

Selecting 'Healthy Choices' over obesity

12:42 PM Wednesday, September 22, 2010

There are encouraging signs in the war against obesity in Ohio.

This summer, state lawmakers and Gov. Ted Strickland adopted the new "Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Act," which is designed to combat the obesity epidemic among our schoolchildren.

One in three children born in Ohio is overweight by age 8, according to Sen. Kevin Coughlin, R-Cuyahoga Falls, a co-sponsor of the bill. And they're apparently picking up the trait at home: Ohio is ranked 10th in the nation for having the fattest adults.

Among the new law's provisions are: healthier á la carte and vending food and beverage options in schools; body mass index (BMI) screenings upon school entry and in third, fifth and ninth grades (with a parental opt-out and a waiver option for schools that may be immediately unable to comply); and a pilot program to encourage 30 minutes of daily physical activity for students. BMI information would be shared with parents or guardians so they can better monitor their children's weight and diet.

Several area districts are to be applauded for already providing healthier food choices for students and measuring BMI before the statewide measure was adopted. We're also anxious to see how a test program — launched Sept. 17 — at Mason High School in Warren County is received by students. Mason is one of two high schools in the nation offering a vending machine full of baby carrots to students. A school official told us that student reaction was largely positive so far.

We don't expect to see carrot machines in every school district anytime soon, but offering veggies and fruits is obviously healthier than the typical vending-machine fare of soda pop, salted chips and candy bars.

The Franklin City School District in Warren County is one of a couple area districts that are exercising the waiver option on BMI screenings for the 2010-11 school year. School officials there have cited concerns about associated costs (estimated at an additional \$10,000 to \$15,000) and medical privacy, and said they expect that most districts will seek the waiver. We hope that's not the case.

Existing physical education classes seem to be the most logical place for BMI screenings to occur and recording a student's BMI at infrequent intervals should be no more onerous than recording a grade on a pop quiz. And concerns about medical privacy appear to be less than genuine. After all, school districts handle confidential student information — including medical situations — every day. Why should the BMI information be any different?

There's no question that obesity is a national crisis — with two-thirds of Americans estimated to be either overweight or obese and at risk of an assortment of life-threatening ailments, according to

Associated Press medical writer Lauran Neergaard. She reported this week on an interesting new study by George Washington University researchers who studied every possible expense and found that the annual cost of obesity is \$4,879 for a woman and \$2,646 for a man. (The study found that obese women earn less than obese men, but those figures also include sick days, lost productivity, early death risk, and other factors.) And we wonder why health-care costs are so high.

Sadly, it appears we are condemning our children to the same fate — unless we commit ourselves to programs like Ohio's "Healthy Choices" initiative and first lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign to promote physical fitness and weight control. We're glad our public schools are taking a lead role.

Find this article at:

<http://www.journal-news.com/opinion/editorials/selecting-healthy-choices-over-obesity-936204.html>

 Print this page Close