

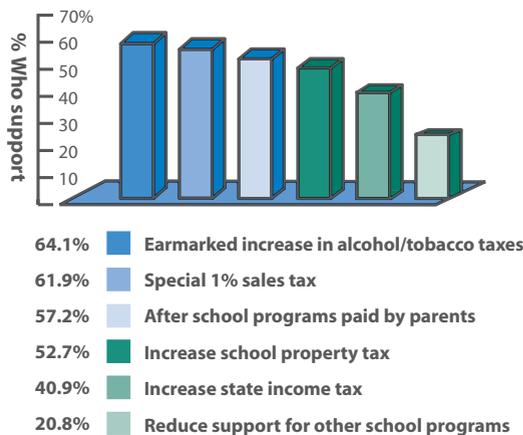


HealthVoices

Addressing Childhood Overweight: Let Georgia Lead the Way

Spring 2005

How would Georgians pay for physical education in schools?



“More than half of Georgians support several approaches to financing physical education and improved nutrition programs in schools: an earmarked increase in alcohol and tobacco taxes, special 1% sales tax, offering after-school programs paid for by parents, and increasing school property taxes.”

Georgia's children risk being the first generation to live sicker and die younger than their parents. A recent study by the University of Georgia found that one in three children in Georgia are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight¹. Being overweight increases a child's risk of developing diabetes and hypertension and exposes children to the social stigma associated with obesity². Physical inactivity is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other health problems³. Yet, only 29% of middle school students in Georgia attend a daily physical education class⁴. The question is what are Georgians willing to do about it?

To answer this question, Healthcare Georgia Foundation commissioned a statewide poll in fall 2004 to learn about Georgians' views on actions that should be taken to address childhood overweight and inactivity⁵.

Key findings of the survey:

- Two-thirds of Georgians recognize that childhood overweight and low fitness levels are very serious problems. Poor eating habits, too much television and video games, and lack of physical activity were identified as major factors contributing to the problems.
- While 97 percent of Georgians believe that parents have the primary responsibility for preventing their children from being overweight, they also believe that schools and communities play important roles.
- More than half of Georgians would support earmarking an increase in alcohol or tobacco taxes or a special 1 percent sales tax to fund physical education and nutrition enhancements in the state's schools.

These results from the poll, as well as other significant findings related to Georgians' views on the problem of

childhood overweight, are highlighted in this issue of HealthVoices.

Who participated in the poll?

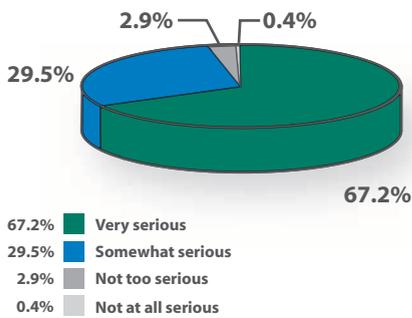
More than 1,200 people across Georgia participated in the poll. The 1,209 respondents represented a diverse cross-section of Georgians: 73.4% were women and 26.6% were men; 75.1% live in urban areas and 24.9% rural; and 51.7% were White, 23.8% Black, and 22.3% Hispanic. Hispanics were oversampled for this survey. The median income was \$50,000 per year. Although the participants in the poll represented the diversity of the state, their responses were not significantly different when analyzed by racial, ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic groups. For example, regardless of race, income level, or whether Georgians live in urban or rural settings, respondents said that it is very important for schools to require physical education classes.



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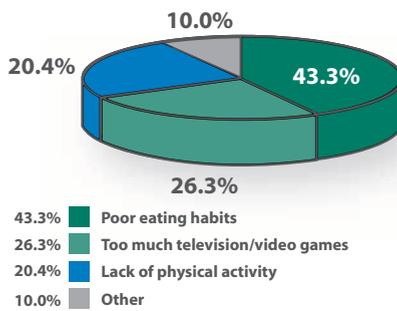
The Findings

How serious is childhood overweight among Georgia's children?



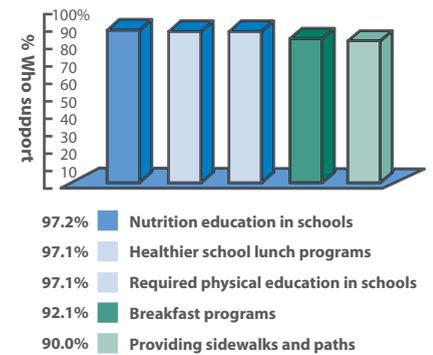
When asked to compare overweight and obesity to other health problems facing Georgia's children, 67.2% view it as very serious and 29.5% view it as somewhat serious. Most Georgians (95%) believe that a low level of fitness is a very serious or somewhat serious problem for children and youth. Over 75% strongly agree that an overweight child has a greater likelihood of becoming an overweight adult.

What factors contribute to the rising numbers of overweight children?



Georgians recognize that poor eating habits, too much television/video games and lack of physical activity are major factors contributing to the increase in overweight children. When asked about the impact on school performance, more than 85% of Georgians agree that a lack of physical activity has a negative impact and 81% agree that being overweight has a negative impact on school performance.

What school-based requirements are Georgians willing to support?



