



Ideas, Commitment, Action, Results: Model Projects Advancing the Cause of School Wellness

This Field Report spotlights three grassroots Action for Healthy Kids Team projects designed to “move the needle” on school wellness and Wellness Policy awareness, development, and implementation. In Michigan, Action for Healthy Kids Team members centered their efforts on a nuts-and-bolts toolkit intended to aid Local Wellness Policy implementation. Focusing on nutrition, the Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team had the important issue of school breakfast firmly in its sights. And for the Alabama Action for Healthy Kids Team, it was about enhancing school-based physical activity in creative, innovative, cost-effective ways. Easily replicated, these three demonstration projects illustrate Action for Healthy Kids’ sum and substance: dedicated groups of committed volunteers trying new tactics, creating new approaches, exploring new directions, and learning invaluable, “sharable” lessons — all in the service of steadily advancing the cause of school wellness.

Michigan

Providing the Tool that Michigan Schools Need

The federal school Wellness Policy mandate, requiring all U.S. school

districts to create and put in place a Local Wellness Policy, has significantly impacted the activities and efforts of Action for Healthy Kids Teams. The Michigan Team is a good example of a strong and effective focus on aiding Wellness Policy implementation through grassroots action.

“It’s literally a *kit*. A box. A grab-bag of files, spiral-bound booklets, single sheets of advice and instruction, and multimedia CD ROMs and DVDs. And it’s meant to be an all-in-one-place reference and solution.”

Larry Merx, co-chair of the Michigan Action for Healthy Kids Team and senior program coordinator at the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan, is talking about the **Healthy School Toolkit** prepared and made available by his Team to school districts across the state.

“We didn’t really time the release of the kit to coordinate with the new legislation — but in fact it turned out our timing couldn’t have been better,” Merx says, referring to the Local Wellness Policy mandate that went into effect in 2006.

“We rolled out with the kit in December 2005 — 4,000 of them, in fact —

KEY ELEMENTS OF MICHIGAN'S HEALTHY SCHOOL TOOLKIT

- Special introduction for a variety of levels of school personnel
- Background information on Action for Healthy Kids
- “Making the Case for School Wellness” DVD
- “Getting Started” guidance on developing, adopting, and implementing Healthy School Environment Policies
- Model, *Michigan-specific* Local Wellness Policy template
- Up-front assessment device, the “Healthy School Action Tool”
- Complete action plan for implementing healthy eating policies
- Detailed instructions for implementing a physical education and physical activity action plan
- Guidance on how to “get the message out” and “communicate your success”
- Resource list for further information

The complete Michigan Healthy School Toolkit may be accessed online at <http://www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/HealthySchoolToolkit.html>

distributing them to anyone in the state who was interested in having one. We launched the kit in a series of statewide trainings in Michigan’s various Action for Healthy Kids regions, passing out nearly the entire first press-run of the kit.”

The mandate virtually insured that Michigan’s Healthy School Toolkit would take off, as school districts suddenly felt the pressure to comply. Merx estimates that the kit has so far made its way into 727 Michigan schools and directly affected almost 427,000 students, from the Upper Peninsula to urban Detroit in the southeastern part of the state. The anecdotal feedback has been extremely encouraging. The Healthy School Toolkit is a concise but complete reference incorporating pragmatic reference pieces like “Making the Case for Healthy Kids,” “Tips & Tools to Help Implement Michigan’s Healthy Food and Beverage Policies,” and “How to Have Healthy School Parties”; plus sections on community/public relations; organizing and coordinating school health “team” meetings; and how schools can get away from using food as a reward for performance and achievement.

A Guide to Policy Implementation

Nick Drzal, a co-chair with Larry Merx of the Michigan Action for Healthy Kids Team, is a nutrition education consultant for the Michigan Department of Education. He cites Michigan’s 2003 adoption of its Healthy Food and Beverage Policy as the real genesis of the Healthy School Toolkit.

