



Grantee Profile	
Grantee:	The University of Texas School of Public Health
Program:	CATCH (Coordinated Approach To Child Health)
Grants:	>\$2.4 million-over 4 years
Activities:	Promote physical activity, healthy food choices, and prevent tobacco use in elementary school aged children.
Impact:	59,000 children

CATCH Program Making Progress in Central Texas to Promote Healthy Habits and Reduce Childhood Obesity

An amazing thing happens in schools where children are introduced to CATCH (Coordinated Approach To Child Health). Kids learn that fruits and vegetables taste good and are good for them and that being active and playing out-of-doors is fun, and they are taking those lessons home to their families. CATCH is now the largest school-based health promotion study in the United States and it is counteracting fast-food, media-oriented lifestyles by teaching children to eat healthy and be physically active every day, and helping instill healthy lifetime behaviors.

The program is vitally needed in Texas where almost 44 percent of fourth grade students and 37 percent of eighth grade students are overweight or obese, affecting their health, schoolwork, social interactions and long-term quality of life. Alarming, the prevalence of childhood obesity has doubled over the last 20 years and there is a coincident rise in Type 2 diabetes in children. The disease, on average, decreases the child's life expectancy 19 years.

CATCH originated in the late 1980s as a research project funded by the National Heart and Lung Institute involving the University of California at San Diego, the University of Minnesota, Tulane University and The University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH). The CATCH Program was

developed to promote physical activity, healthy food choices and prevent tobacco use in elementary school aged children. It works by connecting the major influences of behavioral change - school, family, community, policy and the children themselves - through four coordinated components: the Eat Smart School Nutrition Program, K-5 Classroom curriculum, a Physical Education program, and a Family program. Results from the early impact study have been very promising.

In Texas, CATCH was implemented in schools in El Paso County in 2000 and the program has shown statistically strong results, reducing the number of obese fifth graders by 11 percent for girls and 8 percent for boys. To expand the impact, a CATCH project was initiated to improve the health and fitness of 59,000 children in Travis County with a grant from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

Promoting Childhood Health and Fitness in Travis County

The CATCH program's coordinated approach, giving children the tools and information to educate their families about the importance of healthy nutrition and exercise, thus spreading the impact of the program, appealed to the Michael & Susan Dell

Foundation and aligned with its goals to promote childhood health.

In July 2006, the foundation committed more than \$2.4 million over a four-year period to The University of Texas School of Public Health to implement and evaluate the CATCH Program in Travis County including the Austin, Del Valle, Manor and Pflugerville Independent School Districts. The entire Travis County CATCH project is being housed under the new Michael & Susan Dell Center for Advancement of Healthy Living in Austin, Texas in the newly created Austin Regional Campus of The University of Texas School of Public Health.

The primary project goals are to implement the CATCH program in all 97 elementary schools in Travis County, including 58 targeted low-income schools, and decrease the prevalence of overweight fourth grade students from a baseline of 23.5 percent to 15 percent in four years.

The evaluation of the program will assess the direct impact of CATCH in 20 randomly selected schools over the course of the study based on measures including completion and compliance; dietary and physical activity patterns; changes in children's height, weight, body mass index and other health factors; and student academic achievement.

Weighing in on CATCH

With more than 98 percent of American children attending public and private schools, health promotion programs administered at schools have great potential for reducing the risk of childhood obesity. For over 10 years, CATCH has proven successful in guiding schools, families, and children in the process of being healthy through healthy choices in school lunch programs, physical activity, nutrition education, and parent and community awareness.

Research conducted in 2003 at San Diego State University, considered to have one of the nation's leading community-based intervention programs with UTSPH CATCH, showed that participation in the CATCH program successfully slowed the epidemic increase in childhood obesity rates. In addition, preliminary data from a state-wide health

survey indicate a decrease in the number of overweight fourth graders in El Paso County compared to other counties in Texas.

In Travis County, the program will soon be helping kids make wellness a priority by practicing healthy habits that strike a balance between good nutrition and physical activity leading to better life choices and healthy life-long behaviors.

Key milestones have been completed in training school personnel for implementation and gathering baseline measures from 1,379 students from 35 study schools. Results from this baseline study are forthcoming.

Project leadership has also conducted numerous CATCH Action Team and CATCH Committee meetings and site visits, as well as two CATCH Champion meetings, to exchange ideas, build skills around school-based initiatives, prepare materials and equipment, ready implementation plans and create community awareness.

Outlook

In the coming year, the Travis County CATCH Project will be facilitating implementation, strengthening community relations through the child health consortium, and continuing to create awareness about CATCH and its health objectives through various communication outreach strategies. As work continues over the four-year study, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation will eagerly track the impact of the program in reducing childhood obesity and improving the health and fitness of children in Travis County elementary schools. For additional information, visit www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/catch/ or www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/DellHealthyLiving/.