Newsweek

BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDEBOOK

How to Build a Healthy Kid

In association with

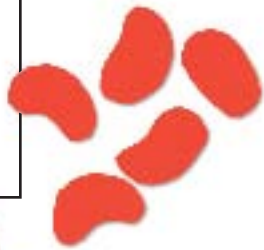
FUEL UP TO Play 60

HEALTHY KIDS








BACK TO SCHOOL

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GUIDEBOOK EDITOR
Debra Rosenberg

CONTRIBUTORS
Johannah Cornblatt, Claudia Kalb,
Nayeli Rodriguez, David Satcher, Ian Yarett

DESIGN DIRECTOR
Andrew James Capelli

DEPUTY DESIGN DIRECTOR
Sara McKay

DESIGN
Kristen Ren

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION
Ignacio Kleva

PHOTO IMAGING
Steve Walkowiak

PHOTO EDITORS
Michael Fodera, Michelle Molloy, James Wellford

EDITORIAL PRODUCTION
Cathy Fenlon (DEPUTY DIRECTOR),
Sally Atkinson, Dan Brillman,
Vicko Fabris, Jean Foos, Deborah Martens,
Pierre Metivier, James C. Morgan,
John Ramsey, Herbert Samuels,
Miguel A. Torres, Ana Zapata

COPY EDITORS
David Olivenbaum (CHIEF), Andrew Cohen,
Lisa DeLisle, Jacqueline F. Kurtzberg, Steve Noveck,
Alessandra Rafferty, Carl Rosen, Jay Wilkins

MANUFACTURING AND DISTRIBUTION
Scott Bauer, Sara Boyarsky, Becky Cassidy,
Kim Corrigan, Kristin Denninger, Gary Dzurenda,
Mark Heeman, Michael Helldorfer,
Lauren Palmieri, Damian Ross, Cintia Senmartin,
Robert Serrano, Anthony Small, Lauren Thompson

COVER AND INSIDE ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZSUZSANNA ILIJIN

A Call to Action

An epidemic of obesity threatens our children's future. What we can do about it.

BY DAVID SATCHER

EVEN IN THIS AGE OF GOOGLE AND iPads, there are some problems that technology cannot solve. One clear example is the growing epidemic of obesity in America, particularly among our children. The problem is rooted in our modern lifestyle—yes, perhaps some of our cutting-edge technology has even made it worse by creating a generation of couch potatoes. Childhood obesity is now contributing to the increase in ailments like diabetes and heart disease. Finding a solution must be a national imperative. Thankfully, first lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign may finally be giving the problem the attention it deserves.

Childhood obesity isn't a new issue, but it is a worsening one. When the surgeon general's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity was released in 2001, being overweight and obese had already reached epidemic proportions

COURTESY OF ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

in this country. That report noted that, in 1999, some 61 percent of adults were overweight or obese, and 13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight. There were nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there had been in 1980. A 2007–08 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey revealed that an estimated 17 percent of children and adolescents ages 2 to 19 were obese. Among preschool children 2 to 5 years of age, obesity increased from 5 to 10.4 percent between 1980 and 2008. It rose from 6.5 to 19.6 percent among 6- to 11-year-olds. And among adolescents 12 to 19, obesity more than tripled, increasing from 5 to 18.1 percent during the same period.

Obesity in children is of particular concern: obese children and adolescents are more likely to be at risk for health problems once faced only by adults, like cardiovascular problems and type 2 diabetes. The incidence of type 2 diabetes is increasing among children and adolescents; most of them, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are between 10 and 19 years old, obese, have a strong family history for type 2 diabetes, and have insulin resistance. Even children who don't develop grown-up illnesses right away are at risk: these kids are also far more likely to become obese adults, who will eventually face a whole array of other health issues.

IN 2008 AN ESTIMATED 17 PERCENT OF CHILDREN AGES 2 TO 19 WERE OBESE.

Luckily, there is much we can do to change this grim trend. We can encourage healthy lifestyles and prevention measures that will secure a healthy future for America's children—getting them used to good, nutritious foods and regular exercise. While families, communities, and policymakers all have a role in working collaboratively to eliminate obesity, I believe that schools—I like to call them the "great equalizers"—present the best opportunity. Schools are inclusive—everybody goes to school—and children spend 1,000 hours a year there. Schools provide an opportunity to educate and influence the habits of children from all kinds of environments, affecting their lives and the lives of their families, now and in the future. Schools can also help to target underlying social problems that influence unhealthy behavior, including poverty, safety, violence, and the absence of stores that sell healthy food.