“Once we had that policy in place,” Drzal explains, “it only made sense that the logical next step was helping schools implement it. A policy means nothing without giving people some guidance on how to enact it. So we were careful that everything in the kit carry the same message as, and be supportive of, Michigan’s Healthy Food and Beverage Policy. That it then subsequently aligned perfectly with the federal wellness mandate was a happy accident.”

Drzal points out that it is important to the Michigan Action for Healthy Kids Team to produce materials that put control in the hands of local schools and districts, and that the information not be perceived as “directives from Lansing or Ann Arbor.” Michigan has six distinct regions, and Michigan Action for Healthy Kids is interested in localities developing solutions based on local buy-in.

“If you go through the kit,” Drzal says, “you’ll see it’s very ‘local’ in tone: getting started in *your* district; what does Michigan-wide legislation mean to *you*; how should *your* district respond, etc. Also, we broke up the toolkit according to the legal standards themselves — there’s a healthy eating piece, a nutrition-standards piece, a physical-activity requirements piece, and then tons of guidance on *how to implement*.”

Drzal admits that, like many states, Michigan is still dealing with many districts struggling simply to *develop* Local Wellness Policies, much less *implement* them, but he points out that the Michigan toolkit, for such districts, serves as much an education function as an implementation one.

“Districts are so overwhelmed, sometimes, with everyday challenges,” Drzal says, “that Wellness Policy information has to be presented in a very palatable, easy way to get districts to ‘bite’ and then buy into it. I think our kit has served that purpose, too.”

9 LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MICHIGAN PROJECT

There are numerous lessons from the story of Michigan Action for Healthy Kids Team's Healthy School Toolkit.

Among them:

- Wellness Policy toolkits should be “all in one place” reference solutions.
- The emphasis should be on the practical “how to’s” of implementation.
- Kit items must all carry the same message, and be consistent and complementary.
- Kits should have a “local” feel — not be positioned as directives from above.
- Trainings on “how to make the best use” must accompany toolkits.
- The best Wellness Policy toolkits are as much education tools as implementation tools.
- The best toolkits are the product of a broad-based coalition, incorporating everyone’s concerns.
- An up-front input tool — for schools and districts to evaluate themselves “pre-policy” — is crucial.
- Sometimes less is more — toolkits shouldn’t be overwhelming and too onerous.

A Group Project

Drzal points out that Michigan’s toolkit was a product of the local Action for Healthy Kids Team deciding — together, as a group — that Wellness Policy implementation was a priority. And, inundated with opinions, policy recommendations, and studies from a wide variety of sources, they decided it was best to “edit everything down” and create a kit that was as simple and “how-to” as possible for use within the state. Drzal stresses that the kit was very much a “consensus document,” blessed by all the constituencies represented on the Team.

Team is the operative word here. Because of the broad-based nature of the Michigan Action for Healthy Kids Team — the constituencies and voices it represents — there was no shortage of materials and expertise. This, as much as anything else, explains the success of the kit, and why it has become the *de facto* reference piece for Local Wellness Policies across the state.

As Larry Merx points out above, the kit was unveiled at a statewide meeting in December of 2005, and attendance — in response to simple post-card invitations reminding invitees of the legislation and of their responsibility to comply — was strong and response was immediate and positive.

“Right off the bat,” Drzal explains, “people were thanking us for putting all the information in one place, so they could start individualizing policies for their district.”

A key part of the kit was the HSAT, or Healthy Schools Action Tool, a concise questionnaire developed to help schools assess whether — and to what extent — their school environment offers consistent messages about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. The HSAT also served as a helpful first step in actually writing a district-specific Local Wellness Policy.

Drzal feels that toolkit training is crucial.

“We did require that, to even get a toolkit, an administrator had to attend a formal training — typically, someone on the Action for Healthy Kids Team would go out and hold a training for as many as 35 or 40 people in a particular region of the state. In the fall of 2006, for example, we did a total of five regional meetings across the state, training another 400 administrators — so the trainings and distribution of the kits are ongoing.

“Walking users through the kit is absolutely essential — explaining what the Wellness Policy requirements are, how they should view the mandate, showing them how they can write and implement their policy and then mark and celebrate their successes... it’s so important to explain everything. You can’t just dump the kit on someone — you’ve got to give them ‘ownership’ of it, and that means walking them through it, which takes some time.”

