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Schools Across the Country Combat the Obesity Epidemic

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by [Jen O'Neill](#)

As the childhood obesity epidemic continues to broaden across the world, health advocates and policy-makers are turning to schools in an effort to combat the problem.

Fighting Obesity

With an estimated 9 million children suffering from obesity in the United States, it has been called “one of the pandemics of the 21st century” and [Arkansas](#) is making active efforts to tackle the crisis. Since the state aligned itself with the requirements outlined in the [Act 1220 of 2003](#), Arkansas has had high hopes of being a “model state” for addressing obesity issues among young people. A recent report indicates that 61 percent of school districts in the state have implemented policies against allowing junk food to be sold in school vending machines. To track students’ health progress, numerous schools are measuring the [Body Mass Index \(BMI\)](#) of students.

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Researchers have pinpointed a mix of factors that have led to soaring rates in obesity among children and young people. Some of the contributing factors include community infrastructure that deters physical activity, and the swapping out of nutritious food choices for high-calorie and fatty foods in the name of convenience. Meanwhile, as schools and communities work to help overweight students, “[competitive foods](#)”—which compete with official breakfast, lunch and snack programs—create an additional challenge for [schools trying to promote nutritious options](#).

[FindingDulcinea's Weight Loss Web Guide](#) has resources for helping people of all ages lose weight in a healthful manner.

California is another state that recently received attention [for banning trans fats in school menus](#), in an effort to confront the obesity issue, specifically among youth. Although Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has spoken about the epidemic, he’s recently vetoed bills that would directly battle the problem. However, last year he signed legislation banning schools from serving foods with trans fats.

The childhood obesity issue goes far beyond the United States. Ángel Gil Hernández, executive director of the University of Granada’s Institute of Food Nutrition and Technology, conducted a recent study which concluded that [17 percent of children in Spain](#) are experiencing health-related problems brought on by obesity. Hernandez predicts that if this trend continues, by 2020, the “cases of type II diabetes will have quadrupled.”

Obesity among children stretches beyond socioeconomic borders, although [poorer communities are often hit the hardest](#).

With over 42 percent of obese or overweight Bronx elementary school students, Borough President Adolfo Carrión has requested funding from the New York City Department of Education. The funding will be used for upgrading, or in some cases, creating, gyms and physical fitness programs for schools that do not have sufficient facilities for exercise. According to a report that surveyed 200 schools, to date, “23% reported not having a gymnasium and 22% do not have outdoor facilities for physical education activities.”

Sources in this Story

- **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:** [Arkansas Schools, Parents Adjusting Well to State Efforts to Curb Obesity](#)
- **MedicineNet.com:** [School Nutrition: Making the Grade?](#)
- **Ventura County Star:** [Governor asked to make good on fighting obesity](#)
- **Science Daily:** [One In Four Obese School-aged Children In Spain Suffers Metabolic](#)
- **Daily News:** [Bronx President Adolfo Carrión Bemoans Schools' Phys Ed Problems](#)

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Although [video games](#) play a role in weight gain among children, ironically, interactive video games, such as Wii, have become popular and fun approaches that many schools have taken to enhance the fitness experience for kids. Although medical researchers say it's not an adequate replacement for real exercise since Wii helped to burn only 60 calories per hour, many believe it is still better than no exercise at all.

- **findingDulcinea:** [Is the Wii Fit Game a Substitute for the Gym?](#)
- **eSchool News:** [Technology brings 'new P.E.' to schools](#)
- **eSchoolnews.com:** [Lance Armstrong debuts new wellness site](#)

Additionally, 10,000 physical education programs across the country are embracing video games and other high tech ways to ["motivate"](#) kids, particularly those who do not ordinarily play sports.

Lance Armstrong's new wellness site, [Livestrong.com](#), provides physical fitness and health advice, along with information about cancer prevention with an [interactive Web site](#) to facilitate students' progress in fighting obesity. Moreover, health experts say that the "hands-on" approach to the site will "reinforce [the] health advice."

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