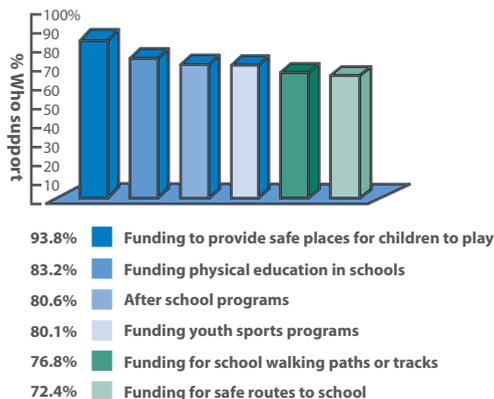
Over 97% of Georgians support nutrition education, improving content of school lunches, and requiring physical education in schools. Georgians also strongly support school breakfast programs and providing safe pathways for biking and walking to school.

Eighty-five percent of Georgians agree that lack of physical activity has a negative impact and 81% agree that being overweight also has a negative impact, yet only 29% of middle and high school students attend physical education classes daily.



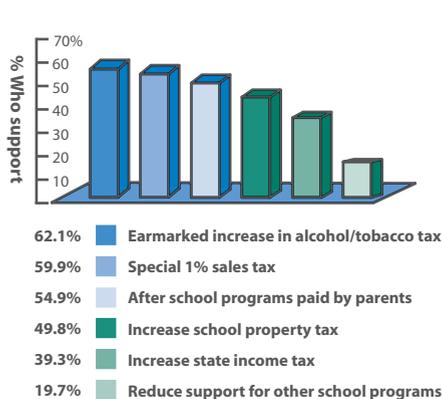
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What can communities do to promote physical fitness opportunities for children?



The poll found that Georgians strongly support community efforts to promote physical activity by providing safe places for children to play, strengthening school programs and facilities, and funding after school and youth sports programs.

How are Georgians willing to pay for school breakfast programs?



Georgians support several approaches to financing physical education and improved nutrition programs in schools by: an earmarked increase in alcohol and tobacco taxes, special 1% sales tax, after-school programs paid for by parents, and increasing school property taxes. Georgians are not willing to reduce funding for other school programs to support improvements in nutrition and physical education programs.

Footnotes

- ¹ Healthcare Georgia Foundation, [HealthVoices. Addressing Overweight: The Role of Physical Activity in Schools](#), Winter 2005.
- ² Institute of Medicine. [Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance](#), September, 2004.
- ³ Pendo, Frank J and Dahn, Jason R, Exercise and Well-being: A Review of Mental and Physical Health Benefits Associated with Physical Activity, [Current Opinion in Psychiatry](#), 18 (2): 189-193, March 2005.
- ⁴ Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, [2003 Georgia Health Student Survey Report](#), November 2003.
- ⁵ University of Georgia Survey Research Center, [2004 Poll on Childhood Overweight and Physical Inactivity](#), May 2005.

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Conclusions

Three conclusions emerge from these findings:

- Georgians agree with health experts that childhood overweight is a serious problem that demands action and that school-based physical activity and nutrition programs are key strategies for addressing the problem.
- Active leadership by parents, schools and communities is required to expand physical activity in schools, enhance school nutrition programs and provide safe paths to walk and bike to school.
- Georgians would support increases in alcohol and tobacco taxes, special purpose sales taxes, and increases in school property taxes to make these changes.

The challenge for state and local policymakers is to lead the way in converting public support for action into programs, policies and financing strategies to ensure that all Georgia's children have the opportunity to live healthy and successful lives.



Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a statewide, private independent foundation whose mission is to advance the health of all Georgians and to expand access to affordable, quality healthcare for underserved individuals and communities.

The Survey

The Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia conducted the 2004 Georgia Childhood Overweight and Physical Activity Survey with a grant from Healthcare Georgia Foundation. Data were generated from a telephone interview of a RDD (Random Digit Dial) probability sample of 1,200 Georgia residents 18 years old or older, conducted between July 5th and October 6th, 2004. The survey design also included an over-sampling of African-American respondents and a list-assisted sample of 200 Hispanic speaking Georgians. The purpose of the survey was to assess perceptions of Georgia residents about ways to address childhood overweight and physical inactivity in Georgia. Estimates based on the total sample size of 1,200 respondents are subject to sampling error of +/- 2.8% at the 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error for the African-American sample (n = 290) is +/- 5.7%, while sampling error for the Hispanic sample (n = 271) is +/- 5.9%. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing a sample of the population of adult Georgians versus interviewing the entire population of adults in Georgia. Sample surveys are subject to other sources of error such as non-response error and error associated with the wording of questionnaire items. The response rate for the study was 43.1% of those invited to participate. The questionnaire and survey results can be found at www.healthcaregeorgia.org.

Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a catalyst for better health and health care in Georgia. Through strategic grantmaking, Healthcare Georgia Foundation supports organizations that drive positive change; promotes programs that improve health and health care among underserved individuals and communities; and connects people, partners, and resources across Georgia.

HealthVoices is published periodically by Healthcare Georgia Foundation as an educational service to Georgians interested in health policy.

HealthVoices is available online at www.healthcaregeorgia.org. For further information, please contact Martha Katz, Director of Health Policy, 404.653.0990 or mkatz@healthcaregeorgia.org.

