

South Carolina

Fighting the Obesity Epidemic: New Partnerships Underscore South Carolina's Focus on Improving Youth Health

Public Health Problem

South Carolina's youth experience health challenges related to overweight and obesity. Among South Carolina's high school students, in 2005,

- 26% were overweight or at risk for becoming overweight.
- 70% did not meet the currently recommended levels of physical activity.
- Only 16% ate fruits and vegetables at least five times a day.
- 78% did not attend physical education classes daily.

To help address the overweight problem among school children, South Carolina Healthy Schools (SCHS) — the state's coordinated school health program funded through CDC provides technical support and professional development to build district capacity to promote healthy behaviors among youth. As part of this ongoing assistance, SCHS conducts special training institutes and supports local mini-grants for school health improvement.

Program Example

The Anderson County School Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) exemplifies the success of the SCHS program's continued efforts to promote healthy behaviors among students. During 2002–2006, the SCHS worked with a local community organization, Anderson Partners for a Healthy Community (Partners), and a local hospital, Anderson Medical Center (AnMed), to establish coordinated school health teams in every elementary, middle, and high school in Anderson County, a system serving about 30,000 students. Pilot funding for the SHIP initiative was provided by grants from SCHS, AnMed, and the Duke Endowment Foundation. The SCHS provided technical support and professional development for Partners' staff and to the school health teams through SCHS and SHIP Summer Institutes. Teams used the CDC's *School Health Index (SHI)* to assess and plan for school health improvement and used a portfolio system to document and track their efforts to promote healthy practices, including physical activity and positive eating behaviors.

Implications and Impact

As a result of the Anderson County SHIP, 47 school health teams were established, 44 teams have been trained, and schools have adopted a variety of health-promoting policies and practices, including the following:

- Adopting healthy vending policies.
- Improving physical activity opportunities available to students.
- Implementing aerobics, yoga, running, and walking programs for students, and faculty.
- Adopting evidence-based health education curriculum.
- Providing breakfast in the classroom, eliminating fried foods, and offering more fruits and vegetables.
- Changing student reward systems to healthy options or other types of rewards.

In addition, across the Anderson County School District, the number of school nurses increased from 31 before the SHIP to 43 after its initiation. These additional 12 nurse positions were at first supported with SHIP funding but now are sustained 100% with district funds.