

SASSY STUDENTS FIGHT OBESITY

Patty Tanner's sixth grade students attend Morningside Elementary School in Salt Lake City. They brainstormed important issues and decided to select one that affects many young people today. Their problem was childhood obesity! Students researched the issue and found that more than 30 percent of school-aged children are considered overweight. They learned that there are many health problems that come with obesity. Diseases caused by obesity include heart disease, stroke, cancer, and type-2 diabetes. Dental cavities can also result from poor eating habits. The class used "Future Problem Solving" steps to identify problems and solutions.

1. Identify all the problems or challenges associated with the issue.

2. Decide on one main problem.

The Morningside students selected childhood obesity and wrote the following:

Since childhood obesity has risen from 4 percent in 1960 to 15 percent today, and adolescents today have a one in three chance of developing diabetes, how might we educate the public about making healthy choices in spite of all the non-nutritional foods that surround us in our community?

3. After brainstorming possible solutions the students decided to:

- Take a survey of vending machines in schools to see if they offer healthy food.
- Submit a policy to the school board identifying healthy vending-machine food.
- Become experts on the subject through research.
- Have students address adult groups to inform them about the problem.
- Learn methods of effectively advocating the cause to the public.

4. Write a Plan of Action.

Students decided that they needed to know more about the subject of obesity. They began reading and inviting speakers to the class. The speakers told them about a bill in the House of Representatives that would limit the type of foods that may be sold to elementary students from a school vending machine. The problem-solving team decided to make vending machines the focus of their plan and to help promote the bill.

5. Produce a Timeline. (This is what the students did.)

- Students studied food labels and invited guest speakers to class.
- Students prepared and presented a speech to the Health and Human Services Committee at the state capitol and emailed legislators on the importance of supporting House Bill 47.
- Students had a booth in the state capitol health fair sponsored by "Action for Healthy Kids."

6. Team Organization.

Students called their team "Students Against Sugar in Schools for Youth" (SASSY). Many gave interviews for television, radio, and newspapers. Students lobbied for House Bill 47 and were disappointed when the bill was not approved. Did that mean that they stopped their efforts? No, students submitted an application to become part of a Vending Pilot Program. They will keep an eye on the legislature to see if a new bill will be submitted for the next session. SASSY won the Utah's Community Problem-Solving Competition for 2004 and represented the state in the national competition.