My own organization, Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished, and sedentary youth by focusing on improving nutrition and physical-activity policies and practices in schools. A partnership of 60 organizations and government agencies that

supports the efforts of teams—including 14,000 volunteers—in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, AFHK was founded in 2002 in response to the surgeon general's Call to Action the previous year, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change.

A 2004 AFHK report, "The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools," pointed out that children who were physically active and ate a nutritious breakfast performed better in school. They concentrated better; performed better on standardized exams in reading and math; were better disciplined; and were much less likely to be absent from school. In a 2008 report, "Progress or Promises: What's Working for and Against Healthy Schools," we found differing views of schools' efforts to promote healthy behavior.

- The nutrition, health, and public-health professionals surveyed cited nutrition education as the most effective strategy to help youth make better food selections. A majority of school administrators, including superintendents, board members, principals, and school food-service professionals, felt their schools were already doing a good job of offering healthy, kid-friendly food options. But some 82 percent of parents felt schools needed to work harder in these areas.

- Nearly 80 percent of physical-education teachers and parents felt schools needed to provide more physical education. Yet about half of school administrators indicated that schools already provide enough quality daily physical education for all students.

- Fewer than one in four parents had ever talked with their child's teacher or principal about improving nutrition or physical activity at school, even though most parents felt these were significant concerns.

- A 2007 national survey conducted by AFHK revealed that 18 percent of parents thought schools were doing a good job offering nutritious, appealing foods, and only 20 percent thought schools offered enough physical activity. Nearly all (96 percent) thought that parents play an important role in advocating for better nutrition and more physical education, yet only 24 percent had ever contacted their child's school to request improvements.

- One of three elementary schools did not offer daily recess, and only 4 percent offered daily physical education. Physical education actually declined as students progressed through school. And most local school wellness policies we examined did not include goals for physical education or physical-education-teacher training.

Though the overall picture seems bleak, there are some bright spots in

SATCHER WITH HOUSTON STUDENTS.

our efforts to tackle childhood obesity. One example is Fuel Up to Play 60, a new youth program sponsored by the National Dairy Council and the National Football League that encourages kids to eat healthy by taking the right fuels—fruits and vegetables, water, low-fat milk, whole-grain bread—into their bodies and to be active for at least 60 minutes a day.

Action for Healthy Kids also developed, in partnership with the National Football League, the first national after-school program, ReCharge! Energizing After-School, that fully integrates nutrition and physical activity through teamwork-based strategies for youth in grades three to six. In the last school year, AFHK reached nearly 4 million kids in 8,000 schools in 1,100 school districts.

Now some 90 percent of schools have wellness policies intended to promote physical education and model good nutrition in grades K through 12. But there is still a tremendous gap between policy statements and program implementation. Concrete action can make a difference: there are school districts that have invested in carts and equipment to serve breakfast in classrooms, and as a result have increased the number of children receiving a nutritious breakfast.

These kinds of partnerships between schools and outside groups will be critical to addressing this complex challenge and all the barriers to healthy behavior that go with it. Individuals must make healthy lifestyle choices for themselves and their families; communities must make changes that promote healthful eating and physical activity; and policies must be developed and implemented to ensure that the changes take place. Working together, we can create a healthier America—for all of us, but especially for our children.

ONLY 18 PERCENT OF PARENTS THOUGHT SCHOOLS WERE DOING A GOOD JOB OFFERING NUTRITIOUS FOODS.

DAVID SATCHER, *M.D., Ph.D., was surgeon general of the United States from 1998 to 2002. He is the director of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute and the Center of Excellence on Health Disparities at Morehouse School of Medicine, where he is also the Poussaint-Satcher-Cosby professor of mental health.*

COURTESY OF NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL

Lunchroom Makeover

How schools can plant the seeds for healthy eating.

BY CLAUDIA KALB

TEN YEARS AGO, ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL students in Cambridge, Mass., ate a fairly typical lunch: American chop suey, beef and macaroni, canned fruit in syrup. "There were no fresh vegetables and no whole grains," says Dawn Olcott, a school nutritionist with the Cambridge Public Health Department. "And dairy products were not low fat." Today, locally grown produce, including fresh squash and tomatoes, is offered. A chef is creating nutritious recipes. And students are growing fruits and vegetables in their own school garden. "There's just nothing like kids planting the seed and watching it come up," says Virginia Chomitz, a senior scientist at the Institute for Community Health, based at the Cambridge Health Alliance. "A child who wouldn't even look at a snow pea before will pop it in her mouth and have a new and positive experience about food."

