

Institute for the Advancement of Multicultural and Minority Medicine



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NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS (NABSE)

NABSE has over 100 local chapters, or affiliates, that serve as effective community outreach vehicles. As part of its involvement in the effort to reduce childhood obesity rates, NABSE utilized the Metropolitan Detroit Alliance of Black School Educators (MDABSE) to develop a community gardens program. The program will serve as a model to implement community gardens in other urban areas, such as: Prince George’s County Maryland, Beaumont, Texas, Newport News, Virginia and the Atlanta area.

The Detroit Alliance committed to implementing the pilot, but due to the size of Detroit. It concentrated on a single community and worked specifically with Title I parents.

The response from the community was overwhelming supportive. A representative from the State Assembly indicated they would propose state legislation regarding the project. The Detroit Health Department voiced an interest in conducting seminars for parents regarding healthy eating and meal preparation, and the CEO of the Detroit Public Schools indicated he would solicit the Departments of Recreation and Public Works for support. City officials committed “in kind” services but no revenue. Nevertheless, the project proceeded.

Based on studies and findings, the following factors contribute to Childhood Obesity:

- Families no longer eat together.
- Individual life-styles contribute to excessive snacking and there is for less family meal planning.
- The cost of fast-food is cheap, and it is economical to eat imbalanced meals
- Both parents are working and “every person is for him/herself”
- In many low-income families, it is a tradition to eat fried foods and heavy starches, etc.
- Many African American parents feel that it is healthy to have “meat on your bones.”
- To be thin is thought to be an illness.

Considering these factors, MDNASE developed a community garden in a local park. The site was donated by the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Water and Public Works Department watered the garden, and the Detroit Public Schools discussed healthy eating and nutrition, and allowed the children to cultivate and attend to the garden. When the garden is harvested, the students will become entrepreneurial and sell their vegetables.

IAMMM’s

Partnerships to Address Obesity

- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity
- Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents
- Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc.
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Girls Inc.
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.
- National Alliance of Black School Educators
- National Association of Black Social Workers, Inc.
- Student National Medical Association
- The Links, Inc.

A Profile of IAMMM's Partners

One of the most important processes used to launch ALAS's, Childhood Obesity project was to identify critical players and create the School Health Advisory Council. Council members of the council included district personnel from the Dallas Independent School District, such as the executive director of Food Services and Nutrition, directors of physical education instruction, the obesity preventive collaboration, and health education related programs within the district. Some of these programs included representation from community agencies, such as the Chief Executive Officer for the Dallas Concilio of Hispanic Service Organizations and parents. Through this coordinated effort, programs such as the *Alliance for a Healthier Generation* have worked with key district staff to implement policies and programs that enable students to eat healthier foods and get more physical activity. An upcoming meeting is planned to review the effects that changes in instruction, food preparation and parent training have on the awareness of obesity and healthy eating.

The Dallas Concilio, the largest non-profit United Way organization in the Metroplex has participated in initiatives related to diabetes prevention, community outreach, parent involvement in the schools, and other collaborative efforts with other non-profits. Through its involvement with the National Council of La Raza its efforts will also be documented for future publication.

All of the activities created greater awareness among parents, district staff and community representatives, and motivated them to further participate and collaborate in childhood obesity prevention projects. In working with a district of this size (151,000 students) the process of coordinating with a number of offices and agencies to get support and buy-in for new projects was difficult. In light of the current budget crises with many districts face, their focus was primarily on accountability and making ends meet with the dwindling resources. Also, the small allocation of the grant put financial limitations on ALAS's outreach. Nevertheless, the Advisory Council was able to share critical information with the Spanish-language media and through parent training programs that helped parents learn about food preparation and exercise. As a result, there was increased concern and discussion in general about the critical issues related to childhood obesity.

The Advisory Council also held luncheons and dinner meetings that brought people together to share data and documentation on childhood obesity. These meetings were successful because of the broad based representation that participated. From the Dallas Independent School District there were executive directors and directors from food services, curriculum and instruction, physical education, health education, the office of the superintendent, district administrators, dietitians, nutritionists as well as representatives from the Concilio and parent organizations involved.

Very little resistance has taken place other than the slow pace of moving such a large organization and so many people. Everyone is overworked with limited resources. However, there is still great concern and enthusiasm to address this issue collectively.

