



Boston's Steps Program

Increasing healthy behaviors among students

What is the public health problem?

Eight neighborhoods in the Boston Steps intervention area collectively have the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, and asthma in the city. According to 2005* Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance data,

- Almost 16% of Boston's high school students (grades 9–12) are overweight and nearly 20% are at risk of becoming overweight.
- In addition, nearly 49% of Boston's high school students report spending at least 3 hours per day watching television.

How Steps is responding

Boston Steps, in partnership with BlueCross BlueShield of Massachusetts and Boston Public Schools, implemented the Planet Health program in schools throughout the city.

- Planet Health teaches students about nutrition and physical activity while simultaneously building skills in language arts, health, math, science, and social studies.
- School teachers and staff members receive annual training on how to implement the program, which is integrated into daily classroom learning activities.

What is the impact?

- Planet Health is being taught in 16 Boston middle schools, reaching 4,200 students. About 160 teachers

and other staff members have been trained in the curriculum.

- In a year-end survey conducted after implementation of the pilot program,
 - Educators reported an increase in staff and student knowledge of nutrition and physical activity, as well as an increase in awareness of the importance of staying healthy.
 - More than 90% of teachers reported that the curriculum had a positive impact on both students' health and their own health habits. Furthermore, the teachers said they looked forward to implementing the curriculum annually.
 - According to the Harvard University Prevention Research Center, which designed the Planet Health curriculum, every \$1.00 spent on the curriculum translates to a future savings of \$1.20 in medical costs and lost wages when the children reach middle age.†

Why this program is working

The Planet Health curriculum was designed to fit well with academic subjects. It has been shown to 1) decrease rates of obesity and disordered eating behaviors among girls, 2) significantly reduce the time that both girls and boys watch television, and 3) increase fruit and vegetable intake and knowledge of nutrition and healthy activities among both sexes. Teachers also rate the program as highly feasible, acceptable, and sustainable.

* Most recent data available

† http://www.cdc.gov/prc/stories-prevention-research/stories/planet_health.htm