

I am Moving, I am Learning

A Proactive Approach for Addressing Childhood Obesity in Head Start Children

Nationwide, nearly one out of three children, ages 2 to 19, is overweight or obese.¹ These children are at increased risk for developing chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, and asthma. They also more likely to become overweight as an adult.² The nation is facing a health crisis in this younger generation.

I am Moving, I am Learning (*IMIL*)

Since its inception, Head Start has sought to ensure that enrolled children receive comprehensive health and wellness services. The Office of Head Start (OHS) understands that improved health outcomes require early intervention and strategies that engage children, families, and staff. Based on that philosophy, “I am Moving, I am Learning” (*IMIL*) was designed to reverse the trend of childhood obesity in Head Start children, by increasing quality physical activity and promoting healthy nutrition.

IMIL was piloted in August 2004 among 17 Head Start grantees in Virginia and West Virginia, under the leadership of the Region III Office. This team received a 2006 *Partnering for Health and Human Service Excellence* award for their work from the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

All components of the *IMIL* approach are scientifically based and provide developmentally appropriate practices for physical activity, music and movement, and nutrition during early childhood. *IMIL* is also aligned with the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and *Child Outcomes Framework*.

The three goals of *IMIL* are to:

- increase the quantity of time children routinely spend in moderate to vigorous physical activities (MVPA) to meet national guidelines for physical activity;
- improve the quality of structured movement experiences into teachers and adults; and,
- improve healthy nutrition choices for children every day.



IMIL backpacks distributed at training sessions include workshop materials, music and movement CDs, pedometers, and other resources.

¹ Task Force on Childhood Obesity (2010). Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity within a Generation: White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President (2010). Retrieved from http://www.letsmove.gov/taskforce_childhoodobesityrpt.html

² Centers for Disease Control of Prevention (CDC). Childhood Overweight and Obesity. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/>

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IMIL training provides program staff with strategies and resources to integrate short bursts of quality MVPA and healthy nutrition messages into curricula and daily activities in the Head Start setting. *IMIL* also provides suggestions to help busy families increase physical activity at home and to make more healthful food choices at the grocery store.

IMIL Moves to All Head Start Grantees

Since its pilot, *IMIL* trainings have attracted many Head Start grantees. The *IMIL* framework has spread from Region III to a cadre of trainers who have, in turn, trained nearly 500 Head Start grantees across the country.

In 2010, the training materials were revised to include four new enhancements:

- Birth to Five: Introduction to Motor Development
- Teaching Across Cultural Horizons
- Activities for All
- Move, Play, and Learn at Home

By January 2011, approximately 300 facilitators will be trained in the newly expanded materials. They will then offer *IMIL* training to Head Start grantees that have not previously received *IMIL*. Details will be released through a Head Start Knowledge and Information Management Services (HSKIMS) E-blast and posted on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). OHS is also partnering with the Office of Child Care to offer *IMIL* training to child care staff.

IMIL Training Evaluation

An evaluation of the *IMIL* approach was conducted in 2007 by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. The evaluation assessed the implementation approaches of the pilot Head Start grantees and potential outcomes. Pilot programs reported:

- Physical activities and healthy nutrition were infused into all programming.
- Children who were previously sedentary became active.
- Parents were receptive to physical fitness and nutrition topics at parent meetings.
- Goals to promote healthy choices were included in Family Partnership Agreements.
- Teachers and staff reported personal weight loss and attributed it to increased MVPA conducted with children.³

Evaluation results also found that the *IMIL* framework could be replicated in a variety of Head Start program options. OHS will evaluate each 2011 training event to obtain feedback on the newly developed framework enhancements.

³ Region III Administration for Children and Families. 2006. "I Am Moving, I Am Learning:" A Proactive Approach for Addressing Childhood Obesity in Head Start Children. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>