

"GEORGIA'S BEST WEEKLY"

# The Savannah Tribune

## Obesity is Out When Students Get in Shape

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The Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH), in partnership with Georgia Action for Healthy Kids and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, hosted the 2nd Annual Georgia Schools Wellness Summit: New Avenues of Academic Achievement.

Under the DCH Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative, the partnership and summit were a direct response to improving the health status of Georgia's children and youth by reducing childhood obesity.

The summit brought together more than 200 school personnel including administrators, nutritionists, nurses, health and physical education teachers, as well as healthcare and public health professionals, community partners, parents and students from around the state. The summit's central focus was to address solutions to childhood obesity.

"Childhood obesity is a significant public health problem in Georgia," said Kimberly Redding, MD, MPH, Director of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs for DCH. "Schools are an important setting to help reduce childhood obesity and other chronic diseases through health, nutrition and physical activity. Collaboration with our partners will help to ensure that students learn how to eat healthy and meet the guidelines for 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activities each day."

In 2010, Georgia ranked second in the nation in childhood obesity, a slight increase over rankings in previous years according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Overweight or obese children are more likely to develop serious chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma and heart problems and are at a higher risk of dying prematurely if their weight is not reduced. Earlier studies from the Georgia Data Summary: Obesity in Children and Youth Report (prepared by DCH's Division of Public Health – Chronic Disease, Healthy Behaviors and Epidemiology Section), the Nutrition Surveillance System (operated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey also highlighted the severity of the childhood obesity issue in Georgia.

During the two-day gathering, summit speakers addressed school cafeteria menus, vending options, school fundraisers for staff wellness programs, state legislation on student fitness assessments (the Georgia SHAPE Act ), and available health resources across the state. Summit

participants also learned new strategies on how to better implement healthy messages and food choices in school settings.

This legislation requires that schools conduct an annual fitness assessment on students in grades 1 through 12 enrolled in a physical education class. A Georgia SHAPE Act pilot program is underway in Bibb, Lowndes, Gwinnett, White and Hall County School Systems and is expected to be completed by April 2011. A final report will be submitted to the Governor in October 2012.