

The Salinas **Californian**

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HELP here to fight fat on campus

WHERE WE STAND:

Monterey County is testing a program to fight childhood obesity. Support the effort and urge your school to join it.

Is there a better place to fight childhood obesity than in the "Salad Bowl of the World?"

You'd think that in the Salinas Valley, we would be a model for nutritional programs and battling obesity.

Well, that day is near. Though the valley mirrors a national trend of increasing obesity among children (and adults), a year-old agency is here to, well, HELP.

GET INVOLVED The locally funded agency's sole purpose is to attack childhood obesity through work in the schools. State and federal officials are eager to see

To set up a partnership to address obesity at your school, contact HELP Inc., at 372-3616.

how the public-private partnerships being formed in this community will work in hopes of making them a model for others.

The HELP Wellness Policy Parity Project provides districts with a kit of wellness policies, resources, after-school classes on nutrition, gardening and physical activities. All of this is free to the participating districts, which are under a federal (unfunded) mandate to adopt wellness policies by the end of June 2006.

All of this is focused on reducing obesity and helping children begin to make life-changing choices about their daily diets.

Here are statistics from the California Department of Health Services that should alarm every parent:

■ Seven in 10 kids consume two or more servings of junk food a day.

■ Only three in 10 eat the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

■ Two in three children fail to get enough daily exercise.

■ One in three California children are overweight or obese.

State leaders have taken notice of the problem. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has banned soda machines in elementary schools.

The state Senate Education Committee passed Senate Bill 12, the "Healthy Schools Now Act," to regulate the fat and sugar content of all food sold at public schools.

Obesity can lead to other health problems later in life. Children need to be healthier if they are to lead long, productive lives. To do that, they must learn to watch what they eat.

Praise these school districts for jumping right in to receive HELP's assistance in addressing childhood obesity: Santa Rita, Carmel, San Lucas, Spreckels, Salinas City, Salinas Union High School, San Ardo, San Antonio, Soledad Unified, Gonzales Unified, Pacific Grove, Alisal Union and Monterey Peninsula Unified.

If your district isn't on the HELP list, ask why. It may be that school officials in your area already have an anti-obesity plan. That, however, is unlikely. Urge them to get HELP.