

Supporting Michigan's Youth



Youth obesity situation

- Twelve percent of high school students are overweight; 15 percent are at risk for becoming overweight; the number of overweight children ages 6 to 11 has doubled in 20 years; and the number of overweight adolescents has tripled.
- Overweight kids have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults.
- More than 61 percent of youth don't participate in any organized physical activity outside of school; 22.6 percent don't engage in any physical activity during their free time.
- Children involved in after-school programs are much less likely to be obese than those who are non-participants.

Selected Successes and Goals

- Nearly **88,000 youth participated in healthy lifestyle education** through Michigan 4-H in 2004-5.
- Schools in the Pilot Schools Project (a collaborative effort with Michigan Action for Healthy Kids) reported a **6 percent increase in student participation in moderate physical activity** and an 18 percent increase in students saying they learned about the connection between eating habits, physical activity and health.
- MAES researcher John Biernbaum works with Lansing's Gunnisonville School on a school-run greenhouse that **provides the cafeteria with fresh salad ingredients for the entire 200-plus student body**. The students get the nutritional benefits of fresh produce and a sense of pride from their role in growing the produce.
- Thirteen schools serving 6,514 students received Team Nutrition Healthy School Environment mini-grants in 2004-5. They added healthy options to vending machines, improved school meals, increased physical activity opportunities and implemented new health policies.
- Half the parents of students from 21 Team Nutrition classrooms reported having more fruits and vegetables available after the TN program; **47 percent offered healthier snacks**; and 40 percent said they were more active as a family.

- Van Buren County MSUE **promoted physical activity to more than 1,300 youth and parents** through a bike rodeo and "10K a Day" walking program. A back-to-school event promoted healthy eating to more than 1,500 youth and parents.

Mentoring situation

- Mentored youth are six to seven times less likely to re-enter the juvenile justice system than youth in that system without mentors.
- The Mentor Michigan program wants Michigan to add 5,000 mentors this year; 30,000 children are mentored now, but a half million Michigan kids need mentors.
- According to the director of Mentor Michigan, one of the most promising things he sees developing is a mentoring program for young adults "aging out" of the foster care system.

Selected Successes and Goals

- MAES researcher John Seita continues his work on how to smooth the transition from foster care to living on their own for kids who age out of the program. He has organized two conferences on the topic and is working to build a mentoring program for foster children that pairs a current foster child with an adult who has been through the system and has achieved success.
- MSUE 4-H, one of the largest informal youth mentoring programs in the state, also has formal mentoring programs in 22 Michigan counties, with a goal of **training and pairing 600 adults with 1,800 vulnerable youth**.
- "Explore, Experience and Achieve Through 4-H Mentoring!" uses 20 AmeriCorps members and MSUE staff members and volunteers in 15 counties to mentor low-income, at-risk or underserved youth. In the program's first year, **144 mentors were trained and matched with 192 youth**.
- In Macomb County, 93 percent of youth involved in the 4-H youth mentor program who work with the Macomb County Juvenile Court Probation and Prevention Office have been prevented from moving on to more costly treatment, **potentially saving taxpayers \$6.5 million**.

Bullying and school violence situation

- Forty-two percent of ninth graders and 25 percent of 12th graders in Michigan have been involved in physical fights during the previous 12 months.
- MAES research at two rural Michigan high schools with aggressive anti-bullying programs found that more than half the students had sexual remarks said to them or sexual/obscene gestures made at them that made them upset; 40 percent had been hit at least once; 35 percent had been put down because of their gender; and about 25 percent blamed themselves for the bullying and thought it wouldn't have happened if only they looked, acted or dressed differently.

Selected Successes and Goals

- MAES researchers are creating sample scripts for teachers to use when they see bullying behavior, and they are helping schools analyze and revise their anti-bullying policies.
- Michigan 4-H's **32,600 volunteers are trained** to infuse messages of tolerance, compromise and inclusiveness in all activities with their 232,000 youth members.

Preparing youth for employment situation

- In the fall 2005 State of the State survey, 80 percent of respondents identified youth job training as a high priority for Michigan.
- According to the Cherry Commission report, many students are not prepared for life and work. The report stresses the need for learning environments with high expectations for youth that provide them with opportunities to strengthen skills in creativity, risk taking, responsibility, adaptability, and other skills for school, work and life success.

Selected Successes and Goals

- More than **230,000 youth gain practical skills** and learn responsibility and leadership through 4-H participation.

- At least 15 Michigan counties provide career education to youth through 4-H, helping them explore their future.
- More than **1,750 youth from three Michigan counties participated in 4-H-sponsored teen job fairs** in 2005. One fair drew 22 businesses and resulted in job placements for 55 teens.

Youth development situation

- Counselors in school settings are often overwhelmed; the average student-to-counselor ratio currently stands at 513 to 1.
- Eighty-seven percent of kids say it is important to have caring adults in their lives, and 45 percent express a need for more adults they can go to when they have a problem.
- Ninety-four percent of kids want to make the world a better place, yet nearly half say community service and volunteering are "really boring."

Selected Successes and Goals

- The MSUE **4-H program had 231,929 youth members** in 2004-5. Of these 26,000 were African American and 10,000 were Hispanic. Only 10 percent lived on farms; 43 percent lived in cities or suburbs of cities with populations over 10,000. The program reaches far beyond its original rural audience into diverse, at-risk populations of youth that are most in need of youth development programs.
- 4-H's Natural Helper program provided peer-to-peer support in six pilot Michigan schools; **70 percent of staff members in those schools said Natural Helper peers were able to effectively help their friends**; 90 percent of students said the peer they spoke with was knowledgeable about additional referral resources, had good listening skills, understood their problems and was able to help them make their own decisions about how to proceed.
- In 2005, **96 percent of 4-H Capitol Experience participants believed they increased their understanding of state government**, and 79 percent said they learned they can make a difference in their communities.

For more information:

Thomas G. Coon, director, MSU Extension (517-355-2308 or msudir@msu.edu)

Steven G. Pueppke, director, Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station (517-355-0123 or maesdir@msu.edu).