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Georgia's Youth: Overweight and Under-Active

Previous surveys have warned that far too many of Georgia's children and youth are overweight and sedentary. To examine this troubling situation more closely, the Philanthropic Collaborative for a Healthy Georgia launched the Georgia Youth Fitness Assessment (GYFA) to give students, parents, school officials and policymakers an accurate picture of fitness levels among Georgia's children and youth.

The Survey Found:

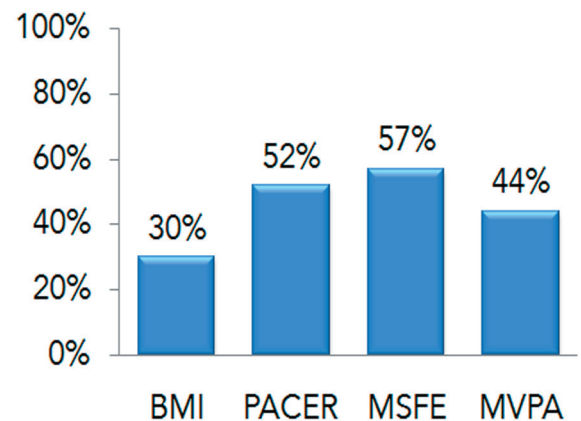
Among a representative sample of over 5,000 5th and 7th grade students in 93 participating schools:

- One-third (30%) have a BMI that is considered a health risk. BMI (or Body Mass Index) is the ratio of weight to height.
- More than half have unhealthy levels of cardiorespiratory fitness (52 percent), and muscular strength, flexibility and muscular endurance (57 percent).
- Nearly half (44%) fail to meet national recommendations for regular physical activity.

An analysis of the data along demographic lines reveals that all subgroups (age, gender and race/ethnicity) performed at disappointing

levels on all tests, indicating many of Georgia's children and youth are at risk for serious health conditions in the future.

Percentage of Students Not Attaining Healthy Fitness Zone (HFZ) for Fitness Tests and Not Meeting Current Recommendations for Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity



GYFA's Sponsors:

The Georgia Youth Fitness Assessment (GYFA) was funded by the Philanthropic Collaborative for a Healthy Georgia, composed of 14 private foundations, along with the Division of Public Health, Georgia Department of Human Resources. The Georgia Health Policy Center in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University coordinated the survey on behalf of the Collaborative. Macro International developed the methodology and conducted the surveys in the schools.

"Recognizing the significance of the rising rates of obesity among Georgia's youth, several foundations came together to invest in understanding the fitness and physical activity levels of our state's youth."

--Bobbi Cleveland of the Tull Charitable Foundation and convener of the Philanthropic Collaborative

The Philanthropic Collaborative for a Healthy Georgia encourages all sectors of society to understand their role and support initiatives to reverse the trend in childhood obesity and lack of physical activity.

Methods:

Three separate instruments were used to gather data: 1) the FITNESSGRAM®, a battery of health-related tests that measure aerobic capacity, body composition and muscular strength, endurance and flexibility; 2) the 3DPAR, a questionnaire of students' recollection of their physical activity on the three most recent days; and 3) surveys on physical education and food service in the schools.

Results are based on the 5,045 students who participated in the fitness testing, the 4,876 students who took the physical activity survey, and the schools that completed the school surveys (87 physical education and 81 food service surveys).

What can we do?

The Philanthropic Collaborative urges a comprehensive approach to sustainable change - one that relies on the collective power and will of communities, schools, parents, policymakers, business and media - to reverse the trend in childhood overweight and lack of physical activity.

- **Communities** can invest in safe, accessible venues for physical activity including well-lit walking trails, more sidewalks and bike paths, safe walking paths to school and convenient play facilities.
- Georgia **schools** could ensure that all children and youth participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during the school day and have expanded opportunities for physical activity through classes, intramural sports, and use of school facilities after school hours.

- **Parents** can model healthy behaviors for children.
- **Policymakers** can provide leadership by establishing childhood obesity as a top priority and making sustainable commitments to policies and programs that increase physical activity among Georgia's youth.
- Private **businesses** can collaborate with community leaders to make children's physical activity a community priority; emphasize products and opportunities that promote regular physical activity for children; and support programs that enable, facilitate and encourage children to be more physically active.
- **Media** can incorporate physical activity issues into their content, including the provision of positive role models, and encouraging discussion of public and private opportunities to promote and facilitate children's physical activity.

The estimated economic impact of adult obesity and related diseases in Georgia was more than \$2.1 billion in 2003. Given the adverse health and economic implications of the decline in fitness and rise in obesity among Georgia's children, a strong and sustained response is necessary. This response must involve all segments of society - public and private alike. A recent survey by the Healthcare Georgia Foundation indicates that Georgia's adults overwhelmingly appreciate the seriousness of this issue. Through bold leadership and strategic action, Georgians can and must work together to create an environment that teaches and promotes lifelong healthy habits for our youth.

For more information about the Georgia Youth Fitness Assessment, please contact Mary Ann Phillips at the Georgia Health Policy Center at mphillips2@gsu.edu. Copies of the complete report may be downloaded at www.gsu.edu/ghpc.