On the Receiving End of the Michigan Toolkit

Mike Hardie is a Michigan food service director who has used the Michigan Action for Healthy Kids toolkit. He’s a Director of Dining Services for Chartwells, which has the contract for providing food for 130 schools in the Great Lakes region.

“The Michigan toolkit was a great resource for us,” Hardie says. “In the districts in which I work, we’d sit down with the toolkit with a coordinated

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS WELLNESS POLICY TOOL

This free online resource defines an eight-step process for school wellness committees or Teams to follow. Developed by National Action for Healthy Kids with input from Partner organizations and local Team members, the Wellness Policy Tool complements state and local wellness resources, such as Michigan’s Healthy School Toolkit.

The Wellness Policy Tool serves as a one-stop, interactive resource designed to guide wellness committees with templates, suggested language, and recommended programming to help them draft, implement, and evaluate their individualized Wellness Policies.

The Wellness Policy Tool is available at www.ActionForHealthyKids.org

school health team, and divide up the contents of the kit according to who was responsible for what. It was an incredibly efficient way of getting everyone’s mind around what they, personally, had to do to contribute to, and then help implement, a Local Wellness Policy.”

Hardie reports that the kit was particularly good at sparking discussion and developing new ideas and directions.

“We would actually sit around a conference table and use the toolkit as the basis of a learning exercise — we’d say, okay, we need to come up with five ideas for healthy school fundraiser events in the next two minutes, and then we’d learn how the toolkit could be used as a quick resource. The folks I was working with at my schools quickly saw that the kit wasn’t a threatening, challenging, onerous, looming series of documents — but an easy, quick-reference solution to hurdles they had to surmount. So to me, the biggest value of the kit was its use in a group setting, where various staff within a school building can assemble in a spirit of cooperation and tackle the issue together.”

Mike LeMerise, a Utica, Michigan physical education teacher, was, like Mike Hardie, on the receiving end of the Michigan toolkit. “I’ll be honest,” LeMerise says, “most P.E. teachers do not understand how to approach people about changing policies — they seldom even ever go to board meetings, so to them, overhauling the physical education and physical activity components of their curriculum to meet the requirements of new Local Wellness Policies can be kind of daunting. P.E. teachers I’ve talked with — myself included — really found the toolkit useful in that sense, particularly the reference materials specifically focused on physical activity imperatives as they relate to wellness, and ways to evaluate and update your current P.E. program.”

“The other thing I really liked about the Healthy School Toolkit was that it’s simple and not overwhelming — it’s a fun thing for people to have. As an educator, I can tell you that we get lots of stuff sent to us that’s formal and beautifully packaged, but that ends up sitting on a bookshelf collecting dust. Keeping it simple and streamlined is much better; it guarantees that a kit will actually be used.”

Ohio

The Social Marketing of School Breakfast

The Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team’s efforts to convince districts

statewide of the benefits of school breakfast consisted of equal parts selling, communicating, educating, presenting, and persuading — mixed with a big dose of statewide travel. It was a social marketing effort that had a two-pronged focus, centering on both the practicalities of encouraging greater *school* participation — and within schools, higher *student* participation — in the school breakfast program.

“Breakfast was an obvious place for us to focus our efforts here in Ohio,” says Shelly Roth, the Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team chair and the vice president of Ohio’s Children’s Hunger Alliance. “We looked at the figures on how many kids qualified for free and reduced-price lunch, and realized that breakfast was sort of an untapped area in Ohio — and that there was actually a huge need.”

