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Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary of Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MEDIA CONTACT: Molly Payne-Hardin
December 10, 2007

Student Obesity Rates Decrease for First Time in Four Years

PENSACOLA – The Escambia County Health Department’s Body Mass Index data for the 2007-2008 School Year was released today and reveals a decrease in overweight students for the first time in four years. Also on Monday, parents of students receive letters notifying them if their child’s weight and measurements are either under, at, or above the healthy ranges for that age group.

BMI is a measurement of body fat based on height and weight and is used to screen for health problems resulting from an unhealthy body weight.

- A total of 11,981 students were measured this fall in Escambia.
- Escambia first collected BMI data in the 2004-2005 school year.
- The total percentage of students whose BMI places them as at risk for becoming overweight or overweight are:

School Year	1 st Grade	3 rd Grade	6 th Grade	9 th Grade
2007-2008	28%	35%	41%	36%
2006-2007	30%	35%	44%	41%
2005-2006	30%	36%	42%	38%
2004-2005	30%	35%	37%	36%

Data of students’ Body Mass Index is required by the State of Florida.

The total percentage of students for the 2006-2007 school year in each weight category are:



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School Year	Normal	At Risk for		
		Overweight	Overweight	Underweight
2007-2008	63%	16%	19%	2%
2006-2007	60%	17%	21%	2%
2005-2006	61%	16%	21%	2%





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Highlights of Health Department and School District Activities

These are highlights of School District and Health Department work in the areas of nutrition, physical activity and wellness to help students. This information is released as part of the December 10, 2007, annual announcement of Student Body Mass Index statistics.

Physical Activity

Required PE, Recess: 2 ½ hours per week of physical education is required for K-5th grade students. 15 minutes daily of recess is required in which students are encouraged to become active.

Walking Clubs: Schools have started Walking Clubs where students and staff walk together each week after school.

After-School Exercise Programs: Schools partner with private gyms to bring in different types of cardio programs – such as boot camp, boxing, aerobics – for after-school exercise programs.

Teaching Healthy Eating

Healthy TV: Nurses use puppets, costumes, skits, and sample foods to hold student's interest in short in-classroom television sessions on nutrition and health.

Food Field Trips: One school nurse organized a field trip to a local grocery store to shop for foods in a meal that the students chose, and to bring the food pyramid to life.

Engaging Parents: Nurses have a table at the popular Reading Roundup nights, with displays such as "Fats in Foods", which helps parents visualize how much fat is in fast food.

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Escambia County Health Department

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“How To” for Healthy Snacks: Nurses teach kids how to make fun healthy snacks such as frozen yogurt cups and “ants on a log” (celery with peanut butter and raisins).

Exercise plus Education: Schools combine educational sessions with fun activities. West Florida Tech recently organized a Turkey Trot where students walked a one mile course, stopping for a nutrition message at each 1/8 mile and figured out how much walking is needed to burn the calories from a Thanksgiving meal.

Idea Sharing: Wellness Coordinators and school nurses meet quarterly to share ideas about what is working in their schools and for additional training.

Health Education Textbooks: Each grade level has its own age-appropriate health education textbooks.

Food Served in Schools

The School District’s food and nutrition staff are making these changes to the traditional lunch meal:

- Decrease the serving of fried foods
- Increase available fruits and vegetables
- Increase complex carbohydrates (for example, many hamburger and hotdog buns are now made of whole grain breads)
- Ensure the right portion size for the age group
- Provide options that encourage variety in the diets of our students

And these changes to the a la carte lunch foods and vending machines:

- Ensure the right portion size for age group
- Limit fat and added sugar content per serving.
- Provide foods that provide nutrients, not simply energy

Specific Examples Include:

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- **Menu changes (secondary grades):** Fast food style combos are replaced with lower fat, more traditional style meals. Chef salads offered daily and fried French fries offered only one day per week.
- **Vending Machines:** The snack vending machines now carry Buffalo Rock's "Better for you" items.
- **Drinks, Juices, Milk:** All beverage machines meet the Alliance for Healthier Generations beverage guidelines. These guidelines include only offering unflavored water, milk and 100% juice at the middle school level, while high school students may have those items in addition to diet soda, flavored water, low calorie sports drinks (20 oz) and full strength sports drinks (12 oz).
- **Recipe Changes:** Recipes are being reviewed for opportunities to reduce fat and increase fiber while maintaining the quality that students have come to enjoy. Nutritional information is being collected for all foods served in school cafeterias.
- **Food Industry:** The food industry now recognizes the public's demand for implementing wellness policies in school districts and is diligently producing healthier/more nutritious options to meet this demand.

District-Wide Wellness Planning

The **district-wide Wellness Policy** – which is implemented in each school -- utilizes the CDC's Coordinated School Health Program model. This model identifies the eight components of an effective school health program, including health education, physical education, counseling, and family involvement.

Each **School Improvement Plan** includes a wellness goal for students and employees.

Leadership and collaboration between the school's wellness coordinators and school nurses.

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Cooperation and **collaboration with community agencies** to promote the importance of lifelong healthy nutrition and physical activity for students and their families.



News Conference Speakers and Attendees

- Dr. John Lanza, Escambia County Health Department Director
- Mr. Jim Paul, Superintendent of the Escambia County School District
- Cordova Park Elementary School Wellness Coordinator Tammy Cooper (speaking)
- Cordova Park Elementary School Nurse Dianne Soderlind.
- West Florida Technical High School Nurse Martha Hanna (speaking)
- West Florida Technical High School Wellness Coordinator Cathy Organt

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