



Balancing Food & Play

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

Helping Texans
Better Their Lives

Relevance

Too many adults and children weigh too much. Texas is now the tenth most obese state in the nation. The obesity rate among children is especially concerning, as it foretells a lifelong struggle with weight-related poor health — and its associated increased need for medical care. Best practice behaviors associated with healthful weight have been identified and include an eating pattern consistent with *MyPlate*, increasing physical activity, and decreasing sedentary behaviors. For children to adopt best practice behaviors, education, skills building, family engagement, and community support are required. School-based interventions, which include family engagement, augment and reinforce other obesity efforts.

Response

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

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, eight take-home reading assignments, four parent letters, and a 41-page journal for each student. The second edition of the *Balancing Food & Play* curriculum incorporates the Food Guidance System called *MyPlate*. The *MyPlate* icon serves as a reminder for healthy eating and illustrates the five food groups.

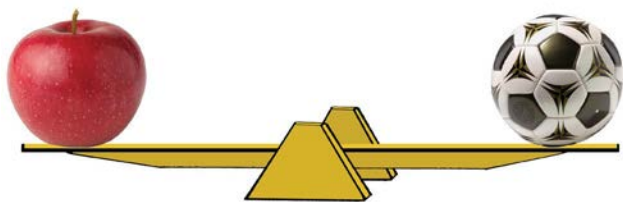
During 2016, AgriLife Extension agents in eight counties recruited local third grade classroom teachers to participate in this program. They received permission to implement this school-enrichment program where 549 students completed the curriculum. To date, 4,980 teacher manuals and 2,803 student journal masters have been downloaded from the *Balancing Food & Play* website: (<http://balance.tamu.edu/>).

Results

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

Self-reported student behaviors related to physical activity, soda consumption, and screen time — all of which are associated with obesity — improved during

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the time that *Balancing Food & Play* was taught. The percentage of students who reported:

- getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity increased from 57% to 74%,
- drinking soda almost never, or never, increased from 34% to 42%, and
- limiting screen time to two hours or less increased from 75% to 93%.

Student responses in 2016 to the question, “What changes have you made since starting *Balancing Food & Play*?” include:

- “I don’t drink sweet tea or soda anymore, and I get more physical activity everyday dancing on my Wii system.”
- “Well, I used to stay inside all the time; now I’m outside more and watch less TV. I am also eating healthy fruits and vegetables, and I’m stronger.”
- “I have been eating healthier snacks now, like apples, carrots and cucumbers instead of chips, and I have been limiting my screen time to two hours or less each day.”
- “I started eating healthier, more vegetables and drinking milk with my meals. I also get at least 60 minutes of play and physical activity, which I didn’t used to get.”



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