

Project H.E.A.L.T.H. Executive Summary

(Project Health Education & Life Transforming Habits)

An After-School Program to Prevent Obesity and Diabetes Among Children and Adolescents

In partnership with the Institute for African-American Health, Inc. (IAAH), 100 Black Men of America, Inc., Leon County Schools, Leon County Commission, Members of the Medical Community, Governmental Entities, Private Industry and Families

TARGET SCHOOLS

**Tallahassee-Leon County
School District
&
FAMU School District**

*Mr. Jackie Pons
Superintendent-Leon County*

*Cheryl Jennings, Ph.D.
Superintendent & Director
FAMU School District*

F.A.M.U. – D.R.S.

*Rose Campbell, Ph.D.
Principal, Elementary School*

*Mr. Richard Richardson
Principal, Secondary Schools*

Bond Elementary School

*Pam Hightower, Ph.D.,
Principal*

Nims Middle Schools

*Ms. Pam Hayman
Principal*

Rickards High School

*Pink Hightower, Ph.D.,
Principal*

**Institute for
African-American Health**
Joseph L. Webster, Sr., MD
President & Chief Executive
Officer

Project H.E.A.L.T.H. Office
Joseph L. Webster, Sr., MD
Principal Investigator

*Location/Mailing Address:
2048 Centre Pointe Lane
Tallahassee, FL 32308*

*(850) 877-3783 [Office]
(850) 878-9329 [Fax]
ProjectHEALTH04@aol.com*

The Problem

According to national research data, obesity-linked diabetes has recently emerged as one of the leading health problems among African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native American children. Moreover, medical experts are warning the public about the risks of obesity and its association with other health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure as leading killers among African Americans.

According to the National Diabetics Education Program (NDEP), “diabetes is the leading cause of adult blindness, lower limb amputations and kidney failure.” It can cause heart disease and stroke, and even death if untreated. Increasingly, many of these problems are occurring in teens and young adults, especially those who develop diabetes during childhood. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that almost 16 million Americans have diabetes. It is estimated that, annually, Americans spend more than \$700 million for diabetes and related illnesses.

Diabetes is a condition exacerbated by obesity. Obesity is a condition characterized by excessive bodily fat. Being overweight, older than ten years of age, experiencing puberty, and having a family member who has type 2 diabetes are all risk factors linked to diabetes, a chronic disease in which the body does not make or properly use the hormone, insulin.

There are two main types of diabetes. Although the incidence of type 1 diabetes (formerly known as juvenile-onset diabetes) is increasing and it occurs most often in children and young adults, approximately 90% to 99% of the diabetes disease burden in America is attributed to type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes has historically been seen in people over 40. Although there are no national data on type 2 diabetes in children, “some clinics report that one-third to one-half of all new cases of childhood diabetes are type 2,” according to the National Institute of Health (NIH).

The NDEP reports that now that more American children and adolescents are overweight and significantly less active, type 2 diabetes is more prevalent among young people. Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and African American children who have a family history of diabetes and who, themselves, are obese, are at a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Further, it is estimated that thousands of children have diabetes that have not yet been diagnosed.

What is promising is that diabetes is treatable. However, children are more likely than adults *not* to take medication as prescribed. Children are more prone to consume foods that aggravate diabetes and its symptoms by increasing blood glucose levels. Further, children, especially those who are obese, fail to realize the relationship between regular physical exercise and the extent to which exercise lowers blood glucose levels.

Consequently, diabetes can be seriously debilitating. While it is recognized as a disability (Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Disabilities Education Act of 1991; Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992), more must be done to educate parents and school districts about this national problem. Inasmuch as school districts, nationally, and the target schools associated with this pilot study accommodate students with visible disabilities in exceptional student education (ESE) classes, children with diabetes do not receive the same services as do students who are profoundly handicapped, hearing impaired, or autistic.

Federal laws require that an individualized assessment be conducted on any child with diabetes. The major reasons why schools do not focus attention on diabetes include: (1) the lack of the students being diagnosed; (2) teachers being uninformed; (3) failure of teachers to recommend students to social workers for diabetic screenings; (4) other than being obese, students show no outward indication that they either have diabetes or are at-risk of becoming diabetic; and (5) physicians and the medical community rarely team with schools to provide students and their parents with the education they need to transform health habits jeopardizing the lives of students and their academic performance.

Recommended Solutions: Project H.E.A.L.T.H.

Project H.E.A.L.T.H., an after school program and pilot study was designed to link the medical community with public schools, families, business' & government leaders as stakeholders in saving our children.

Few studies are conducted to understand why school-aged African American children and other racial/ethnic minority children are less likely to improve their overall body politic by changing eating habits, increasing activity levels, monitoring weight or decreasing high-risk behaviors.

