

A TRAINING MANUAL FOR

PARENTS

TEACHERS AND

FOOD SERVICE STAFF

# Physical Activity and Nutrition

for Alaska's  
Head Start Kids



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## for Alaska's Head Start Kids

A training manual for parents, teachers, and food service staff

June 2007

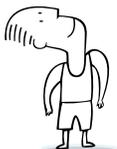


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# We couldn't have done it without you.

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Dear Alaskan:

*The primary mission of the Head Start program is to prepare children for school success through the provision of comprehensive child development services. This training manual focuses on physical activity and nutrition, which are two critical components of a comprehensive child development program.*

*On the surface, physical activity and nutrition may seem to have little to do with school readiness. However, both are essential. Children who engage in regular physical activity and are properly nourished are more likely to improve their school performance because they are more alert and engaged in classroom activities, more able to concentrate, and less likely to misbehave.*

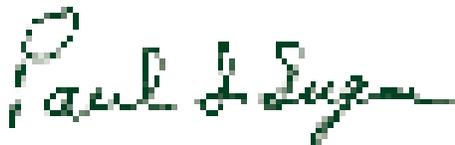
*In addition to preparing children to succeed in school, physical activity and good nutrition provide lifelong health benefits. They contribute to good cardiovascular health, strong bones and muscles, and they keep the brain active and healthy.*

*Despite the many benefits of physical activity and good nutrition, too many Alaskan children today grow up without developing positive physical activity and nutrition habits. They consume more sugar, fat, and calories than they can expend, and spend more time looking at screens than playing outside. As a result, children are at a greater risk for obesity and many other chronic, lifelong health problems than ever before.*

*Head Start programs are in a position to make a tremendous contribution to child health and school readiness through the promotion of physical activity and good nutrition. Head Start staff see children nearly every day. They share meals with children and can use mealtime to promote healthy eating and teach about healthy foods. They have classroom time set aside to help children develop important motor skills, such as throwing, jumping, and catching. They can also design lesson plans that incorporate physical activity and nutrition concepts and model healthy behavior.*

*In addition to activities carried out in the classroom, Head Start staff members interact with parents and caregivers on a regular basis. They have opportunities to share information on healthy eating and physical activity with parents, and to encourage parents to reinforce healthy behaviors at home.*

*The materials in this training manual are designed to give Head Start staff suggestions and activities they can use to educate, encourage, and inspire parents and children to eat well and be physically active. By doing so, children will not only be healthy, they will be ready for school and on the road to living a healthy life.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Sugar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Paul Sugar

Head Start Collaboration Director

Alaska Department of Education  
& Early Development

For more than 40 years, Head Start has played a significant role in improving the physical and social health of our nation's children and families. Head Start has been a leader and powerful influence in setting standards for all early childhood care and education providers. Although health related issues have varied throughout the years, Head Start has always addressed relevant health issues accurately and in a timely manner. Head Start is currently challenged with becoming an early childhood care and education role model for addressing the childhood overweight epidemic.

This epidemic of childhood overweight is affecting the nation's boys and girls as toddlers, preschoolers, and adolescents. Over the past three decades, the rate of overweight has more than doubled for preschool children ages 2 to 5 years and adolescents ages 12 to 19 years, and it has more than tripled for children ages 6 to 11 years. All socioeconomic strata and all ethnic groups have shown an increased prevalence of overweight.

Society has changed dramatically in the two decades over which the overweight epidemic has developed. Many of these changes, such as both parents working outside the home, longer work hours by both parents, supersizing of food and beverage portions, intensified marketing of foods to young children, increased reliance

## Executive Summary

and acceptance of prepared foods, and more meals eaten outside the home, together with changes in the physical design and safety of communities affect what children eat, where they eat, how much they eat, and the amount of energy they expend.

The opportunity is here for Alaska's Head Starts to tip the scale back towards a healthy childhood weight. Head Start can provide student and family education, improve the classroom nutrition and physical activity environment, and adopt nutrition and physical activity policies that enhance the current requirements of the Head Start Performance Standards and Other Regulations. The intent of these actions is to initiate, support, and sustain the societal and lifestyle changes that can reverse the trend of overweight among our children and youth.

This Physical Activity and Nutrition Training Manual is designed to provide Alaskan Head Start parents, teachers, and food service staff with tools they can use to become leaders in reversing the epidemic of childhood overweight.

### SECTION one

#### TRAINING FOR HEAD START STAFF

Section One of the Training Manual is designed for supervisors or coordinators and can be used to train teachers, family advocates, home visitors, and other Head Start staff. This section contains three modules that address childhood overweight, physical activity and nutrition. The first module, *Weight Matters*, provides an overview of childhood overweight, its associated health risks, basic skills on interpreting Body Mass Index (BMI), and information to help staff accurately discuss a healthy childhood weight with parents.

*Nutrition in the Classroom* encourages improvements in the classroom environment by addressing classroom design, introduction of new foods, support of healthy eating habits, and provision of consistent, accurate nutrition messages to parents.

*Physical Activity in the Classroom* focuses on the classroom environment by addressing classroom design and ways to create active classrooms.

## SECTION

# two

### TRAINING FOR PARENTS

Section two consists of three modules designed to guide Head Start parents. Childrens' attitudes about nutrition and physical activity are nurtured by engaged and skillful parents that model and encourage fun, life-long habits.

*Setting the Table for Meals Together* encourages families to eat more meals together. Children who eat meals together have greater word acquisition, eat a more nutritious diet, are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, and, as teens, communicate more openly with their families and get better grades. *Making Healthy Food Choices* provides information on "how to" select healthy foods to improve health and achieve and maintain a healthy weight by following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 and MyPyramid recommendations.

*Physical Activity at Home* helps parents understand the importance of both structured activity and free play. Structured activity is important so children learn how to move in all kinds of ways. Free play helps develop a child's imagination, creativity, body awareness and sense of space and dimension.

## SECTION

# three

### TRAINING FOR FOOD SERVICE STAFF

This section contains two modules for training menu planners and food service staff.

*Serving Healthy Food* will help weave together the Head Start Performance Standards, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, MyPyramid and health organization nutrition recommendations enabling Head Starts to serve wholesome nutritious foods.

*Serving Traditional Foods* is designed to help Head Start centers wishing to serve donated traditional Alaska Native foods. Serving traditional Native foods in the Head Start classroom provides good nutrition and addresses the cultural and ethnic food preferences of many of the children. This module provides a brief overview of the nutritional benefits of Alaska traditional foods, how to determine if the Head Start center has the capacity to prepare traditional foods, ways to involve the community in the donation of Alaska traditional foods to the Head Start, and the Alaska Department of Conservation Alaska Food Code regulations surrounding the use of Alaska traditional foods.

### A CALL TO ACTION

Clearly, Head Start alone cannot address all the reasons for the increased prevalence of childhood overweight. However, organizations such as Head Starts and individuals such as Head Start families across the state can begin to make positive changes. In the long-term, Alaska can become a state where proper nutrition and physical activity support energy balance and a healthy weight is the standard. Head Start's leadership is necessary to help early childhood care and education develop nutrition and physical activity standards and programs that result in sustained societal and lifestyle changes that promote a healthy weight among Alaska's children and youth.

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