Working with the Ohio Department of Education, Roth and Ohio Action for Healthy Kids colleagues analyzed which Ohio schools were, and weren’t,

10 LESSONS LEARNED IN OHIO ABOUT PROMOTING THE VALUE OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST

1. Statewide education and selling efforts require a road show.
2. It can take two or three presentations for your message to sink in.
3. All levels of personnel — from janitor to superintendent — have a stake in school breakfast. All of their jobs are affected.
4. A key selling point: school breakfast can be simple, fast, and easy.
5. Another key selling point: USDA return-on-investment can make school breakfast a profitable win-win for schools and students alike.
6. School breakfast helps to improve children’s diets and can help to reduce childhood obesity.
7. School breakfast supports school wellness.
8. Building relationships is what it’s all about when selling the breakfast concept.
9. “Getting the word out” about the value of school breakfast includes community meetings, talking to local media, and a wide variety of similar communication efforts.
10. The strongest selling tool: the numbers, comparing both revenues and academic achievement among schools that do, and don’t, serve breakfast.

offering breakfast. Of those that weren’t, the Team identified which schools and districts were most in need — the defining factor being the number of students from families at or below the poverty level. Roth notes that the resulting list of target schools was by no means limited to urban districts. Fully, 29 of Ohio’s 88 counties are lower-income rural areas in the southeastern part of the state, many bordering Appalachia.

“Our job then,” Roth goes on, “was to hit the road and go around the state to these schools, and districts, talking with them face to face — not just about the nutritional and fiscal advantages of serving breakfast, but about the practicalities, the day-to-day logistics, of doing so.”

Covering the Buckeye State

“It was basically a road show,” Roth continues. “We had to educate administrators about everything from the federal funding and reimbursement available to schools offering breakfast... to the ‘academic’ sell — reminding them, yet again, that better-fed kids are better learners. But at the same time, in addition to talking to superintendents and administrators, we spoke with food service personnel, transportation managers, even janitors and custodians, about their responsibilities in a school where on-site breakfast becomes part of the school day. Breakfast, no matter how simple, involves preparation and cleanup, and there are lots of jobs affected. We saw it as our job to help the schools understand not only why school breakfast is a win-win proposition, but how schools can make it work in terms of personnel; how they can fit breakfast into a school day already overcrowded with duties and responsibilities on everyone’s part.”

Selling the Simplicity of Breakfast

Roth makes it clear that breakfast is an easier sell to schools when you explain the various breakfast options available, and how simple and streamlined the morning meal can actually be. Breakfast doesn’t have to be an elaborate affair in the cafeteria. “Grab & Go” breakfasts are simple, on-the-run hand-held meals in a sack that kids pick up on their way to homeroom or first-period, and eat at their desks. “Kiosk” breakfasts are just that — simple, nutritious foods like fruit, bagels, fruit juices, yogurt, and milk offered between morning class-periods at easily-staffed lobby and hallway carts and kiosks. Some schools even serve quick-and-easy laptop morning breakfast in the gym. Roth explains that the Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team was careful to prepare handouts explaining all these options to schools to sell the concept of school breakfast.

Were there challenges? Of course.

“You make clear the nutritional and academic benefits to students, and the fiscal benefits to schools and districts, as best you can. In some ways, that’s an easy sell. Because of USDA reimbursement policies, there’s a very clear return-on-investment for schools serving breakfast — so any program you set up is likely going to continue into the future if it’s working. Funding and staffing is going to come. But one of our biggest hurdles, believe it or not,” says Roth, “is simply convincing decision-makers and policymakers that obesity and hunger can coexist, and that an overweight child can still be a hungry

SCHOOL BREAKFAST RESOURCES FROM OUR NATIONAL PARTNERS

- The **United States Department of Agriculture** administers the **School Breakfast Program**. Program guidelines, research, and data on school breakfast are available at www.usda.gov.
- The **Food Research and Action Center** (www.frac.org) provides a wealth of information on the School Breakfast Program as well as outreach materials, including an annual **School Breakfast Scorecard** with state-by-state data on school breakfast participation and trends.
- **Expanding Breakfast** (www.nutritionexplorations.org/sfs/programs_breakfast.asp), a program of the **National Dairy Council**, offers a kit and video about providing breakfast outside the cafeteria, along with research data, communications tools, and FAQs, plus an online course on alternative breakfast for school nutrition professionals, developed in cooperation with the **School Nutrition Association**.
- The **School Nutrition Association** (www.schoolnutrition.org) promotes an annual **National School Breakfast Week** in March to raise awareness about the availability of the School Breakfast Program.

child who needs a good breakfast. You'd be surprised how many people unschooled in the childhood obesity epidemic simply don't understand that."

