



# Health + Fitness-Based Curriculum for Schools: **A R E W E R E A D Y ?**

By Lynn Durocher, MS, MBA

**G**eorge Bush has ruled “No Child Left Behind”...what about “No Child Left With a Big Behind?” It seems as if we have forgotten the simple fact that without proper nutrition children cannot learn to their fullest potential. Some 75% of children in the United States are malnourished. In the majority of cases this is not from eating too little, but from not eating enough of the right foods.

## **Reframing The Issue**

In the past, health and physical education classes have been the primary methods of communicating the importance of nutrition and exercise. Today it seems as if standardized testing and budget cuts have

forced these two issues into the background. Attending physical education classes once or twice a week does not meet the movement needs of children today. It also does not allow adequate time to educate them on the importance of exercise in their everyday lives. Children not only learn specific, subject material in school but they also learn to place more value on the subjects that are emphasized. With curriculum downplaying the importance of health and nutrition, of fitness and exercise, children will follow that lead. If schools are meant to prepare students for the future — yet leave out this health and fitness component — children will be led to a future of being unhealthy and overweight.



## RIGHT SIZE KIDS:

Right Size Kids was founded in 2004 as a specialized program for overweight children offering individual and group fitness, nutrition and behavior modification programs. The professional staff continues to educate and treat overweight children and families in both the clinical setting and in external venues such as schools. The organization also offers a self-managed, home-based multidisciplinary program called Success At Home™ which allows families to follow a structured program under the guidance of their local family care physician and with the remote support of the Right Size Kids professional staff. In 2007, Right Size Kids released a comprehensive educational curriculum focused on nutrition, fitness, self-esteem and behavior modification. The Healthy Adventures for Kids™ program is available in two versions: a healthcare provider edition and a non-healthcare provider edition.

### What We Lack

The increase in the number of overweight and obese children in this country would lead one to believe that both the children and their parents are not being taught how to incorporate healthy behaviors into their lives, and this results in making unhealthy decisions. How can parents teach their children about proper nutrition when all they learned was the first version of the Food Pyramid? In our pediatric weight management practice, we continue to be astounded by the lack of knowledge of proper nutritional, as well as the lack of understanding of the key role it plays in child development. We see this not only in parents, but also in the people who are providing them advice and information: their healthcare providers. (Just last week a parent was chastised by her pediatrician for not giving her six-year-old child enough juice. “How will she get the Vitamin C she needs?” preached the doctor. “How about trying fruits and vegetables?” would have been my response.) Unfortunately, it would require an act of Congress to put a plan in place that would educate every adult in the U.S. about nutrition. It is critical that we exploit the opportunity we have with children in school to educate them to be healthy from pre-school through postgraduate work.

### Research-based Action

Addressing the issue early is key. According to research (Wisemandle, et. al., 2000,) the largest increase in overweight among girls was seen between kindergarten and first grade. For boys this leap occurred between first and second grade. In addition, intervening before age 10 may introduce critical lifestyle and behavior influences prior to changes in resting metabolic rate that have been shown to occur in both obese and normal-weight children.

With this knowledge it makes the most sense to target children when they are young, before there is a problem. Prevention of weight gain is easier, less costly, and more effective than treating obese adults after the problem has been fully developed and the life style an accepted way of life. 🍷

### REFERENCE

Wisemandle, W., Maynard L.M., Guo, S.S., Siervugel, R.M. (2000). Childhood weight, stature and body mass index among never overweight, early-inset, overweight, and late-inset overweight groups. *Pediatrics*, 106:E14.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn Durocher, MS, MBA is the President of Right Size Kids (<http://www.rightsizekids.com/>).