That new and positive experience has been missing for far too long. The National School Lunch Program provides meals for more than 30 million children across the country every day. Those lunches, many of which are served free or at a reduced cost, are critical to the well-being of students. But they are not nearly as nutritious as they should be. A report sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that the average salt content of school lunches is almost twice the recommended level. Schools do provide a range of choices for students, but many of those options are high-fat, high-calorie foods, such as french fries and cheeseburgers. Almost one third of schools still offer whole milk, despite government guidelines recommending nonfat or low-fat milk for children age 2 and older. And while most schools are meeting targets for protein and vitamins, 42 percent fail to offer fresh fruit or raw vegetables on a daily basis.

> 42 PERCENT OF SCHOOLS FAIL TO OFFER FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES ON A DAILY BASIS.

Unhealthy eating has contributed to a childhood-obesity epidemic in this country. One third of America's youth are now overweight or obese, putting them at risk for chronic

illnesses, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The obesity crisis has alarmed public-health officials and propelled better nutrition into the spotlight. First lady Michelle Obama has made school lunch a pillar of her Let's Move initiative, launched earlier this year. Major food suppliers have joined in, pledging to decrease sugar, fat, and salt; increase whole grains; and double the amount of fruits and veggies served in school meals within 10 years. On Capitol Hill, the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, which seeks to increase meal-reimbursement rates so schools can buy higher-quality and fresher foods, is making its way through the legislature. And the push to feed students more nutritious meals has even made it to prime-time TV: in a recent *Top Chef* episode featuring White House assistant chef Sam Kass as guest judge, contestants competed to create a healthy, kid-friendly school lunch on a limited budget. Thumbs down: banana pudding doused in sugar. Best of the bunch: pork carnitas, cole slaw made with yogurt, chicken flavored with apple cider, and melon kebabs.

Lessons learned from the Cambridge initiative, which was launched in 1998, are relevant to any school district in the country. First and foremost, revolutionizing school lunch is no easy task. One major hurdle: adjusting a food-service culture that has been entrenched for decades. Lunch staff are used to serving canned goods and reheating foods prepared elsewhere, because feeding kids quickly and efficiently on a budget has long been the goal—not necessarily feeding them well. Chomitz and Olcott, who work collaboratively through Cambridge's Healthy Children Task Force, have learned that change will come only when school administrators make

nutrition a top-down priority, not an afterthought. Chomitz learned how low nutrition ranked when she first approached the Cambridge school system about improving its lunch offerings a decade ago: the superintendent told Chomitz she'd never had a conversation with a food-service staff member. "It never dawned on her."

Fortunately, the school system agreed to join forces and hired a proactive food-service manager who was eager to support better nutrition. Using funding obtained through federal, state, and local grants, Chomitz and her team purchased fresh fruits and vegetables and brought them into the schools for kids to sample. Cambridge public schools serve a broad mix of students: 64 percent are nonwhite and 41 percent are low income. "A lot of the children had never seen a whole head of broccoli before in its fresh raw form," says Olcott. College students volunteered to help, and together they handed out small tasting cups at cafeteria tables and talked to the kids about each of the items. The goal was not just to get children excited about brightly colored fruits and vegetables, but also to convince food-service staff that the kids would actually eat them. Not only did they eat them, "they'd come back for seconds and frequently thirds," says Olcott.

MANY FOOD-SERVICE STAFFERS HADN'T BEEN TRAINED TO CUT OR COOK. SOME DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO PEEL A VEGETABLE.

The more experience kids have with fruits and vegetables, the better: a child who picks a tomato or slices a carrot wants to eat it. So the Cambridge team partnered with a local school-gardening group called City Sprouts to create school-based gardens. Whenever possible, the produce grown was featured in the cafeteria as a fruit or vegetable of the month.

School lunches cannot be remade in one giant leap. In Cambridge, goal No. 1 was simply adding fresh fruits and vegetables. Next up: new dishes created with local produce. In 2006 the school system hired part-time chef Vin Connelly to develop tasty, kid-friendly recipes. Here again, the team had to be sensitive to longtime food staffers. "I can't walk into a kitchen and say, 'Chef Vin is here—get out of the way,'" says Connelly. "A lot of these people have been in their job 25 years. Like anybody else, they're resistant to change." It became clear that food-service members had to be actively involved in the process, not simply told what to do. Bringing everyone together for a recipe demonstration turned out to be "totally ineffective," says Chomitz. Instead, Olcott and Connelly had to meet with staff at every school individually to introduce them to the most basic skills. Many of them hadn't been trained to cut or cook. Some didn't know how to peel a vegetable.

