On the Move Junior Program Improves Nutritional Intake among Children 2016-2017

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 12 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
“On the Move Junior” is a five-week school-based curriculum for second-graders. It is based on MyPlate, the current icon for nutrition, and includes children’s storybooks 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, 5,119 children have participated. In 2016-17, 2,183 students in 25 counties completed the program. They improved their knowledge of nutritional recommendations as shown by test scores:

- 85 percent ate more fruit
- 75 percent ate more vegetables
- 80 percent tried a new food
- 73 percent tried fruits of different color
- 87 percent engaged in more exercise

According to survey results, 79 percent of parents read the weekly newsletter. Parents reported that their children asked questions about food (60 percent), offered help with food preparation (42 percent), requested healthful snacks (47 percent) and tried a new food (40 percent).

Feedback
Parents said:
- “She enjoyed telling me about what she learned and definitely notices when others were making healthy choices. She was way more open to trying veggies because of the program!”
- “This was a great eye opener! I didn’t realize how few veggies my daughter was eating.”

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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