TEXAS OBESITY RESEARCH UPDATE

SEPTEMBER, 2011

UPDATE ON THE TEXAS CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION POLICY EVALUATION (T-COPPE)

A JOINT RESEARCH PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AUSTIN REGIONAL CAMPUS AND TEXAS A&M SYSTEM HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER SCHOOL OF RURAL PUBLIC HEALTH.

BACKGROUND

When it comes to childhood obesity, Texas continues to be ranked 7th worst in the nation. Today, one in five Texas children ages 10-17 are obese. Less than a third of Texas children and adolescents meet the recommended 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day. Yet we know that physical activity improves academic performance, concentration and classroom behavior. When students engage in Active Commuting to School (walking or biking), they get physical activity, develop a sense of responsibility and independence, spend time outside with parents and friends and develop a better understanding of their community, and most importantly they arrive to school ready to learn.

In addition to these significant benefits, children can also benefit from walking and biking to school in terms of reducing stress, relieving ADHD symptoms and improving cognitive and motor skills. $^{\rm iv\ v\ vi\ vii}$

It wasn't long ago that American children walked or biked to school. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case viii:

- In 1969, 42 percent of children 5 to 18 years of age walked or bicycled to school.
- In 2001, 16 percent of children 5 to 18 years of age walked or bicycled to school.
- In 1969, 87 percent of children 5 to 18 years of age who lived within one mile of school walked or bicycled to school.
- In 2001, 63 percent of children 5 to 18 years of age who lived within one mile of school walked or bicycled to school.



SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (SR2S)

On August 10, 2005, President George W. Bush signed into law the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) that promoted SR2S programs that offer healthy alternatives to riding the bus or being driven to school. Each state receives funding based on its percentage of the national total of children in grades K-8. From 2005 to 2009, Texas received almost \$45 million^{ix} in this fully funded cost-reimbursement program managed by Texas Department of Transportation^x. Through a competitive process, Texas communities are awarded funding for local projects:

- 70-90 percent of the total funds are dedicated to infrastructure projects (engineering)
- Remaining 10-30 percent support non-infrastructure or planning projects (education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation)

In May of 2010, TxDOT awarded \$54 million to Texas communities with \$16 million coming from remaining SAFETEA-LU funds and \$38 million in anticipation of the re-authorization of the SAFETEA-LU bill. The current law is extended through December 31, 2010. A multi-year reauthorization bill is expected after Congress reconvenes following the midterm elections.

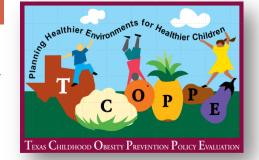
TEXAS CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION POLICY EVALUATION

On June 24, 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation gave a \$1 million grant to the University of Texas School of Public Health Austin Regional Campus and Texas A&M System School of Rural Public Health through the Statewide Evaluations of Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies program. The purpose of this national program is to build the evidence base for childhood obesity prevention by evaluating state-level policies that aim to affect children's access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.

Texas Childhood Obesity Prevention Policy Evaluation (T-COPPE) is a five year project seeking to understand how two new policies impact physical activity and nutrition among Texas children. Specifically, T-COPPE is evaluating the SR2S(focus of this research brief) and the new Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program guidelines.

Three different groups were surveyed:

- Schools and communities who received infrastructure funding
- Schools and communities who received planning funding only
- A control group of unfunded schools and communities



Survey Scope

- 81 schools in 28 metropolitan and rural counties across the state.
- 3,315 students
- 2.057 parents
- 1,653 individuals surveyed in student/parent combination survey
- 12,167 Active Transportation Counts performed
- 79 Environmental Audits performed

BASELINE RESEARCH RESULTS

	Infrastructure Schools	Planning Schools	Control Schools
% Active Commuting To School	12.7	13.2	7.2
% Active Commuting from School	19.5	18.9	14.9

Students that walked or biked to school were more likely to:

- Have a friend who walked or biked to school
- Have self-confidence that they could walk to school
- Feel that they could ask their parents to walk or bike to school

Compared to children in control schools, children in planning schools:

- Were better at asking their parents if they could walk or bike to school
- Had higher parent self-confidence for letting children walk to school
- Had higher parent outcome expectations
- Had higher student self-efficacy
- Were more likely to walk or bike
- Were less likely to ride the bus
- Were less likely to watch TV while eating dinner
- Were less likely to watch TV on weekends

Compared to children in control schools, children in infrastructure schools:

- Had higher student self-efficacy
- Were more likely to walk
- Were less likely to ride the bus

Parents more likely to let their children commute to school:

- Had higher self-confidence in letting their child walk to school
- Perceived better walkability around their house and their child's school
- Were more likely to let their children walk to other places from school
- Reported better outcomes associated with walking to school (e.g., children would be healthier)
- Reported fewer barriers to commuting



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Baseline Research Findings	Potential Policy Solutions
Active Commuting to School (ACS) is low in Texas across all	Additional programs that promote built environment
communities.	conducive to ACS
Significant differences were seen in ACS between	Smaller grants (planning grants) may be as effective in
planning/infrastructure and control schools.	increasing ACS as larger grants (infrastructure grants)
Many parent-related variables were consistent with ACS.	Investments in programs that focus on parent education
Child behaviors associated with ACS included asking behaviors &	Promotion of programs like Walking School Buses, where
having friends commute.	groups of children walk/ride together

RECAP OF 82ND LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Partnership for a Healthy Texas: Conquering Obesity set "complete streets" as a priority this session because supporting a healthier environment is critical to increasing activity and improving health outcomes for Texans. HB 1105 by Representative Linda Harper-Brown and SB 513 by Senator Rodney Ellis would have required the Texas Department of Transportation to determine the feasibility of designing new roads, or repairing roads, with the safety of all users in mind, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Because Texans have a much more sedentary lifestyle than past generations, initiatives like these have also shown to promote health.

Contributors to obesity include fewer people walking or bicycling and more driving, in part because getting places through active transportation is made difficult by a lack of sidewalks or bike lanes. Although complete streets did not become law this session, the bills generated bipartisan support and brought together vocal support from health, disability rights, the elderly, physical activity, and cycling advocates and organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT T-COPPE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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