Based upon ALAS's experiences in the community, much more media attention has been made in Spanish speaking TV and Radio and a major colloquium or conference in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex will be convened with key decision makers to discuss childhood obesity and healthy living styles. On a consistent basis, ALAS will continue to inform parents in the schools regarding childhood obesity and its consequences, and ALAS will continue to meet with local officials regarding school districts policies that need to be updated and publicized so the schools are in alignment with district policy. In addition, community agencies and city representatives will be solicited to bring more resources, such as parks, bike paths and supermarkets, to the lower income neighborhoods.

ALAS has launched a grassroots initiative that has the potential for greater impact given additional time and resources and these findings will be shared with the ALAS membership and affiliates through conference presentations and on the ALAS web site. The formation of the Dallas District Advisory Council will be critical to the childhood obesity prevention initiatives launched by DISD or any school or district.

Student National Medical Association (SNMA)

The Weill-Cornell Medical School chapter of SNMA spearheaded efforts to reverse childhood obesity by partnering with Settlement Health, a federally qualified community health center in the East Harlem community. In their efforts to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of childhood obesity, they designed a 10-week curriculum targeting middle school aged children, to coincide with the Thanksgiving-Christmas holiday period when unhealthy habits have been shown to peak.

The curriculum emphasized three key areas - nutrition, exercise and education. During each session, they touched on each of these topics, under a unifying theme. For example, during a session titled “Fast Food Frenzy”, the participants saw parts of a documentary – “Supersize Me” – about unhealthy eating habits. This was followed by a speed-walking field trip to a local McDonalds to teach kids how to make healthy choices in fast food settings by learning how to read food labels and limiting caloric intake. At other sessions, the educational arm addressed the need for advocacy for healthier food options in the neighborhood, and ways to advocate. The nutritional component consisted primarily of practical lessons on ways to make healthy meals and snacks, while the exercise component focused on quick conventional ways to exercise during the day, and also introduced the participants to alternative methods of exercise such as yoga. There was also a session which focused on eating disorders, to stress the difference between eating healthy versus adopting unhealthy habits on the other side of the spectrum. To help them better internalize the balance between eating and activity, participants were required to keep Journals about their diets and exercise pattern during the course, and were each given pedometers to track level of passive exercise. In addition to the weekly sessions, the kids were each paired with a medical school student mentor and required to work together on an independent project which addressed the need to reverse childhood obesity.



The 10 week program, called MACHO - **M**ovement **A**gainst **C**hildhood **O**besity - was a combined effort of students from Weill Cornell Medical and staff at Settlement Health Community Health Center. As the leading provider of primary healthcare in the neighborhood, Settlement Health provided an invaluable resource through which to garner support from community leaders, and also to help tailor the program to the specific needs of the community. Participants in the program were selected through a combination of referrals from pediatricians and marketing of the program to parents by students at the clinic. The combination of pediatrician and parental involvement ensured participation. Due to the multifaceted nature of the obesity epidemic, the group decided not to focus on BMI as a cut-off and considered all middle-school aged children in the neighborhood affiliated with the clinic as potential participants. This also helped reduce the risk of stigmatization of the group.

Overall, the reception from the community was very positive. Some things worked better than others, and the feedback was used in planning future activities. For example, journal entry was sporadic at best, and most of the pedometers distributed at the outset were lost half way through the program. Working with middle school children also has its special challenges and rewards, and attention needs to be paid to the best ways to engage kids in such programs. However, the participants understanding of the problems associated with childhood obesity, and its health consequences showed stark improvement over time as demonstrated in the level of discussion, in test results and in the quality of final presentations.

Based upon their experience in the community, SNMA believes that change needs to come from the ground up. The consumers of goods (like foods) and services (in this case, schools and children) need to demand healthier alternatives, and only then will they start to see a change in the balance. Of course, policy changes, such as requirements for a set number of hours for physical education and introduction of salad bars and other healthy food alternatives at schools, would be necessary, but would also require support on the ground level. Addressing the issue from the ground up will make the case more sustainable, by teaching people in the community reasons for as well as tools with which to advocate for themselves.

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**Look for these articles in the next edition
of the Newsletter.**

- Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.
- Girls. Inc.

The SNMA determined that the Best Practices for reversing childhood obesity require that this multi-faceted problem be addressed from various angles - nutrition, exercise and education. Partnering with a federally qualified community health center was also important clearly links these efforts to the larger need for healthy lifestyle options. The Weill-



Cornell Chapter of SNMA will take the lead to help other chapters replicate reversing childhood obesity through schools and neighborhoods tailored to the specific needs of their respective communities.

Funding for this newsletter was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). For more information about RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic, please visit: www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity.