

Afterschool Programs in Boston, MA, Expand Opportunities for Obesity Prevention

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At A Glance

As of August 2015, more than 10,000 K-12 students attend healthier afterschool programs in Boston, Massachusetts. The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) partnered with Harvard Prevention Research Center (PRC) and the YMCA Greater Boston to implement the Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity (OSNAP) Initiative. More than 120 afterschool programs learned how to create environments that promote healthy eating and physical activity. The work was funded, in part, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Public Health Challenge

Childhood obesity is a growing health concern across the United States. In Boston alone, more than a third (39.9%) of students who attend Boston Public Schools are overweight or obese (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2011). The statistics are even more alarming for Black and Latino youth, who experience higher obesity rates than their White peers. BPHC wanted to set up strategies to reduce the overall rates of childhood obesity and give all young people access to

conditions that promote the best possible health, particularly those in high-need areas. Afterschool programs were identified as a key setting to focus obesity prevention efforts. According to the Afterschool Alliance, more than 8 million children are enrolled in afterschool programs across the country. Even with competing demands and limited resources, these settings can have a major impact on youth health outcomes.

Find Out More

School districts, public health agencies, and youth-serving organizations such as the YMCA or Boys and Girls Club can play a crucial role in reducing childhood obesity in the nation. OSNAP aims to help by providing out-of-school-time programs across the U.S. with educational resources that explain how to create healthier environments for children. To learn more about improving access to healthy options, reducing screen time, and increasing opportunities for physical activity, visit www.osnap.org.

We see clearly that the OSNAP program, with its training, guidelines and resources, has empowered our clubs to support healthier practices for all our members and staff.

- Afterschool Program Partner

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Approach

BPHC partnered with YMCA Greater Boston and the PRC to implement the OSNAP Initiative. This intervention has proven effective at helping afterschool and other out-of-school-time programs improve nutrition and physical activity practices. With community partners, BPHC introduced OSNAP to afterschool programs across Boston, prioritizing five neighborhoods that experience the highest health disparities. Participating afterschool sites received educational materials, training, and technical assistance to create healthier afterschool programs. Staff evaluated the access that children have to opportunities like increased physical activity, reduced screen time, and healthier food and drinks.

Results

More than 120 Boston afterschool programs participated in the OSNAP model in 2015 and set up new practices regarding screen time, physical activity, and nutrition within their organizations. Altogether, these sites serve more than 10,000 young people. Of that number, nearly 75% are Black or Latino. While the initiative's evaluation results provide exact percentages, examples of changes include: • Almost doubling how often children are provided with at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity, from 39% of the time to 68%; • Offering water to children nearly every day, from 73% of the time to 93%; and • Serving juice less often, from 66% of the time to 58%.

What's Next

Approximately 33% of Boston's afterschool programs have been engaged through the OSNAP Initiative. To expand the network of participating programs beyond grant funding, BPHC and community partners are working to institutionalize the OSNAP model. Key staff have been identified to continue this effort, and an advisory group was formed with representation from stakeholders within Boston's childcare sector. The PRC has also developed an online training and interactive learning community for out-of-school-time programs interested in promoting healthy practices. Tip sheets, posters, and a step-by-step OSNAP implementation guide – among other resources – are available for free online at www.osnap.org. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.