



Community Health Briefs

Fitness for Kids — Independent Health

Innovation Strategy

About half of obese school-age children will become obese adults and 70 percent of obese children have at least one cardiovascular disease risk factor, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The Independent Health Foundation, the not-for-profit community outreach arm of Independent Health founded in 1992, began the Fitness for Kids Challenge in 2008 to combat childhood obesity with local schools in Buffalo, New York.

Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Exercise
- Diet
- Education

Program Description

Almost 10,000 elementary school students in Western New York, representing nearly 500 classrooms, are participating in the Fitness for Kids Challenge from November 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016. More than 150,000 students have participated since the challenge was first launched.

As part of the seven-month initiative, teachers are given in-class and at-home challenges centered on the “5-2-1-0” daily goals:

- 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables
- 2 hours or fewer of screen time (which includes television, computer and video games)
- 1 hour or more of physical activity
- 0 sugary drinks, such as soda and sports drinks

In addition, each participating school is asked to make a health policy change in its building, such as replacing unhealthy snacks in school vending machines with healthier alternatives or creating a before-school walking club for students and faculty.

Prizes are given monthly to students and \$20,000 to be used for health and fitness initiatives is awarded annually to classrooms and schools with the highest levels of participation.

In 2014 the Independent Health Foundation established a partnership with the Buffalo Bills and the NFL's Play 60 campaign to further increase awareness among schools and the community. Through this partnership students are challenged to participate in the Play 60 Challenge each year during the month of October, in which they aim for 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Prizes are awarded to encourage students to live healthy lives, including Buffalo Bills' signed merchandise, player appearances and sports equipment.

Independent Health Foundation produced a [series of promotional videos](#) in which Buffalo Bills players interacted with youth and promoted the importance of the program's "5-2-1-0" daily goals.

Results

2014 participation included 54 schools, 372 classrooms and 7,200 students. Schools implemented a variety of health policies, including:

- Requiring healthy fruits and vegetables for snacks
- Implementing a new cafeteria program called "Try It Tuesday" in which students are encouraged to try new healthy foods
- Hanging "Healthy Me" posters around the schools reminding students and teachers what they can do to be healthy
- Allowing students to have a water bottle at their desk to encourage the drinking of more water

Last year, these programs awarded \$20,000 to schools and classrooms with the highest levels of participation:

- \$1,000 grants to five large schools with more than 170 students participating in program activities
- \$1,000 grants to five small schools with fewer than 170 students participating in program activities
- \$250 grants to 40 individual classrooms that exemplified the program's goals

In the past seven years, the program has awarded more than \$60,000 to schools. The grants have funded health and fitness initiatives that include new physical education equipment, outdoor basketball courts and field trips to fitness facilities.

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