Dear Readers,

As you may know, this year Women In Government (WIG) has teamed up with Leadership for Healthy Communities (LHC), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to assist women state legislators in their efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. Today, more than 23.5 million children and adolescents in the United States—nearly one in three young people—are either obese or overweight, putting them at higher risk for serious, even life-threatening health problems. As a mother of two teens, I see up close every day how our kids are struggling with nutrition and physical activity challenges and the resulting impact on their lives. I am pleased to see that some states, cities, and communities that have taken a comprehensive policy approach to preventing obesity have recently reported declines in their childhood obesity rates.

To do our part, WIG has initiated a number of new projects aimed at decreasing rates of childhood obesity. We have launched a policy resource center, held a childhood obesity task force meeting, and designed a legislative toolkit. Today, we will release our first quarterly newsletter to keep you informed on all the latest information. These newsletters will feature the work WIG and our members have done to reduce childhood obesity to motivate others to take action.

As this partnership with LHC grows, we will continue to research healthy eating and active living strategies that legislators can promote in their districts. We look forward to providing legislators with new and innovative resources to empower communities to improve the health of their residents, particularly children. Together, we can make a difference and improve the health of our nation!

Sincerely,

Marjorie Maginn
WIG President and Executive Director

WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT’S CHILDHOOD OBESITY TASK FORCE

Women In Government (WIG) brought together more than 20 women legislators from across the nation for a Childhood Obesity Task Force meeting in Oklahoma City in September 2013. At the meeting, legislators and policy experts discussed how to improve access to healthy, affordable foods; increase opportunities for physical activity during and after the school day; and the positive economic impact of childhood obesity prevention policies.

“We were thrilled to bring together women policy-makers from across the nation to work together to ensure the health of our children, our families and our communities,” said Marjorie Maginn, president and executive director of WIG. “While we are beginning to see improvements in childhood obesity rates in some parts of the country, it’s important that we continue to develop partnerships and promote policy changes that increase access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.”

Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett provided a keynote address on his efforts to improve Oklahoma City’s livability and residents’ access to healthy foods. Other speakers included Daniel Hatcher, National Healthy Out-of-School Time Advisor at the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, an organization founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation; and John Weidman, deputy executive director for The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based organization dedicated to increasing healthy food access.

WIG’s focus on childhood obesity is made possible by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its national program Leadership for Healthy Communities.

“We know women legislators play a critical role in advancing policies to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic,” said Maya Rockeymoore, director of Leadership for Healthy Communities. “We are proud to be working with Women in Government to improve the health of our communities nationwide.”

For more information about the Childhood Obesity Task Force meeting, visit: www.womeningovernment.org/COTF2013

By Molly Peltzman, MA, Health Policy Fellow

Photo: www.travelok.com
INSTANT RECESS FOR ACTIVE LIVING

Ding-a-ling, ling, ling…it’s recess time! Remember the joy and excitement you felt as a kid hearing the recess bell?

The Instant Recess bell is ringing in thousands of schools across the country today. Do the kids in your state hear that recess bell often enough?

Making kids healthier ten minutes at a time, Instant Recess is a program developed by the late Antoinette “Toni” Yancey, MD, MPH (1957-2013). Instant Recess is an evidence-based approach to increasing daily physical activity and improving behavior among elementary school children. It proposes regular, short ten-minute exercise breaks, often with music and dance, and can be easily incorporated into the classroom, work, and community life.

Dr. Yancey was a visionary and pragmatist. A medical doctor for more than 30 years with a Masters in Public Health, her last professional positions included serving as a professor at the UCLA School of Public Health, Department of Health Services. She was also the Co-Director of the UCLA Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Equity. Dr. Yancey served on the Institute of Medicine Standing Committee on Childhood Obesity Prevention, the National Physical Activity Plan Coordinating Committee, and the California Department of Public Health Advisory Committee. She was on the Board of Directors for Public Health Institute, the Action for Healthy Kids, and the Partnership for a Healthier America. Dr. Yancey was awarded the Community Mobilization Award by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention for her Instant Recess approach in 2012 at the Weight of the Nation Conference in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Yancey died on April 23, 2013, at the age of 55 after a year-long battle with cancer. At Women In Government’s Childhood Obesity Task Force meeting, Dr. Denise Woods-Bevly continued Dr. Yancey’s mission by informing legislators about the importance of physical activity in schools. Legislators had the opportunity to learn how physical activity can improve health and focus in children, as well as experience for themselves the benefits of an exercise break.

Find out more at www.instantrecess.com or www.tonivyancey.com

Childhood Obesity Declining in the U.S.

With children at risk of future health problems stemming from overweight and obesity, the nation has placed a strong emphasis on combating the childhood obesity epidemic. Although progress has been slow, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have released a report proving that the hard work is starting to pay off. Many states across the U.S. have shown decline in instances of childhood obesity; 19 of 43 states and territories studied have seen a reduction among low-income preschoolers. While this is a huge win for many, childhood obesity is still a large problem. Three of the 43 states studied showed an increase in childhood obesity, and 21 states showed no change at all.

Although childhood obesity is still very present, this news should provide hope that with more attention, awareness, and hard work childhood obesity can be reversed.

3 InstantRecess.com
Children and Physical Activity
Fast Facts

Physical Activity in High School
Less than 3 in 10 high school students get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

Across all age groups, girls have lower levels of physical activity than boys.

Physical activity declines significantly with age.
- 42% of kids ages 6-11 get 60 minutes per day
- 8% of kids ages 12-15 reach 60 minutes per day

Percentage of children walking or bicycling to school dropped 37% in one generation

50% walked or biked in 1969

13% walked or biked in 2009

Walking and bicycling to school is good for the environment. A return to 1969 levels would mean saving:

3.2 billion vehicle miles
1.5 million tons of carbon dioxide
89,000 tons of other pollutants

And be equal to keeping more than 250,000 cars off the road for a year.

Credits: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Weight-control Information Network, Leadership for Healthy Communities, Safe Routes Partnership
As part of Women In Government’s (WIG) commitment to working with women state legislators committed to advancing childhood obesity prevention policies, we have selected ten champions to lead and inspire our efforts. WIG will provide legislators with technical assistance, media training, and information and materials to support their policy work.

“Our state legislator champions are: Representative Laura Hall (D-AL), Representative Annie Mobley (D-NC) Senator Laura Kelly (D-KS), Representative Alma Allen (D-TX), Representative Christie Carpino (R-CT), Senator Harriett Chandler (D-MA), Representative Stacey Guerin (R-ME), Representative Kim Norton (D-MN), Representative Lauren Matsumoto (R-HI), Representative Terri Austin (D-IN) and Senator Jackie Winters (R-OR).”

If you have implemented or are considering childhood obesity policy work in your district, we would like to hear from you. Summaries of your efforts can be posted in the WIG Childhood Obesity Policy Resource Center as well as featured in our quarterly newsletter.

For additional information, visit: https://www.womeningovernment.org/obesity/policymakers

Women In Government Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of all female state legislators across the country which provides educational resources, expert forums, networking and leadership opportunities.

For more information visit: https://www.womeningovernment.org/obesity

Connect with Women In Government through our Facebook and Twitter page!