

# WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

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April 2006

## Site of the Month

From eighth grade through twelfth grade I participated in mandatory physical education classes five days a week, about 45 minutes a day, at the Argyle, Minnesota, public school. My physical education teacher, Mrs. Kuznia, had us doing gymnastics; playing softball, volleyball, and basketball; and jumping on a trampoline—all strenuous activity. After graduation I attended the University of North Dakota where four classes of physical education were required. To make sure that I fulfilled the physical education requirements before graduating, I took three courses my freshman year. The following year I transferred to the University of Minnesota, which had no physical education requirements. Looking back, thirty years later, I consider myself fortunate because those years of exercise benefitted my current health.

Researchers have been focusing their attention on childhood obesity. Nevada KIDS COUNT released an issue brief the end of 2005 (<http://kidscount.unlv.edu/2005/childhoodobesity.pdf>), the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a data snapshot during March 2006 (<http://www.aecf.org/stateleveldata/snapshot.jsp>), and *The Future of Children* devoted its spring issue ([http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/obesity\\_intro.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/obesity_intro.pdf)) to the topic. It's the latter publication that I'd like to bring to your attention.

Nine articles published in the *Future of Children* discuss topics such as fighting obesity in public schools, the role of parents in preventing obesity, treating child obesity and associated medical problems, interventions for minorities and low-income populations, the role of child-care centers in preventing obesity, the role of built environments, the consequences of obesity, and the potential causes of obesity. If you do not have time to read them all, I recommend reading the introduction, "Introducing the Issue," which summarizes the articles.

"Fighting Obesity in the Public Schools" is the article that I chose to read and to summarize. The article's authors believe that changing school policies, such as selling only nutritional foods in vending machines and implementing programs, such as first- through twelfth-grade physical education classes five days a week that engage students in strenuous activity, are the best solutions to the obesity problem. They contend that schools are the mechanism for change because children spend much of their time in school, which provides the opportunity for change. As such, the authors recommend that schools:

- ◆ reduce the availability of junk food by restricting sales of foods and beverages high in fat and sugar
- ◆ make school meals more nutritious
- ◆ increase the amount of exercise students get in school
- ◆ help students establish lifelong eating habits by offering courses on health maintenance
- ◆ take the opportunity to influence parents' choice of foods at home and help them understand the importance of physical activity for their children