.



DOE Wellness Policy

- Created to comply w/ federal mandate
- No communication or enforcement of the policy at a school level
- Available online on DOE website



School Criteria for Inclusion

- Elementary schools in three DPHOs

Additional:

- SPARK
- Empowerment schools
- School Food Plus





SPARK in Action!



Big Changes to Program Structure

- Added nutrition objectives to the grant for:
 - Healthy fundraisers, healthy snacks (based on school priorities)
- Interns
- SPARK
- Partnership with FoodChange



Community Partnerships

Formed partnerships with:

- FoodChange: Leader Training for schools, free program toolkits for school events & focus groups
- Cornell Cooperative Extension: parent education
- New York Road Runners: Mighty Milers program - school-wide physical activity
- Columbia, NYU & Hunter's internship programs: graduate student interns
- DOE HealthTeacher - K-5 nutrition education curriculum



Overview of Roles and Responsibilities

DOHMH & FoodChange

- Trainings & assistance
- Toolkits
- Interns
- Programs
- Grant opportunities
- Networking opportunities

Schools

- Letter of Agreement
- Attend Leaders Training
- Complete School Health Index (SHI)
- 1 meeting per month
- Wellness policy



Intern Role & Responsibilities

- Interns assigned to new schools in their first year of participation in the WC project
- Role of the intern:
 - Guide and support the Wellness Council
 - Provide nutrition education workshops
 - Connect schools with programs
 - Collect assessment/evaluation data



Program Implementation – Timeline

- School recruitment
- Intern recruitment
- Training
- Wellness Council initiation
- School needs assessment
- Program implementation
- Policy initiation and implementation
- Evaluation throughout



School Recruitment

- DOHMH Program Coordinator schedules initial visit w/ school principal and other staff
- Discuss school interests and priorities around health issues
- Describe Wellness Council program goals, benefits for school, roles and responsibilities in the partnership



Lessons Learned: Principal Support is Key

- Obtain Letter of Agreement, agreeing to:
 - Leader Training (send 2 school reps)
 - Complete the School Health Index (SHI)
 - Hold at least 1 WC meeting/ month & document
 - Provide documentation for all WC events
 - Write at least one school wellness policy



Lessons Learned: Partner with School Wellness Council Leader

- Invite potential WC leader to initial meeting with principal (Parent Coordinator, PE teacher)
- Ensure one is assigned on the Letter of Agreement – can be changed
- Fosters school empowerment and sustainability



Intern Recruitment & Supervision

- Connect with graduate program advisors
- Send recruitment email to students
- Interview and hire
- Assign to schools
- Biweekly reporting



Initial Intern and School Leader Trainings

- Intern training – 4 hours
 - How to recruit members, culture of working in schools, how to complete SHI
- WC Leader Training – school reps and interns – all day training (9-4)
 - Meeting facilitation, program planning, nutrition education
- Binders – resources for free community based nutrition education and physical activity opportunities for students, school staff and parents.



Wellness Council Initiation

- Wellness Council Leader & Intern recruit members to form WC:
 - PTA meetings
 - Faculty meetings
 - Parent-teacher conference, etc
- Aim for diversity of members in terms of school roles
- Aim for 5-10 members



School Assessment

- School Health Index (SHI) – nationally recognized CDC school health assessment tool

SHI Modules Based on CDC's Coordinated School Health Program Model



Lessons Learned: Structured Programs

- Schools need structured ideas (program in a box)
- New this year: Toolkits to host school-wide community events around monthly themes promoting nutrition and physical activity
- Way to involve entire school community, raise awareness, educate, and prepare school to write wellness policy



