

## **Summary of Findings: Obesity Research**

- **Focus Groups**
- **PRIZM Analysis**
- **Phone Survey**

March 13, 2006

# Executive Summary

## **To generate this report, we looked at:**

- Focus group data, analyzing it by race/ethnicity, by age (child or parent), and overall for similarities and differences (Johnston, Vance, Lee, and Halifax Counties)
- 400 sample random telephone survey to qualified participants in Swain, Johnston, Vance, and Lee Counties
- Full report also looked at PRIZM data for Swain, Johnston, Lee, and Vance Counties, not included in this presentation

# Executive Summary

- **15 focus groups were conducted in Johnston, Lee, and Vance counties; 3 additional groups were conducted in Halifax county at a later date – total of 18 Groups**
  - **Johnston County**
    - 1 Hispanic Parent Group (August 10 at 7:30pm)
    - 2 Hispanic Youth Groups (August 10 at 3:30pm and 5:30pm)
    - 1 African American Parent Group (August 17 at 7:00pm)
    - 2 African American Youth Groups (Both August 17 at 5:00pm)

# Executive Summary

- **Lee County**
  - 2 Hispanic Parent Groups (August 11 at 5:30pm and 7:30pm)
  - 1 Hispanic Youth Group (August 11 at 3:30pm)
  - 1 African American Parent Group (August 18 at 7:00pm)
  - 1 African American Youth Group (August 18 at 5:00pm)
- **Vance County**
  - 2 African American Parent Groups (August 16 at 5:00pm and 7:00pm)
  - 2 African American Youth Groups (August 16 at 5:00pm and 7:00pm)

# Executive Summary

- **Halifax County (Haliwa Saponi tribe)**
  - 1 American Indian Parent Group (January 18, 7 p.m.)
  - 2 American Indian Youth Groups (January 17 & 18 at at 5:00 pm)

# Executive Summary

## Key Observations

- The desire to be more active is already present in all groups we conducted.
- Concerns over safety and lack of access to parks/playgrounds/pools are the primary reasons that children do not play outside as much as they or their parents desire.
- American Indians are much less concerned about safety, more active and much more likely to report having enough extracurricular options. However, this may vary from tribe to tribe.
- There is a “disconnect,” or lack of true knowledge, of how physical activity can lead to longer, healthier lives.
- Generally speaking, each group expressed interest in becoming more active. However, if exercise was more directly involved in “fun” activities, both the children and adults would be more inclined to participate.

# Hispanic Summary

## General Observations about Hispanic Families

- Thrive on social networks of family and close friends
- Prefer to do things in groups
- Stay home during the week; do things as families on the weekends
- More active on the weekends than weekdays
- Prefer to be outside as opposed to indoors
- Prefer active lifestyles to sedentary
- Parents often work in labor intensive jobs
- Do not watch TV as a family unit
- Understand that weight has health implications
- Have difficulty financing extracurricular activities and few we talked to were involved
- "Use" TV differently than other groups

# Hispanic Summary

## Special Concerns for this Group

- Cultural and safety concerns play a role in the decision to allow children to be unsupervised (i.e., it is not appropriate for a girl to be accompanied by an older boy or a man that is not her relative)
- For newer immigrants, adjusting to a culture far different from that in which they were comfortable
  - Need transportation rather than walking
  - Food is not as fresh/food is different
  - Language
  - More safety concerns here (rape, kidnapping, other violence)
  - Less free time
  - To some, chubby = healthy

# Hispanic Summary

## What the Kids Enjoy

- Overall, kids prefer being outdoors to being indoors. Specifically, they like to:
  - Play ball (soccer, kickball, etc.)
  - Play outdoor games
  - Play on the swings
  - Ride bikes
  - When exercise was described broadly to include many activities, the children concluded that exercise was fun
- When they have to be indoors they:
  - Watch TV
  - Read
  - Play indoor games

# Hispanic Summary

- **On the weekends, family activities include things away from home such as:**
  - Going to the park
  - Going to the movies
  - Going swimming at a friends (no one mentioned public pools)
  - Going skating
  - Going shopping

# Hispanic Summary

- **The barriers to getting outdoors include:**
  - Parents are not at home; kids cannot be out unsupervised due to safety concerns
  - Parents get home too late at night
  - Family has one car and it's being used for transportation to work
  - Not enough places to go that are affordable or close by
  - Children help parents a great deal at home
  - Adjustments to the humidity in the summer and cold in the winter
    - Heat was mentioned repeatedly as a barrier to outside play
  - Kids did not describe a problem with not enough activity. They reported getting as much exercise as they'd like