Persuasion by Building Relationships

Charlie Kozlesky, a senior vice president at Ohio's Children's Hunger Alliance, is another Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team member. He observes that, less than a decade ago, Ohio ranked 49th out of the 50 states in the proportion of public schools that even *offered* a breakfast program — the number stood at about 35%. Since the Team's efforts were begun, Ohio has made inroads. In 2006, it ranked 28th among states in the proportion of low-income students who participate in breakfast, particularly impressive when you consider that 17 states actually mandate school breakfast by law. Ohio does not.

So what did the project entail organizationally?

"Basically, it has been a relationship-building job," answers Kozlesky. "We moved the needle on breakfast in Ohio by getting out there and trying to find the 'go-to' people in each district — people who could influence the decision, and get the ball rolling. We talked to superintendents. We talked to school nurses and food service directors. We talked to principals. We talked to civic leaders and educators' associations. We went to community meetings. We talked to the media. We had meetings with county health commissioners to ask what they could do. We scheduled presentations and events with parents and school leaders where local legislators conversant in school wellness would talk about the advantages of school breakfast as a crucial part of overall Wellness Policies. We wrote articles for administrators' and educators' newsletters. It was almost a 'guerrilla marketing' effort, with us spreading the word in any conceivable way we could that school breakfast just makes sense — for everyone."

One of the most effective selling tools, Kozlesky points out, was "modeling" a successful school breakfast program — giving a presentation in a district not currently invested in school breakfast at which a successful school breakfast program was profiled.

"At these meetings," Kozlesky reports, "we'd put up the numbers on a PowerPoint slide — how many kids were eligible for school breakfast, how many were unserved, what reimbursement monies the district was passing up, the revenue that they were losing by not serving breakfast. We made the case for academic achievement by showing published test scores of districts that do, and don't, serve breakfast... and we hoped for buy-in. The best response — what we crossed our fingers for — was an agreement to 'pilot' school breakfast and try it out."

Often a Hard Sell

"Almost every district in Ohio we've gone to has been a hard sell," Kozlesky says. "But persistence is the name of the game. In our Team's experience, 90% of decisions about school breakfast are made by individual principals. If they shake their head and tell me they just can't make it work schedule-wise, or for some other reason, the first thing I do is find a principal who *is* making it work, and bring the two principals together. Again, it's just plain old-fashioned selling. And believe me, it can take two or three meetings for the message to even sink in."

But it's working.

"When we started," Kozlesky recalls, "roughly 193,000 Ohio school children were receiving breakfast. In October [2007], we'll probably be over the 300,000 mark. So the trend is clearly an upward one, which we're pleased about. To give an example of four particularly impressive counties, in Guernsey, Monroe, Noble, and Washington counties in the southern part of our state, the proportion of kids receiving breakfast has gone from 10% to about 80%. Our efforts are a real success story in those areas in particular."

Kozlesky describes what the Action for Healthy Kids Team does as "helping schools and districts to overcome the barriers" to instituting breakfast — by involving everyone from parents to health department officials to cafeteria workers in meetings and discussion sessions.

"In the end," he says, "the data are extremely important, and convincing. My dream scenario is to go to a district and say, 'Okay, your district now has 1,000 kids. Four hundred of them are eligible for free- and reduced-price breakfast, and you're only feeding 100 of them. Do you know what kind of a financial win it could be for your district to feed 400?' Putting it this way, we can demonstrate the sheer financial viability of an expanded breakfast program, and everyone wins — the kids in need and the districts."

A Superintendent Weighs In

Carol Oxley is Superintendent of Schools in Lima, Ohio, one of the districts that "got on the breakfast bandwagon" in response to the Ohio Action for Healthy Kids Team's marketing efforts. She raves about her district's decision.

"Breakfast in the classroom is one of the most significant endeavors we've embraced to increase student achievement," Oxley states emphatically. "But it's not just academic achievement. We've noticed a measurable decrease in morning and mid-day referrals to the school nurse's office, which I trace directly to kids being fed in the morning. I can report a 40% decrease in morning stomach-aches and headaches since we've instituted breakfast in the classroom."

