

## **PASSPORT TO A HEALTHY FUTURE IN CITRUS COUNTY**

*Reaching vulnerable children and mothers with nutrition education to reduce obesity*

### **Public Health Problem**

- One in four children in the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Program in Citrus County, Florida are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight putting them at increased risk for chronic disease as obese adults.
- Improving eating and physical activity habits among children can help them prevent weight gain and adult obesity. Although there is limited information about children's eating habits in Florida, few adult residents eat the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables and one fourth have a sedentary lifestyle.

### **Program**

- The Citrus County Health Department collaborated with a WIC program registered dietitian and a nutrition educator to teach kindergarten through third grade students about healthy eating and physical activity.
- The teaching team used several curriculum guides - Read for Health, Florida curriculum benchmarks, and Sunshine State Standards Benchmarks - as a starting point to create the Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program which provides six weekly classes.
- Students record one or more healthy examples in their passport at the end of each class to receive a 'passport stamp' that allows them to 'travel' to the next class. Students sign a pledge committing to a healthy lifestyle and their parents get a weekly letter with steps to take at home that helps engage them in the educational process.
- Initially funded from a settlement award, the program is now supported by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, the Board of County Commissioners, the Citrus County Health Department, and the Citrus County School Board Nutrition Department.

### **Impact**

- School cafeteria staff reports an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption and a decrease in high-fat, whole milk purchases by students.
- Teachers report that children are eating healthier meals and bringing healthier snacks into the classroom.
- All Citrus County elementary schools are now implementing the Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program classes, reaching over three thousand students in the classroom and through 'family night' activities.
- The Nutrition and Fitness Passport Program will be expanded to county middle schools, increasing the number of children who will benefit from healthy eating and physical activity education.

### **Contact**

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