

By JYL STEINBACK



## “Shape Up US” Shapes the Future of Our Children

*Despite all the wellness programs that have been designed to fight it, a 40-year trend of increasing childhood obesity is becoming more severe. Clearly, a new approach is needed to solve America's obesity epidemic.*

We can't focus solely on food. We must think “Outside the Lunchbox” to crack the problem.

First, let's define obesity. The Centers for Disease Control recommend using the relative body mass index, or BMI, scale to determine obesity. BMI in the 95th percentile class now is considered class I obesity. Class II obesity is a BMI of 120 percent of the 95th percentile, and Class III is 140 percent of the 95th percentile.

Childhood obesity rates — now at 18.5 percent among children from 2 to 19 — appeared to be flattening out in the US in the past few years. But a new analysis of the data shows severe obesity continues to climb.

According to the analysis reported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the alarming 40-year trend of increasing childhood obesity persists. It is even more distressing when you break it down by age, race and socio-economic levels.

Since 1980, teen obesity quadrupled from 5 percent to 20.6 percent. Children aged 2- to 5-years-old has seen sharp increases from 2015 to 2016 when compared to the 2013 to 2014 cycle. African American and Hispanic children in all age groups have significantly higher rates of obesity than do White and Asian American children.

What's the big problem with childhood obesity?

Obese children are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and breathing issues like asthma and sleep apnea.

They are at higher risk for psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, as well as low self-esteem. And, they often are the targets of bullies.

So, obesity can affect mental health and social well-being, as well as physical health. These factors also affect school attendance and educational performance.

In the past 20 years, there have been numerous wellness programs aimed at childhood obesity. Unfortunately, they were one-dimensional niche programs, focusing primarily on what was on the child's plate with perhaps a little exercise thrown in for good measure.

Physical inactivity is a huge contributing factor to the problem of obesity. The Surgeon General recommends children should engage in 60 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week. Many schools have eliminated Physical Education and other school-based health programs. Estimates show that only 3.8 percent of elementary schools now provide daily physical education.

With student access to technology when they arrive home, they are less likely to get the requisite amount of physical activity there either.

Adding back niche programs such as P.E. and nutrition is not enough to stem the tide of obesity and improve overall health. “Outside The Lunchbox” is required to develop an effective wellness program that looks at the needs of the whole child.

Our teachers are the ones who can help bring about these lifestyle and behavioral changes. Educators need a multi-disciplinary health and wellness education program that integrates core curricula including math, science, social studies, language arts, geography and more.

Students need hands-on learning opportunities integrated throughout a relevant, standards based, meaningful, and fun curriculum that are optimized for personalized learning.

Why?

We know from the research of cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Adele Diamond that the more parts of the child's brain we engage, the more likely the student will retain and internalize the material.



Curriculum should bridge the gap by bringing physical activity and health into the daily curriculum and not be an afterthought.

“If we want the best academic outcomes, the most efficient and cost-effective route to achieve that is, counter intuitively, not to narrowly focus on academics, but to also address children's social, emotional, and physical development. Similarly, the best and most efficient route to physical health is through also addressing emotional, social, and cognitive wellness. Emotional wellness, similarly, depends critically on social, cognitive, and physical wellness,” says Dr. Diamond.

Additionally, it should provide the five kinds of learning identified by the Whole Child Initiative:

- Cognitive-intellectual activity, associated with the left brain
- Creative-intuitive activity (the arts), associated with the right brain

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- Structured physical movement and unstructured, self-directed play
- Handwork, making things that can be useful
- Engagement with nature and community

We at Shape Up US are developing highly integrated programs with a whole-child approach. Not only do they attack childhood obesity through physical activities, our programs feature resources to help teach students about healthy eating, positive thinking, dental health, financial health and social responsibility.

Finally, I believe a successful program must include a support system. I call this a "Circle of Wellness" a sustainable program that last a lifetime. This is a 360-degree group of parents, grandparents, teachers and the community that surrounds and supports students in their journey to good health.

The statistics show a clear correlation between physical, social, and financial well-being and academic performance. Other programs have not attacked the problem holistically.

Our innovative, multi-pronged approach helps solve many of the greatest problems that face today's youth.

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of our young people. They need the right tools, and Shape Up Us is that sustainable turn-key solution that flows from teacher > to student > to family > to community educating the "Whole Child" mind, body and emotion. It will "Transform Our Children" and "Shape Up" the future of our world.

Jyl will be launching her newest, game-changing cookbook *Think Outside the Lunchbox: 250 Plant-Nutritious Recipes the Whole Family Will Love* (introduction by Dr. Scott Stoll). This cookbook will help you think about food differently, opening your eyes and your mouth to wholesome plant-based foods that are not only from the earth but good for the earth. *Think Outside The Lunchbox* will change you on all levels of your being — mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

One-fourth of all donations to Shape Up US will go toward bringing The Hip Hop Healthy Heart Program™ back into the schools. This program is a K through 6th-grade comprehensive mind, body, and emotion healthy literacy education curriculum created to "build a culture of health" throughout our educational system.