



Balancing Food & Play

<http://balance.tamu.edu/>

Making a Difference

Relevance

Many health professionals and educators are alarmed by the increase in the rate of child obesity. Nationally, 18 percent of children ages 6 to 11 years are obese (95th percentile for body mass index [BMI] by age/sex). Texas ranks seventh in the nation and has a child obesity rate of 20.4 percent. Programs that increase awareness of food and physical activity recommendations and change behaviors associated with obesity are needed.

Response

A multi-disciplinary team developed an integrated, interactive third-grade enrichment curriculum on nutrition and physical activity. The curriculum is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and is titled *Balancing Food & Play*.

The *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum was designed to improve knowledge and behaviors related to the following four educational constructs:

- snacking on fruits and vegetables,
- drinking milk with meals and water with snacks,
- encouraging 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and
- limiting screen time to two hours or less per day.

The curriculum contains four elements: 20 lesson plans, 8 take-home reading assignments, 4 parent letters, and a 41 page journal for each student. The 2nd edition of *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum was released in the summer of 2011 to incorporate the new Food Guidance System called MyPlate. The MyPlate icon serves as a reminder for healthy eating and illustrates the five food groups.

During 2012, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agents in 21 counties recruited local third grade classroom teachers to participate in this program. They received permission to implement this school enrichment program, and 1,334 students completed the curriculum. To date, 1,215 teacher manuals and 1,041 student journal masters have been downloaded from the website (<http://balance.tamu.edu/>).

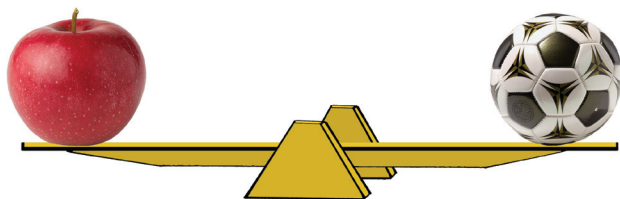
Results

At the completion of *Balancing Food & Play*, students were more likely to correctly identify food and physical activity recommendations.

Self-reported student behaviors related to physical activity, soda consumption, and screen time – all of which are associated with obesity – improved during the time that *Balancing Food & Play* was taught. The percentage of students who reported:

- getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity increased from 51 percent to 73 percent;
- drinking soda almost never or never increased from 32 percent to 42 percent; and
- limiting screen time to 2 hours or less increased from 81 percent to 91 percent.

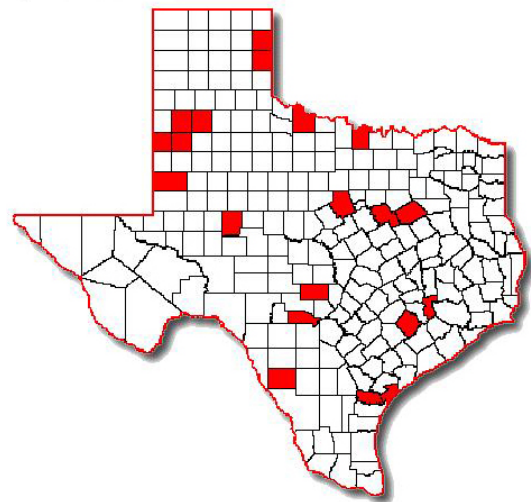
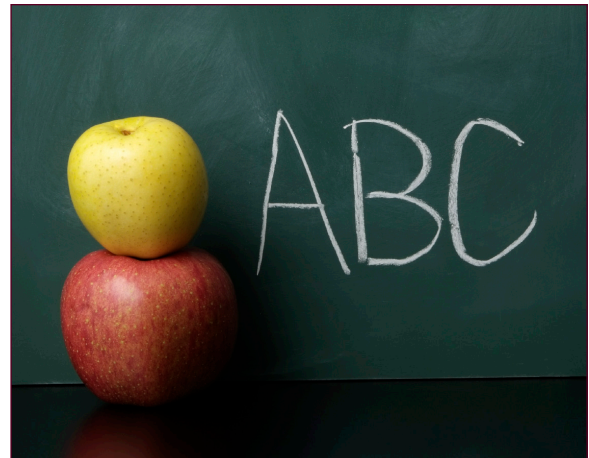
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Student responses in 2012 to the question, “What changes have you made since starting *Balancing Food & Play?*” include:

- “My mom hung the MyPlate in the kitchen so now she knows what kind of healthy food we need to eat.”
- “When I started *Balancing Food & Play*, I was playing on the Wii all the time, but now I have two hours of screen time.”
- “I’m picking better choices since when we started.”
- “I am exercising and eating healthy, and it feels good!”



Texas Counties Participating in
Balancing Food & Play in 2012.