# Hispanic Summary

- **Desired interventions to help get kids active:**
  - Inexpensive indoor facilities where kids can play and parents can be comfortable watching
  - Safe parks in walking distance from homes
  - Security within neighborhoods
  - Places to ride bikes away from traffic
  - Public swimming pools

# Hispanic Summary

## Attitudes toward Television

- Resoundingly, this group does not choose TV as their preferred way to spend time, but they do watch because:
  - Can teach the language
  - Can entertain kids while parents work
  - Is something to do when the weather is bad
  - Keeps boredom away when you can't go outside
  - Believed 1, 2 or 3 hours a day is not bad, but 4 hours a day is too much
- One perceived negative of TV came up in every group
  - Believe that TV is bad for the eyes

# Hispanic Summary

## Reported TV Watching Habits

- Most kids report watching TV for 2 hours a day.
- Parents report that their kids watch between ½ hour and 5 hours a day.

# Hispanic Summary

## Attitudes toward Exercise

- Kids think exercise is fun; parents don't think of fun when they hear "exercise".
  - Kids say exercise includes playing, doing hard chores, walking, running, and playing sports.
  - Adults say exercise is non-recreational.
- Parents prefer the term physical activity; kids don't know what physical activity is.
- Children and adults know exercise is important.
- Kids exercise because it is fun and, often, because it is a social activity. They feel good when they do it because they are not bored.
- Parents say that it is harder to exercise in the US because you can't walk to get where you need to go and there are more amenities here (dishwashers, washing machines, etc.).

# Hispanic Summary

## Images of Healthy People

- To kids, a healthy person:
  - Eats fruits and veggies
  - Exercises
  - Avoids junk food and candy
  - Feels happy
  - Weighs what they are supposed to
- To Parents, a healthy child:
  - Looks right for their age
  - Is happy, bright eyed and pink cheeked
  - Doesn't complain
  - Has good skin

# Hispanic Summary

## Images of Unhealthy People

- To Kids, an unhealthy person:
  - Doesn't like to exercise
  - Eats junk
  - Doesn't eat veggies
  - Watches too much TV
  - Is weak
  - Looks fat
  - Can't do things for his/her family

# Hispanic Summary

## Perceptions of Obesity

- It is OK to say someone is chubby or fatty (it is affectionate).
- Of particular importance to this group is the use of diminutives (i.e., 'gordita') in communicating about weight issues.
- The term obese is only acceptable in a professional context, otherwise it is offensive
- The term fat is always offensive
- Prefer to say that someone has additional pounds (using diminutive)
- Obese means "too overweight", suggesting that some overweight is acceptable
- Parents blame school food as being unhealthy and being a contributor to the problem

# Hispanic Summary

## **Interventions targeting Hispanics**

- Do not need to motivate to exercise, rather, they need to facilitate exercise
- Must focus on the family
- Must happen at the local (neighborhood) level
- Must be culturally appropriate (geared to their interests, not just spoken in Spanish)
- Must be written by someone with an understanding of the importance of diminutives in Spanish, particularly if any description of weight issues is included
- Must allow for a family member or close adult friend to be present (unlikely that parents will entrust a child to a stranger or someone outside of their community, even in a certified program setting)
- If at all possible, should be climate controlled as much as possible (difficulty adjusting to humidity and cold)

# African American Summary

## General Observations about African American Families:

- Children have a lot of unsupervised time at home
  - Parents work long hours
  - Parents are tired when they return home from work and need quiet time
- Watching TV, playing videogames or playing on the computer are considered “active” indoor activities
- Understand the importance of exercise but often say they don’t feel motivated to do it
- Children don’t have a clear understanding of how much exercise they need to be healthy

# African American Summary

## **General Observations about African American Families:**

- Eat while watching television
- Don't always associate being overweight or obese as a negative quality
- Don't always trust their neighbors or feel comfortable letting their children out of their sight because neighborhoods aren't safe
- Tendency to connect weight to diet more so than exercise

# African American Summary

## **Special Concerns for this Group:**

- View being a little overweight as healthy, even attractive
- Some say that you can be obese and healthy at the same
- Believe that 20 – 30 lbs. overweight is not obese

# African American Summary

## What the Kids enjoy:

- Overall the children enjoy watching television and playing video games as much as engaging in other activities such as:
  - Bike riding
  - Skating
  - Swimming
  - Playing with friends

## On the weekends:

- Spend more time watching television and playing videogames
- Play with friends
- Go to church
- Play on the internet

# African American Summary

## The barriers to getting outdoors include:

- Too hot
- No children to play with
- Not enough to do in neighborhood
- No safe parks or swimming pool
- Neighborhoods aren't safe
- Parents work long hours and aren't home
- Organized sports are expensive

# African American Summary

## **Desired Interventions to Help get Kids Active:**

- Inexpensive or free organizations that sponsor organized sports or activities for children
- Neighborhood Watch (Security)
- Addition of a park or water park
- Public swimming pools
- Addition of a Community Center with crafts and other activities

# African American Summary

## **Attitudes Toward Television:**

- This group generally wants to watch television because it is entertaining
- Children specifically said that it is "Fun, Excellent, and Sometimes Educational."
- Comments also included that watching television is, "Boring, alright, kind of good and kind of bad."

