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# RURAL COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL BASED HEALTH AND WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS



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## BACKGROUND

The Illinois CATCH onto Health! Initiative (ICHI) was launched in 2007 as part of the Illinois Delta Project to improve the health of Illinois youth. It currently reaches more than 75 percent of 106 schools in the Illinois Delta Region covering the following counties: Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, White, and Williamson. Through a policy, systems, and environmental change approach, the ICHC provides assistance to engage teachers and administrators to implement Coordinated School Health policies and programs, with the goal of increasing physical activity and healthy eating within schools and improving the social and emotional wellness of students. In addition, the ICHC provides guidance to improve school health services, develop wellness teams, draft inclusive wellness policies, offer professional development opportunities, and implement strategies to increase activity levels during PE and free play and help school chefs design healthier lunch menus. This consortium is a collaborative partnership with Southern Illinois University Medicine, Southern Illinois Healthcare, University of Illinois Extension, and all local health departments that serve the Illinois delta region.

The purpose of the Delta Grant Program is to fund organizations located in the eight Delta States address unmet local health care needs and improve health equity through the development of new and innovative projects. The Delta States Rural Development Network Grant Program (Delta) has provided approximately 56 awards for health organization located in the eight Delta states, to date. Over time the total award amount had increased from \$5,090,751 to \$10,079,870 of HRSA funds that are being invested in the Delta region through this program.

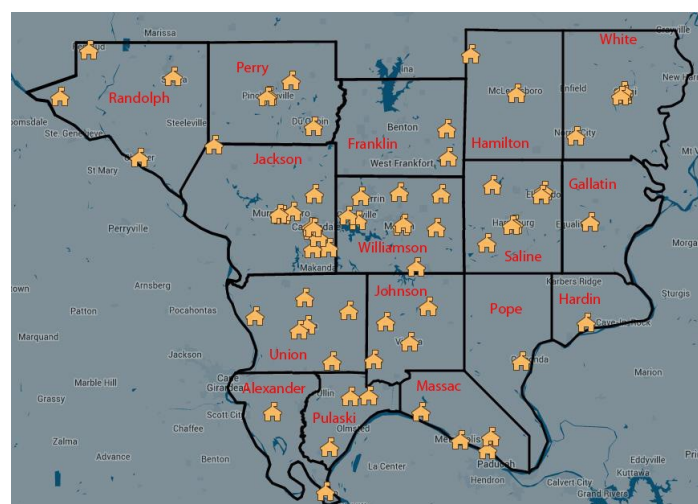
## METHODS: EVIDENCED BASED MODELS

Childhood obesity has been an increasing problem in the United States, especially in rural areas and effective prevention approaches are needed. Coordinated school health programs (CSHPs) bring together educational and community resources in the school environment. This method is particularly important in rural areas, where resources and trained health professionals are in short supply.

The ICHC implemented a coordinated approach and utilized the following evidenced-based models:

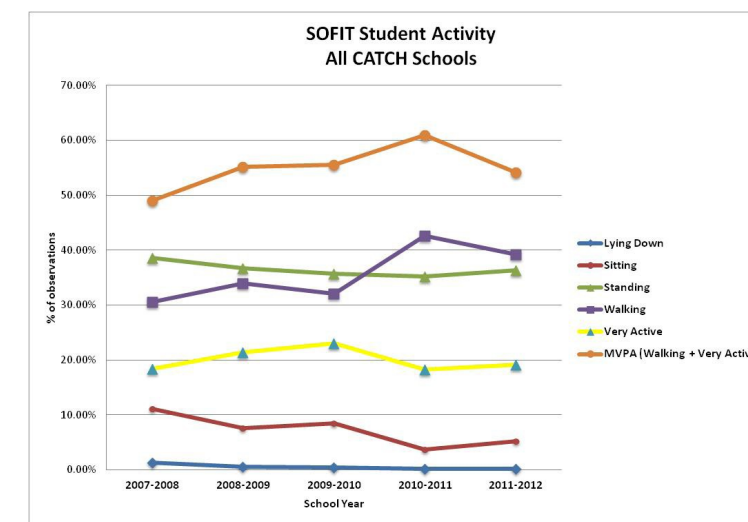
- Centers for Disease Control's (CDC's) Coordinated School Health (CSH) framework is an integrated set of planned, sequential, school-affiliated strategies, activities, and services designed to promote the optimal physical, emotional, social, and educational development of students. This framework was used to build increased capacity for Illinois schools to continue effectively improving school health through policy, systems, and environmental change, thus promoting sustainability and a strong fundamental attitude regarding the importance of general wellness, both in schools and in the community.
- CDC's School Health Index (SHI) is an online self-assessment and planning tool that schools can use to improve their health and safety policies and programs.
- CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health), an evidence-based program, has been recognized to address components of the CSH model. It includes classroom teachers, physical education teachers, school nutritional service staff, and children's families in the planning and implementation of the programs and aimed at increasing access to physical activity and healthier nutrition knowledge and options.

ICHC had positive impacts on increasing physical activity in schools, along with systematically enabling schools to: eliminate gaps and reduce redundancies across the many initiatives and funding streams; build partnerships and teamwork among school health and education professionals in the school; build collaboration and enhance communication among public health, school health, and other education and health professionals in the community; and, focus efforts on helping students engage in protective, health-enhancing behaviors and avoid risk behaviors. These ICHC efforts in the Delta region were recognized by the Illinois Department of Health and the implementation framework was adopted statewide and became a part of the *We Choose Health* initiative. This initiative brought CSH and CATCH to more than 300 schools in the state and created access to the expertise from rural health care providers, public health departments, schools and community organizations. The ICHC currently provides technical assistance through this initiative to health departments as needed.



## IMPACT/RESULTS

- Increased moderate to vigorous physical activity during the school day in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Increased aerobic capacity in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Increased standardized test scores in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Built capacity in school administrators, teachers and staff through organizing health and wellness efforts to focus on Policy, System and Environmental (PSE) changes resulting in over 30 wellness policies being strengthened or established
- Statewide recognition with the development of the *We Choose Health* Initiative reaching over 300 schools in the state of Illinois



## CONCLUSION

Funding opportunities from federal agencies such as the HRSA's FORHP and CDC are necessary to expand the work of health departments, community-based organizations, and schools in rural areas as they continue to face challenges and barriers to preventative health and quality health care.

In addition, given the diversity of schools in which CATCH and the Coordinated School Health Model have been successfully implemented, the ICHC expects that these initiatives will continue to drive positive impacts in the Illinois Delta region and continues to provide a framework for replication. This implementation framework, while developed in a rural area, has proven to be equally as effective in the more urban areas of Illinois. The ICHC is currently working on refining CSH and CATCH implementation, expanding their collaboration beyond the Illinois Delta region and focusing on further communication efforts with their programs to elevate their model to the next level with the goal of reaching and replicating in all of the eight Delta States.

## CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION

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