

# Washington County

## Healthy Meals and Active Play Are Effective Tools For Appalachian Preschools

### Summary

Healthful changes in Washington County’s preschools are having a positive impact on children’s health behaviors. Children are eager to sample new foods and excited to spend more time outside engaged in new activities with their teachers. Although it may take a while to impact rates of obesity or chronic disease, more than 100 preschoolers are now consuming more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, consuming less foods of little nutritional value, and developing new physical activity habits that will lay the foundation for healthier lives.

### Challenge

Despite nutrition guidelines set by USDA, unhealthy foods continue to find their way into Washington County’s preschools, where one in four children are overweight or obese. Although preschools offer children adequate time for unstructured, indoor play, little time is devoted to teacher-led physical activities and outdoor play.

Advance a few grades, and Washington County’s school nurses are witnessing the progression of disease as they are discovering high blood pressure in a portion of the county’s elementary-aged children, of which 40% are overweight or obese. Some of these children are also demonstrating early indicators of diabetes, with a few having already been diagnosed with pre-diabetes and Type 2 diabetes.

### Solution

To reverse progression of chronic disease in children, the Washington County Health Department’s Creating Healthy Community (CHC) program partnered with the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development to offer the “Healthy Children, Healthy Weights” training to preschool administrators and teachers. Training sessions included healthy activities, healthy eating, healthy growing, healthy menus and healthy policies. Following the training, Washington County Health Department CHC staff worked with preschool administrators to implement new health policies to improve the nutritional content of menus and increase the quantity and quality of physical activities within the county’s preschools.



### Your Involvement is Key

Although obesity and chronic disease may be daunting issues to confront, we all must accept our roles in reducing its impact. Creating policies, systems, and environmental changes in our schools are viable solutions. Every school in America has room to improve the nutritional quality of the food it serves or the quality and amount of physical activity of its students participate.

Whether you are an administrator, teacher, or parent, you can be an advocate for creating healthy learning environments for children in your community.



## Results

As a result of the “Healthy Children, Healthy Weights” training, Your Kids First Learning Center in Belpre and Pioneer Pete Daycare in Marietta have made the following changes:

- Increased fruit and vegetable consumption by five servings per week
- Eliminated pre-fried foods from their menus
- Banned sugar-sweetened beverages
- Replaced 50% of the grains they serve with whole grains

Both facilities now offer additional teacher-led physical activities that are facilitated through the preschool

Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH) curriculum. Your Kids First Learning Center has also developed an outdoor exploration area. This new play area is home to butterfly, tomato, strawberry, and sensory gardens; willow, bean, and morning glory arch tunnels, and a plexi-glass art easel.

“We are always wanting to go above and beyond and offer the best to the children in our care. With the rise of childhood obesity, we know how important it is to implement healthy habits early.”

- Shannon Winland, Administrator at Your Kids First Learning Center

## Future Directions

The Washington County Health Department’s Creating Healthy Communities program and the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development are committed to fostering their partnerships with the county’s preschools in the years to come. Planning is underway to offer a second health policy training in 2013. The training will lead to additional policy, system, and environmental changes that will impact the health of hundreds more children in high-need county preschools.



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