# African American Summary

## Attitudes Toward Videogames:

- This group generally enjoys playing videogames
  - Children specifically said that playing videogames is, "My favorite thing to do, Excellent, Fantastic."
- If given the opportunity to do another task besides play videogames, this group would prefer to:
  - Go to the gym
  - Play with the dogs
  - Play football
  - Play basketball
  - Go swimming

# African American Summary

## TV Watching Habits

- Most kids report watching TV anywhere from 2-11 hours on a non-school day, and anywhere from 2 hours to all night on a school day.
- Parents report that their children watch anywhere from one hours to falling asleep with the TV on.

# African American Summary

## Attitudes toward Exercise:

- Children generally like to exercise because it makes them feel good, it's fun, they can lose weight, and stay fit.
- Children and parents agree that exercise is important
- Parents admit that their exercise habits make an impression on their children, they are role models for their children

# African American Summary

## Images of Healthy People:

- To children a healthy person:
  - Is skinny or medium in weight (not fat)
  - Exercises
  - Is Muscular
  - Is strong
  - Eats fruits and vegetables
  - Is clean
- To parents a healthy child:
  - Can be overweight
  - Is happy
  - Is active and alert
  - Is Lean, but with “meat on bones”
  - Can be skinny
  - Is well-rounded

# African American Summary

## Images of Unhealthy People:

- To parents, an unhealthy person:
  - Looks so thin their rib cages are sticking out
  - Is not very active
  - Doesn't have a healthy appetite
  - Is not social
  - Is obese

# African American Summary

## Perceptions of Obesity:

- The term "Obesity" is offensive for some
  - Approach the subject with sensitivity
  - Use another term such as "need to lose weight"
  - Several respondents feel that children can be obese and healthy at the same time
  - Some mentioned that the truth hurts but that sometimes it helps for people to hear the truth

# African American Summary

## **Interventions targeting African Americans**

- Should be publicized with motivational messaging
- Should be planned at the neighborhood level rather than a county or city wide level
- Might involve trustworthy adults in neighborhood who can volunteer to have activities for the children
- Should focus on the parents- convince them that they are role models and their behavior affects their children; teach them that being obese is not healthy
- Must be inexpensive

# American Indian Summary

## General Observations about family life

- In their free time, families like to engage in sedentary activities:
  - Go out to eat
  - Rent movies
  - Read together
- Families are time-deprived.
- Anticipated barriers to participation in fitness activities include transportation and activities that happen during parent's work hours.

# American Indian Summary

## General Observations about Parents.

- Parents believe that their children are getting exercise at school.
- Parents associate overweight with health concerns such as heart disease, but many do not associate it with diabetes, and no one associated overweight with cancer.
- Parents report not having set rules about television viewing or eating while watching TV.
- Adults in this group prefer the term “exercise” to “physical activity” because exercise implies time to get away and focus on only themselves.
- They understand the importance of exercise as it relates to physical well being.
- Parents are concerned about childhood overweight, but do not equate overweight with being unhealthy.
- Parents would like to receive information about healthy weight range for children, things to look out for such as high TV usage, nutrition (educate parents and grandparents), and local activities for kids.

# American Indian Summary

## General Observations about Children.

- In general, the children in these groups like to play outside.
- Most said that they play outside as much as they want.
- Most of the children enjoy watching TV and playing video games.
- Several children report enjoying TV and video games because the experience is “like they are really doing something.”
- When asked what they would rather do instead of watching TV or playing video games, these children named active things such as riding bikes or playing sports.
- Nearly all of the children in these groups report snacking or eating while watching television.

# American Indian Summary

## General Observations about Children.

- There did not appear to be a clear difference in the meaning of “exercise” and “physical activity” as there has been in some other groups. Neither term was preferred before the other.
- Both exercise and physical activity appear to be fun to the children we talked to.
- Less than half of the participants believe that it is necessary to exercise to be healthy. Most associate being healthy with eating vegetables.
- Exercise appears to be more closely associated with appearance (look buff, be skinny, etc.) rather than overall health.
- Children in these groups believe that they get 30 minutes of exercise a day by walking at school, doing chores, and playing outside.