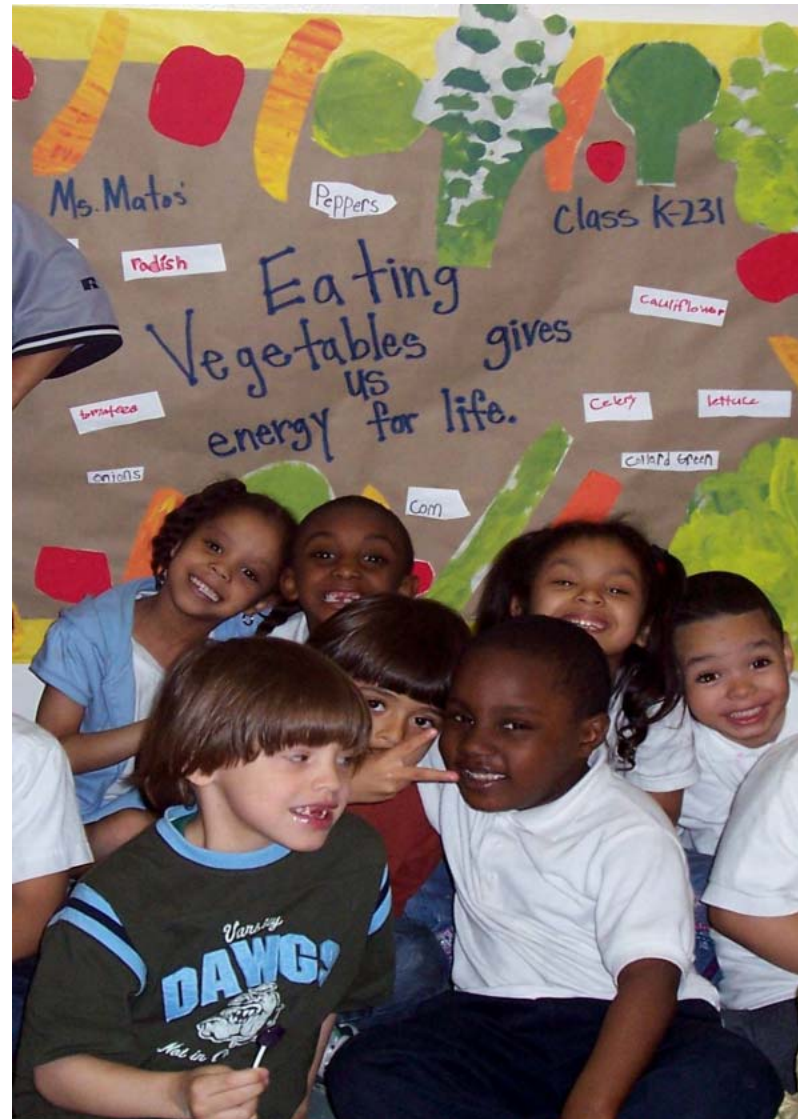
Sampling of Monthly Toolkits

Month	Theme
* November	Harvest Event
* January	Get Active Indoors
* February	Healthy Fundraiser
March	School Breakfast Month
* April	Healthy Snack Fair



*Asterisks denote the larger toolkits – those that include equipment and/or materials. The smaller toolkits only include suggested activities to promote these themes.

Sample Toolkit: Have a Healthy Snack Fair



Lessons Learned: Mini-Grants for Sustainability

- Promote policy implementation and sustainability
- New competitive mini-grant for returning schools:
 - 3 mini-grants available of \$5,000 each
 - One for a school in each area –
 - Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem



Lessons Learned: Mini-Grants for Sustainability

- Criteria for **returning** schools:
 - Wellness policy & SHI completed
 - Submit grant application with:
 - Policy implementation plan
 - Grant spending plan
- Criteria for **new** schools:
 - Same, but will also accumulate points this year which will help in selecting winning schools



Lessons Learned: Incentive for SHI Completion

- Submit checklist by **Nov. 30, 2007**
 - Letter of Agreement
 - Form Wellness Council
 - Attend Leaders Training
 - Have at least 2 WC meetings
 - Complete SHI by November 30, 2007
- Receive \$1,000 bonus to kick-start WC



NYC School Wellness Council Project: Current Status

- Total schools recruited to date: 53
- Number with active WC: 38
 - Determined by recent Leader Training attendance (17 returning & 21 new)
- Number with written wellness policies: 12 (of 17 returning active)
 - Waiting to get a few more as part of the mini-grant application due in two weeks



Barriers to Implementation of Wellness Policy

- Policy mandate but no enforcement
- Organizational culture: structured, directive leadership
- Competing school priorities
- Council members/school staff knowledge & attitudes regarding nutrition & physical activity - getting teachers to role model good eating habits



Successes



- **Central Park East II** in Harlem completed SHI, taught nutrition ed to parents, hired yoga instructor to train teachers to do yoga w/ students, adopted NYRR Program, hosted nutrition week, provided healthy snacks during Sports Day, facilitated a nutrition poster contest in all grades w/art teacher, and supported PTA in creating healthy cookbook.
- **PS 123** in Brooklyn hosted a health week, adopted NYRR Program, introduced Everyday Gourmet (healthy lunches brought to school) to teachers, piloted a nutrition ed program in 4th & 5th grades, and trained PE teacher & one school aide in SPARK.



Successes



- **PS 133** in Harlem hosted school health/fitness day, implemented one week breakfast curriculum in science classes, and started a Weight Watchers Club with WC members losing up to 30 lbs.
- **PS 145** in Brooklyn started a healthy kids club, increased p.a. in the classroom, instituted a no junk food policy at the school carnival day, and gave out 80 binders that describe ways to incorporate p.a. throughout the day to classroom teachers.
- **PS 57** in Harlem instituted birthday clubs, bringing fresh fruit & water to student birthday parties, and implemented the NYRR Program.



Tips for Success in Schools

- Change takes time – be patient & persistent
- Small changes can have a BIG impact
- Make it fun for kids, parents & school staff
- Continually look back at goals, assess how the council is doing and celebrate successes; once WC accomplishes goals, make new ones!



Thank you! Questions?

Marcela Betzer
School Wellness Program Coordinator
mbetzer@health.nyc.gov
212-676-2552

AUTHORS:

Marcela Betzer, MPH
Caroline Fitz-Roy, MA
Candace Young, MS

