

## Passport to a Healthy Future in Citrus County, Florida As of July 2008

### **Healthy People 2010 Objective:**

19.15 Increase the proportion of children and adolescents aged 6 to 19 years whose intake of meals and snacks at school contributes to good overall dietary quality.

### **Issue:**

The Citrus County Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Program reports that one in four children, age two through five years old, are at risk of becoming overweight or are overweight. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children with a body mass index (BMI) over the recommended range are at a higher risk for becoming obese adults. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that 80 percent of children who were overweight between the ages of 10 and 15 were obese adults by age 25. Adult obesity increased in severity if the child became overweight before eight years old.

Poor diet and lack of exercise contribute to the obesity problem. The Citrus County Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data reveals only 27 percent of residents, 18 years of age and older, eat the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables and 26 percent of the adults report having a sedentary lifestyle.

### **Intervention:**

To decrease these statistics, the Citrus County Health Department (CCHD) collaborated with a WIC registered dietitian and a nutrition educator to teach elementary school students, from kindergarten through third grade, about nutrition and physical activity. The CCHD team used Read for Health, FCAT Benchmarks, and Sunshine State Standards Benchmarks as a starting point to create the Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program.

The Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program classes are held once a week for six weeks with each class lasting up to 40 minutes. At the end of each class, students write at least one healthy example learned that day in their passport. A program administrator places a sticker on the student's page signifying a passport stamp. The student then moves on to the next class. At the end of the six weeks, students sign a pledge and, thereby, commit to a healthy lifestyle. Their parents are informed with a weekly letter, which engages the parent in the process. The letter also informs the family of healthy behaviors that they can practice at home. The class subjects include:

- The Food Guide Pyramid
- Fruits and vegetables
- Low-fat milk
- Physical activity
- Water and other drinks
- Smart snacks

Initially funded from a settlement award, the Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program is now financially supported by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, the Board of County Commissioners, the Citrus County Health Department, and the Citrus County School Board Nutrition Department.

### **Impact:**

The Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program classes are taught at all Citrus County elementary schools. Over 3,000 students have learned the importance of proper nutrition and daily physical activity. The school cafeteria staff have reported a decrease

in whole milk purchases and an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption by students. Teachers have testified that children are eating healthier meals and bring healthier snacks into the classroom. The next goal for the Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program will be to include the Citrus County middle schools, which will increase the number of children who will benefit from nutrition and physical activity education.

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