# American Indian Summary

## Special Concerns for this Group:

- It appeared to researchers that the discussion guides had been shared with both adult and child participants prior to the discussions.
- Only one adult group and two children's groups were conducted. All groups were in one county and only one tribe was represented.
- There appears to be little opportunity for physical activity within the community.
- There is a distinct lack of information on the relationship between exercise and health among children.
- There is a distinct lack of understanding that childhood overweight can lead to adult health problems among both adults and children.

# Phone Survey

- 400 sample, random digit dial survey of Johnston, Lee, Swain and Vance counties in North Carolina.
- Respondents were screened to interview only African American, Hispanic and Native American respondents with children aged five through eleven years old living in the household.
- The survey was conducted September 10-15, 2005.
- The 400 sample survey has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.9\%$ .

# Phone Survey

- 30% of children watch television/video games more than three hours per day. There is a statistically significant difference among Hispanic children, who watch less television.
- 49% of children reportedly play or are active three or more hours per day. Native American children are considerably more active than Hispanic or African American children.
- 79% of guardians believe their children are at or above the recommended amount of activity for a healthy life. This may be an issue for further education.
- 57% have no nearby playground or recreational facility nearby. 69% in Vance County have no nearby playground or recreational facility.

# Phone Survey

- 25% of respondents worried about the safety of nearby playgrounds. But these numbers varied significantly, with 86% of Johnston County respondents believing their playgrounds were safe for their children as compared to only 58% of Vance County respondents. 33% of Native American respondents worried about the safety of local facilities.
- 57% of respondents said they let their children play outside only with a trusted adult supervisor. Swain County residents and Native American residents were far less likely to require constant adult supervision.
- 53% of respondents wanted more organized activities for their children. 66% of Native American respondents said there *were* enough activities as compared to 63% of African American respondents who said they wanted more.

# Phone Survey

- 79% of respondents believe their child is at a healthy weight.
- 52% of respondents believe they, personally, are at a healthy weight. African American respondents and Native American respondents were less likely to be at a healthy weight. African American respondents said they were less likely to be doing something about it as compared to overweight Native American respondents.
- 20% of respondents do not believe the amount of activity or a child's current weight will have an effect on their current health. 23% of African American respondents do not believe a child's weight currently affects their health. 25% of Vance County respondents do not believe a child's weight currently affects their health.

# Phone Survey

- The phone survey validated focus group research that suggests that people understand the impact of weight on risk for diabetes (82% believe it's a higher risk) and for heart problems (87%).
- As in the focus groups, far fewer believed weight had any impact on cancer. Only 30% believed overweight people are at increased risk of cancer. 6% actually suggested that being overweight would lower your risk of cancer.
- As in the focus groups, parents felt their kids get a fair amount of activity on an average day, although 21% believed their children get the most exercise at school or in gym class.
- 79% of parents believe their children get the recommended amount of exercise (47%) or more (32%).

# Implications for Interventions

## Activity Based Interventions

- Findings suggest that it is possible to plan multi-cultural interventions to facilitate exercise.
- Activity-based interventions need to focus on neighborhoods rather than community or county wide facilities. In other words, it is better to put a park in five neighborhoods than to build an expensive facility in the county seat.
- Activity-based interventions should be free to the degree that is possible. Expenses such as equipment, entry fees, membership fees, etc. keep these families from participating.
- All interventions need to focus on active families rather than just active kids. Though this may not be as effective in Halifax county.
- When directed to kids, the message that exercise is fun should be stressed. When directed to parents, the message that this is something for the family that is safe, inexpensive, and accessible should be touted.
- There is a need for organized sports in some areas such as Halifax county.

# Implications for Interventions

## **Educationally Based Interventions**

- Educational interventions are needed to clear up misconceptions about healthy weight and disease, particularly cancer, but also diabetes and cardiovascular disease. These interventions need to be targeted specifically to the minority group.
- Additional interventions to inform parents and children about how much exercise they need are important. Unlike the above, these can be more general messages.
- Primary caregivers (parents and grandparents in many cases) need nutrition information, particularly related to food preparation that is simple and affordable.
- Both children and adults need education in regard to the relationship between childhood overweight and disease later in life.

# Implications for Interventions

## Community-Wide Interventions

- Neighborhood watch programs or other programs in cooperation with local law enforcement programs may help to provide the security children need and their parents desire when playing outside.
- Community wide efforts to control traffic in residential areas are needed.