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A PROFILE OF
CHILDHOOD OBESITY
IN ERIE COUNTY

A Product of the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County

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For the first time in history, children are predicted to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the USA, and is projected to shorten American life expectancy by 2–5 years over the next 35 years. In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that over 1/3 of children were either obese or overweight (i.e. at risk of becoming obese). This problem is only worsening, as obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past 30 years.

Being obese or overweight can cause serious health conditions including:

- Asthma
- Stroke
- Cancer
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Premature Death

A child's weight status is determined through the body mass index (BMI), which is the child's height and weight as compared to other children of the same age and gender. Children that are obese have a BMI at or above the 85th percentile.
**PUBLIC EXPENDITURES IN NEW YORK STATE**

New York State (NYS) is second highest for obesity related spending in the United States. Over the past three decades, obesity and overweight rates among children and adolescents has continued to increase. Currently, 34% of children in NYS are currently obese or overweight.

In 2009, over **$11.1 billion** was spent on obesity prevention and mitigation, including **$6.7 billion** (60%) in public expenditures through Medicare and Medicaid.

Battling the onset of obesity could save hundreds of millions of dollars each year, making both families and NYS more financially sustainable.

**OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE CHILDREN IN ERIE COUNTY**

In 2012, 32% of children in Erie County qualified as obese and overweight. This is an increase from 28% in 2008.

- 30.4% of elementary school children are considered obese and overweight.
- 34.4% of middle and high school children are considered obese and overweight.
- 13 of the 29 school districts in Erie County had above average rates of obese and overweight students.

Public Expenditures exceed private spending on obesity-related illnesses in NYS (2009 Figures).

School Districts from rural, suburban, and city areas have high rates of overweight and obese children.
Obesity and overweight rates for school-aged children in Erie County have ties to access and consumption of healthy food, safe and accessible spaces to engage in physical activity, and neighborhood income levels.
Above Average Childhood Obesity Rates Can Be Caused By

Unhealthy Food
Children and adolescents may consume up to 40% of their daily calories from sugars and solid fats.

Screen/Media Time
Children who watch more than two hours of TV per day are more likely to gain excess weight that can contribute to obesity.

Neighborhood Income
Children from lower income households are more than twice as likely to be obese than those from higher income households.

Below Average Childhood Obesity Rates Can Result From

Nutritious Food
Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are high in fiber and have been shown to reduce weight gain over time.

Physical Activity
Regular physical activity reduces both body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference while improving aerobic capacity.

Community Wealth
Higher-income areas have greater access to parks, sports facilities, and healthy food options than low-income areas.
WHAT IS THE STATE OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY & OVERWEIGHT RATES IN ERIE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

Above Average

Lakeshore 44.1
Cheektowaga Central 41.1
Springville-Griffith 40.0
Lackawanna 36.6
Cheektowaga Maryvale 36.6
Depew 35.6
West Seneca 34.7
Cheektowaga Sloan 34.7
Alden 34.2
Buffalo 33.7
Frontier 33.1
Tonawanda 32.9
Sweet Home 31.8
Erie County 31.7
Kenmore-Tonawanda 31.0
Erie County School Districts located in the City of Buffalo, suburbs bordering the city, and rural communities tend to have above average rates of overweight and obese children when compared to school districts in other suburban communities.
There is a close relationship between income levels of a school district and the proportion of children who are obese or overweight.

Traditionally high income districts like East Aurora and Orchard Park have relatively healthier students than nearby districts with lower income levels, like Lakeshore and Cheektowaga.

One way we can measure the income levels of a district is to understand what proportion of students are receiving free or reduced lunches, shown. Typically, these children and their families are either living in poverty or slightly above poverty and are considered low income.
32% of Erie County students are Overweight or Obese

43% of Erie County students receive Free or Reduced Lunch

Erie County Averages

School District Averages

Evans-Brant (Lakeshore) CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
44%
42%

Cheektowaga CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
41%
49%

Springville-Griffith CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
40%
24%

East Aurora UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT
25%
7%

Orchard Park CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
25%
7%

Hamburg CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
25%
18%

Grand Island CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
25%
20%

FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH RATES

ABOVE AVERAGE CHILDHOOD OBESITY RATES

BELOW AVERAGE CHILDHOOD OBESITY RATES
Combating childhood obesity is a challenge the entire community must come together to address. From policymakers and parents to school districts and sports leagues, we can all work together to improve our children’s health and well being.

**Policymakers** and funders should continue supporting school based programs and after school programs that are used to decrease childhood obesity, like Soccer for Success, Play 60, and CATCH.

Other strategies to promote healthy lifestyles include ensuring equal access to physical activity, such as recreational programs and safe play spaces, as well as equal access to nutritious food through nearby grocery stores and farmers’ markets.

**School districts** should continue or start to collect data on childhood obesity to support policymakers in understanding which programs are the most effective to implement.

School districts can also take a leadership role by working with their wellness teams and other staff to provide a safe environment for children. They should enact policies and procedures that support healthy behaviors including:

- Delivering high-quality and nutritious school lunches
- Offering nutritional education at early ages
- Ensuring equal access to physical education

**Families and individuals** should make their children active contributors to the process of planning for meals, grocery shopping and preparing meals.

Children should be encouraged to reach for the fruits and veggies while avoiding the snack food aisles. We can also model good behavior by reducing too much screen time and encouraging active play time, both indoors and outdoors.
WHICH PROGRAMS ARE DELIVERING RESULTS?

United Way's Healthy Start Healthy Future for All Coalition, a partnership of over 50 organizations, promotes collaborative efforts across Buffalo & Erie County that are leading the way in the fight against childhood obesity. These innovative programs combine nutritional education with physical activity, while providing varying degrees of mentorship through school-based and after school initiatives. Three local examples are included below.

**Soccer for Success**
- **Local Availability**: 42 sites in the City of Buffalo
- **2013-2014 Results**: Improved body mass index, waist size, and aerobic capacity
- **Partners**: U.S. Soccer Foundation, Buffalo Soccer Club, Independent Health Foundation, United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
- **Uses**: Uses soccer to combat childhood obesity and encourage healthy lifestyles. 75 minutes of after school programming 3x/week.

**Play60 Challenge for Kids**
- **Local Availability**: 522 classrooms, 61 schools in Erie County
- **2013-2014 Results**: 5,437 students participated in over 5.6 million minutes of physical activity
- **Partners**: National Football League, American Heart Association, Independent Health Foundation, United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
- **Assists**: Assists schools in providing healthy and active environments; class rooms participate in 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

**CATCH®**
- **Local Availability**: 8 schools in the City of Buffalo
- **2013-2014 Results**: Largest evidence-based child health promotion program in the world
- **Partners**: Buffalo Public Schools, Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
- **Encourages**: Encourages healthy eating and physical activity from Pre-K to Grade 8; highly cost effective program for obesity prevention.
USEFUL RESOURCES

For more information on childhood obesity and steps you can take, please explore the following resources:

**NYS Health Data**
Find data related to childhood health from Student Weight Status Category Reporting
[health.data.ny.gov](http://health.data.ny.gov)

**Community Health Assessment**
Erie County’s 2014-2017 CHA, reporting on the overall state of health in the area
[erie.gov/health](http://erie.gov/health)

**UWBEC Health & Wellness**
Learn more about United Way's programs that are actively working to reduce childhood obesity
[uwbec.org/wellness](http://uwbec.org/wellness)

**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**
Find research briefs on some of the causes and consequences of childhood obesity.
[rwjf.org](http://rwjf.org)

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