Oxley echoes Charlie Kozlesky's experience about the "hard sell" challenges of school breakfasts when it comes to convincing districts.

"You know," Oxley says, "so many administrators and teachers look at the concept of breakfast in the classroom as something that's going to eat into their instruction time. With administrators and teachers like that, I insist that they go to visit a school currently offering breakfast in the classroom, to see first-hand how it can work. They need to see the visual impact of kids quietly getting needed nutrition, to witness first-hand a flatbed tray of milk containers rolling down the corridor and kids digging in and finishing their meals in a relatively small amount of time. They 'get' that breakfast in the classroom is no big deal, and that behavior really can be totally transformed when kids aren't hungry."

Oxley is quick to point out that selling the school breakfast concept to individual principals was a necessary step in her district, and that the key is giving them leeway.

"If you visit each of our schools, you'll see that breakfast looks a little different in each one, even though we're all the same district," she advises. "Principals have to do what works best for their particular student makeup,

class schedule, physical plant, prep facilities, and available staff. I leave it to them to work out the details.”

So where is it all heading in Ohio?

“Universal breakfast seems to be the ideal outcome, and it’s what we’re moving toward” says Shelly Roth. “Universal breakfast — where every student eats breakfast for free, regardless of income level or eligibility for free- or reduced-price meals — sort of takes the stigma out of in-school breakfasts. Two of our urban districts, in fact, Columbus and Cincinnati, both went to universal breakfast in 2006, and participation has absolutely gone through the roof. We’re thrilled.”

Alabama

Physical Education is a Curriculum. Physical Activity is a Behavior. Alabama is Enhancing Both.

Alabama Action for Healthy Kids Team member Pat Floyd is a professor in the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Alabama State University in Montgomery. She articulates one of Alabama’s pressing challenges clearly. Surprisingly, it’s not a lack of hours in the day for physical education and activity, or even a lack of interest — it’s simply a lack of equipment.

“The fact is,” she says, “many Alabama schools suffer from a lack of good, working equipment for physical education — or, when they do have such equipment, it’s damaged or unusable. It may seem like a small thing, but we decided to make that very specific issue our Team’s focus.”

With all the challenges relative to school wellness, why focus on something like athletic equipment — especially when there would appear to be other, perhaps larger and more pressing issues? Floyd has a direct answer.

“You have to understand — in some schools in Alabama we have P.E. teachers using discarded soda can crates for step-aerobics. And honestly, the shortage of decent equipment in P.E. class can be a genuine barrier to organized physical activity, and by extension to school wellness. It’s something that schools with generous equipment budgets don’t even think of, but it’s a real problem.”

As a result, at an annual meeting of the Alabama State Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, held in Birmingham, Action for Healthy Kids Team members distributed P.E. kits — and offered training — to certified P.E. teachers from 35 low-income rural Alabama schools. These kits contained not informational or instructional material, but actual equipment for use in indoor gym-class settings and outdoors on the playground. Packaged in easily transportable plastic tubs, the kits, with an estimated value of \$250 each, included balls for multiple sports (basketball, soccer), jump ropes, hula hoops, stop watches, Body-Mass Index calculators, and even 25 pedometers for each school, made possible by a special donation.

Providing What Districts Themselves Could Not

“The whole point of this effort,” explains Pat Floyd, “was to provide developmentally appropriate equipment to promote physical activity within P.E. classes — equipment that these schools simply didn’t own and were unlikely to be

PHYSICAL EDUCATION EQUIPMENT: LEARNING FROM ALABAMA

Physical education equipment may seem like a small thing, but, as Alabama learned, it's vitally important, especially to schools with budget challenges. Some guidelines for groups contemplating a similar initiative:

- Physical education equipment kits should be distributed to, and via, P.E. instructors.
- Equipment selection should be based on specific curriculum needs, and be developmentally appropriate.
- Advice and recommendations on equipment selection should be sought from localities' P.E. teachers, principals, and superintendents, as well as from state physical education associations/ organizations.
- Equipment durability, functionality, and flexibility should be taken into account to maximize value.
- Kits should contain instructional materials on equipment use, and in-service training should be offered.

able to afford in the foreseeable future.” Generally, Floyd points out, these were schools where 50% or more of their students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch.

