

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION



*Lack of physical activity and poor nutrition contribute to overweight and obesity among Rhode Island students. Overweight and obesity are associated with significant health risks, higher rates of absenteeism, lower test scores, and social and emotional problems.*

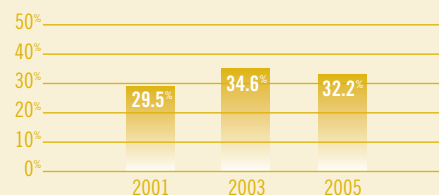
Results from the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show improvement in some risk factors for overweight and obesity among Rhode Island students, such as the amount of time children are physically active during physical education class.

However, about one-third of students continue to report insufficient moderate and vigorous physical activity on a weekly basis (see Graph 1), with female students getting less physical activity than male students. There has also been a decrease in consumption of the recommended servings of fruit, vegetables, and milk (see Graph 2).

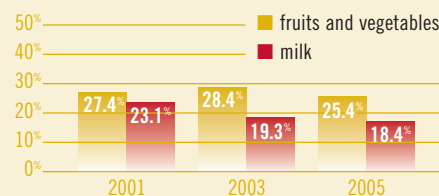
Data from the 2005–2006 School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) survey on television, computer, and video game use also reflect a lack of physical activity among students, with many students watching 2–4 or more hours of television after school (see Graph 3). A majority of students also report playing computer and video games before or after school, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels (see Graph 4).

Further, researchers at the Center for Weight and Health at the University of California at Berkeley concluded that overweight children and adolescents are more likely to consume a few large meals per day rather than smaller, more frequent meals and are more likely to skip breakfast. SALT data show that the percentage of students who eat breakfast decreases with age (see Graph 5).

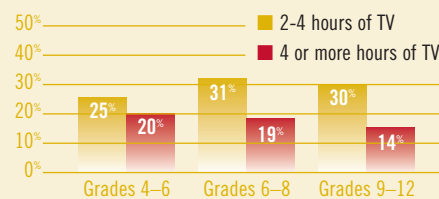
**GRAPH 1:** Percent of students with insufficient moderate and vigorous physical activity in the past week, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



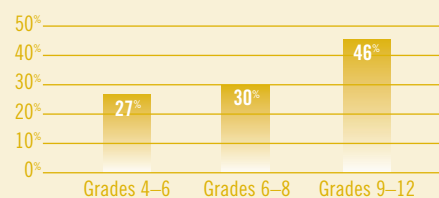
**GRAPH 2:** Percent of students who ate 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables, or drank 3 or more glasses of milk per day in the past week, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



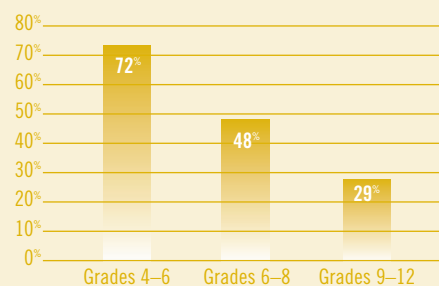
**GRAPH 3:** Percent of students watching television before or after school on an average day, 2005–2006 (SALT).



**GRAPH 4:** Percent of students who do not play computer/video games before or after school on an average day, 2005–2006 (SALT).



**GRAPH 5:** Percent of students who report eating breakfast everyday, 2005–2006 (SALT).



# WHAT SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS CAN DO TO HELP PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND GOOD NUTRITION

Schools can use a variety of approaches to help reduce the risk of overweight and obesity for their students to improve students' health and academic performance.

## Discussion Questions

District and school leaders can use the following questions to start a conversation in the school community about ways to promote physical activity and good nutrition.

1. How do students in our school or district compare to the rest of the state?
2. Are students getting enough physical activity and good nutrition during the school day?
3. How are overweight and obesity affecting students' ability to learn, their self-esteem, and the school culture?
4. Are our physical activity and nutrition policies properly implemented, enforced, and communicated to the school community?
5. Are the messages we give students about nutrition in the cafeteria or hallways the same as those we give in the classroom?
6. Are our physical education and nutrition education programs aligned with state standards?
7. Are there other ways students could be active during the school day?
8. Are there ways we could support families in increasing physical activity and good nutrition?
9. What can we do to make our staff better role models?
10. What are our goals around physical activity, nutrition, and obesity and how can we achieve them?

## Best Practices

Below is a list of best practices—policies, activities, or programs to reduce overweight and obesity—that other schools have implemented successfully.

- » Implement a daily, high-quality physical education program for all students throughout the school year and do not allow exemptions from physical education for participation in other activities (e.g., interscholastic sports, band, chorus, academic classes).
- » Offer a variety of interscholastic athletics, intramural activities, and non-competitive physical activity clubs for all students, with no fees or fees that are waived for any student who cannot afford to pay.
- » Provide skills-focused nutrition education as part of a comprehensive K–12 health education curriculum.
- » Promote healthy eating with strategies that reduce the prices of nutritious food and beverage choices sold to students and increase the prices of less nutritious choices.
- » Collect suggestions from students, families, and school staff on nutritious food preferences and strategies to promote healthy eating.
- » Provide students with information on the nutrition and caloric content of available foods.
- » Conduct taste tests with students to determine food preferences for nutritious items.
- » Provide information to students about nutrition, food marketing, and food safety, and promote the school meal program by having students visit the cafeteria.
- » Include physical activity and nutrition education in after-school programming.

*“School can be a powerful catalyst for change when it comes to preventing and reducing overweight and obesity.”*

*David Satcher, MD, former U.S. Surgeon General, 2005*

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For additional ideas, visit [www.thriveri.org/issues/physical\\_activity](http://www.thriveri.org/issues/physical_activity) or [www.thriveri.org/issues/nutrition](http://www.thriveri.org/issues/nutrition).

[www.thriveri.org](http://www.thriveri.org)