This program provides educational training, medical knowledge, physical intervention, nutritional advice and psychosocial support, to increase productivity at every level for a population at calculated risk. A collaborative consortium headed by the Institute of African-American Health (IAAH) was created to effectively and efficiently intervene by sharing in the responsibilities of education, training, and follow-up care of our youth. Established in 1993 and headquartered in Tallahassee, Fla., the IAAH is setting the wheel in motion for Project H.E.A.L.T.H. to become a national Health Education & Life Transforming Habits (H.E.A.L.T.H.) initiative designed to study obesity and diabetes in children from 6 to 18 years of age. Furthermore, it will become Florida's first statewide initiative of this nature.

In partnership with Leon County Public Schools, Florida A&M University and its Developmental Research School, the Tallahassee Area Chapter of the 100 Black Men of America, Inc., the Institute for African American Health, Inc. (IAAH) and various other entities, Project H.E.A.L.T.H. will be implemented as a pilot study within four public schools in Tallahassee: Leonard-Wesson Elementary School, Nims Middle School, Rickards High School and the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School.

Project Goals & Objectives

The major goal of Project H.E.A.L.T.H. is to provide education and training about obesity and its effects on the young body, thereby preventing or decreasing obesity in children and adolescents. The hopes are that through the efforts of this project other serious illnesses or diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and kidney failure will be eradicated among our black youth. By increasing the activity levels of children, monitoring their weight, sugar and salt intake and other high-risk behaviors, Project H.E.A.L.T.H. aspires to prevent or decrease obesity, and work with schools, parents and community resources in order to promote healthy attitudes, lifestyles and communities.

The project aspires to improve the self-esteem of students who are considered obese according to medical literature in order to improve their overall health and educational performance. The project will also elevate the general level of knowledge about obesity, increasing the overall physical activity, improving general nutritional knowledge of school aged children, teachers and parents. The intentions are to decrease the number of obese children, decrease the number of students becoming diabetic, improve overall educational performance among children in Leon County schools and cut down on the spiraling cost of loss of lives among youth for preventable diseases.

Project Participants

The project participants would include self-identified students in grades k-12 who attend four Leon County public schools: Rickards High, Nims Middle, Bond Elementary and the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School.

The Process

Project H.E.A.L.T.H. will survey students and their parents. Experienced teachers and nurses who have been trained by Project staff will co-team to provide a planned curriculum to students. The curriculum will focus on the prevention and control of diabetes by stressing the necessity of engaging in regular physical exercise; eating foods that do not elevate glucose levels and, overall, practicing proper nutritional habits; taking medication as prescribed; monitoring blood glucose level; and knowing the consequences of the disease if it is not controlled.

An array of teaching methods, techniques and delivery modalities will be used. These include, but are not limited to, guest lecturers from medical partners, and representatives from health organizations, a virtual classroom, videotapes, and computers will also be used to enhance learning. The local school district has its own television station and Project H.E.A.L.T.H. staff will utilize its services.

Public service announcements will also appear on other local television stations. Press conferences and newspapers will be used to educate the public and project participants not so much about the project, but about the impact of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity on health. Since the duration of the study is five (5) years, students will be followed for a period of five years or until they graduate from high school.

EVALUATION & QUANTIFIABLE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The success of the project will be determined by achievement measurements and goals determined by the team of experts that include physicians, pharmacists, social scientists, nurses, civic leaders, educators, political leaders and grassroots persons.

Conclusion:

It is expected that by increasing the activity levels of children, monitoring their school performance, monitoring their weight, sugar and salt intake and other high-risk behaviors, students will adapt and correlate good health with good performance. This study intends to go beyond biological factors contributing to issues of obesity and diabetes by identifying those values, attitudes and beliefs that promote unhealthy practices that lead to harmful lifestyles in communities.

It is important to note that this is not a treatment study; however, staff will inform parents if students need to be under the treatment of a physician. Staff will also, with parents' permission, refer students to social service agencies that can assist them in locating a physician for treatment.

The intentions of this project are to train and educate students, parents and the community about the impact of uncontrolled diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity, and how to improve the quality of life. These are expected to result in overall improvements in the level of education and health of our next generation.

Finally, the project participants are the primary concern of the project's leadership. This project will establish baseline data for the Leon County area and the state of Florida to help improve two major crises in this state, health disparities and education of the youth. The data collected from this study will be instrumental to scientist and educators in every discipline in improve the quality of life for Floridians, as well as Americans for generations to come. The intentions of this project are to better educate multiple generations about the problem of childhood obesity and diabetes and the transformation of lifelong habits.