On the Move Junior Program Improves Nutritional Intake among Children 2015-2016

The Situation
More than 30 percent of North Dakota children 2 to 5 years of age are considered overweight or obese (with a BMI-for-age above the 85th percentile). According to the Youth Behavior Risk Surveillance Survey (2015), 42 percent of North Dakota students in grades nine to twelve consumed vegetables less than one time daily, 75 percent of adolescents were not physically active at least 60 minutes per day, and about 12 percent were not physically active 60 minutes on at least one day during the seven days prior to the survey.

Extension Response
Tara Sondeland, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Educator (SNAP-ED) presented “On the Move Junior” a five-week school-based curriculum for second-graders. It is based on MyPlate, the current icon for nutrition, and includes children’s story books and hands-on activities. The curriculum aims to improve the variety of healthful foods that children consume, especially the amount of fruits and vegetables they consume. It also aims to improve fitness habits. Parents receive newsletters and participate in goal setting and other family-based activities.

Impacts
Since 2014, 2,936 children (averaging 7 years old) have participated. In 2015-16, 1,676 students in 25 counties completed the program. They improved their knowledge of nutritional recommendations as shown by test scores:

- 89 percent ate more fruit
- 80 percent ate more vegetables
- 87 percent tried a new food
- 80 percent tried fruits of different color
- 90 percent engaged in more exercise

According to survey results, 83 percent of parents read the weekly newsletter. Parents reported that their children asked questions about food (62 percent), offered help with food preparation (48 percent), requested healthful snacks (49 percent) and tried a new food (47 percent).

Feedback
Parents said (nine months later):
- “My daughter enjoyed learning about and trying new foods, especially the colored peppers.”

Students said (nine months later)
- “I eat whole wheat bread instead of white”

County Impact
A nine month follow up survey was completed by 22 Minto students and their parents who participated in the program. The results showed:

- 96% of youth exercise 30 minutes a day
- 93% of youth increased their daily dairy intake
- 72% of youth continue to try new foods
- 72% of youth want healthy food information

Public Value Statement
Improving health behaviors can increase quality of life and save millions of dollars in collective health-care costs for North Dakotans throughout their lifetime.

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