Importantly, the Alabama Action for Healthy Kids Team took time, in advance of the kits' distribution, to survey principals and physical education teachers on the kinds and variety of equipment that would be most useful to them.

“Using the published Alabama Physical Education Course of Study curriculum as their guide, they told us the specific activities, exercises, and sports they lacked materials for, and what equipment would be most useful for the widest range of students they were serving,” Floyd reports. “We also asked for similar input and recommendations from colleagues at the Alabama Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. We really thought through what we were providing them in terms of everything from age-appropriateness to equipment durability versus its cost.”

“The equipment wasn't just a fun, free gift to schools,” Floyd emphasizes. “This wasn't Christmas morning. The training that went with the kits included sessions on what makes for a quality P.E. class; on the definition of a physically educated student; on the dangers of physical inactivity; and on the whole concept of developmentally appropriate P.E. We were also careful to provide in-service training on how to actually use instruments like pedometers and stopwatches, and to explain to P.E. staff unfamiliar with them how they can best be put to use to both encourage physical activity and measure progress.”

Feedback: Appreciation and Excitement

“The feedback we've gotten from P.E. teachers is extremely encouraging,” says Floyd. “Between 100 and 700 students at each of the selected schools use the equipment daily, and between 350 and 1,000 students use the equipment weekly. Principals and superintendents have been extremely grateful, telling us they're ‘honored’ and ‘excited’ to have been chosen to receive the much-needed equipment.”

Would the Team do anything differently next time?

“Actually, if we were to do the equipment distribution again,” Pat Floyd says, “we might re-think a bit the mix of equipment in the kit. The equipment we selected was based on encouraging movement and stimulating motor skills — not just on providing fun for recess and ‘free play.’ So that's what you want to keep in mind, as well as the durability of the equipment. Balls, Frisbees, and jump ropes were the most popular items, and the longest-lasting. Equipment that is fragile you definitely want to stay away from. But whatever the equipment, we're definitely affecting change. The fact is, physical education is a curriculum, but physical activity is a behavior. By enhancing physical activity, we're improving the effectiveness of the curriculum.”

Connie Thomas, a P.E. instructor at Montgomery, Alabama's Haynesville Road Elementary School, agrees.

“I know gym equipment seems like a perhaps unimportant thing,” she allows, “but we're trying to help kids from a very low socioeconomic stratum,

EQUIPMENT LIST

Alabama's P.E. Enhancement Kits have a retail value of \$250, and include:

- Soccer balls
- Basketballs
- Jump ropes
- Frisbees
- Pedometers (donated)
- Body-Mass Index calculators

and give them some exposure to the benefits kids on the 'other side of town' take for granted. We now have a jump-rope club, divided into groups with three different levels of jumping ability. A new Ultimate Frisbee team has some of our kids getting great cardio workouts, running and jumping as they never have before. And I was absolutely elated to get the pedometers that were supplied — I now have one elementary class that's walking their way to fitness, learning not just how to move but to *breathe*. And of course a hidden benefit with physical education is that as you talk about concepts like timing, speed, increasing and decreasing strength levels, and counting at jump-roping, you're actually learning math concepts while improving motor skills, coordination, and overall wellness; the mind and body are both learning. So I can't tell you how important, and how encouraging, something as simple as new gym equipment can be for schools like ours."



ABOUT ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Action for Healthy Kids is the only nonprofit organization that addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished, and sedentary youth by focusing on changes within schools. This national, grassroots, public-private partnership of 60 organizations and government agencies representing education, health, fitness, and nutrition, supports the efforts of Teams — comprised of more than 9,000 volunteers — in all states and the District of Columbia. Action for Healthy Kids was founded in 2002 by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, in response to the *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change.

To learn more about Action for Healthy Kids, visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.