And there was another major challenge: outdated and ill-equipped

kitchens. When Olcott and Connelly attempted to lay out how to make the first recipe—a simple mix of butternut squash, cinnamon, nutmeg, brown sugar, and oil—they immediately noticed staff members looking at each other as if something was wrong. "We were telling them to measure out a tablespoon of cinnamon," says Olcott. "They said, 'We don't have measuring spoons and cups.' I hadn't realized they didn't have that kind of basic equipment." The condition of school ovens differed significantly, so the recipe had to be tweaked. In one kitchen, the bake time was 40 minutes; in another, 60. "We had to work with the staff at each of the schools to coach them and change the recipe based on what their ovens could do," says Olcott.

Patience and flexibility are critical to the success of lunch makeovers. It took 14 months to get Chef Vin's butternut squash on school menus. Every step posed new challenges: creating the recipe, conducting taste tests with kids and finessing the mixture, finding a local vendor who could supply 450 pounds of diced squash, getting staff up to speed in their kitchens. And lunch reformers must be prepared for the palates of children, too, who don't always take to a new food instantaneously. "You have to present it to them seven, eight, nine times for them to be comfortable trying it and liking it," says Connelly.

'A LOT OF THE CHILDREN HAD NEVER SEEN A WHOLE HEAD OF BROCCOLI BEFORE IN ITS FRESH RAW FORM,' SAYS OLCOTT.

The Cambridge team is realistic about how radically it can transform school cafeterias. A complete revolution is economically and practically difficult to accomplish, and the elementary-school menu still contains some of the old standbys—mac and cheese, spaghetti and meat sauce. But options have markedly improved. Today kids can choose grilled-chicken fajitas, vegetarian chili, lentil soup, tomato-basil-mozzarella salad, and roasted sweet-potato fries with cumin and chili powder. One day, after Olcott and Connelly encouraged staff participation, a food-service member showed up with her own batch of golden broth with fresh cabbage, turnips, carrots, butternut squash, and potatoes. "It was fabulous," says Olcott. "Marie's Haitian Soup" is now a regular feature.

Ultimately, the key to improving any lunch program is sustainability. "If the program only works when the chef is in the kitchen, it will never be successful," says Connelly. One-on-one training and straightforward, simple recipes are the way to go. The payoff is enormous, especially when kids learn healthy habits early in life and make them part of their daily routine. "I've had kids say, 'I want my mom or dad to make this at home,' " says Connelly. "I think that's a testament that it's working. That makes me feel great." □

Beyond Hot Dogs

After a White House visit, chef Kathy Gunst is putting school lunch on the menu.

In early June, first lady Michelle Obama urged hundreds of chefs to adopt schools in their communities. Afterward, Maine chef and cookbook author Kathy Gunst talked with NEWSWEEK's Claudia Kalb.

What happened when you got home from the White House? I contacted the principal at my local elementary school. The next thing I know, a landscape architect who is redesigning the school's landscape said, "Do you want a greenhouse?" Within a month everything had changed.

What are your immediate plans? I'm hoping to get the greenhouse and garden up early this fall, and I'm going into the classroom in September to teach food education and cooking to the kids. The goal is to get the teachers to work the greenhouse into their curriculum, from art to science to writing projects.

What about school lunch? This is very tricky. A lot of the foods they buy are frozen or canned. My plan is to examine that and, with the budget they have, see if we can augment it with a salad bar and fresh fruits. Eventually, these foods would come from what we grow. One of the most horrifying things is what kids are bringing to eat from home. Bologna in plastic trays. It's become a crap-food contest in the cafeterias. Who said kids only like hot dogs and chicken nuggets?

What kinds of local fruits and vegetables could you serve? Apples, blueberries, strawberries, pumpkins. One of the things we're going to have to do is make fall vegetables sexy. I'm hoping to make the rest of the school system insanely jealous so they'll want to do it, too.

Who's paying? It's completely voluntary. Parents are coming to build the greenhouse, plant and weed. Everybody in the community wants to help. They're deeply interested in improving the quality of food.

How optimistic are you? It's very dreamy right now, and I'm filled with enthusiasm. Check back in a year. □

DAN GAIR—BLIND DOG PHOTO

A Fitness Revolution

Obesity killed her brother. Now Pamela Green-Jackson is helping schools close the phys-ed gap.

BY JOHANNAH CORNBLATT

IT WAS AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN Pamela Green-Jackson sat up in bed in her home in Albany, Ga., and woke her husband. She told him that a dream had inspired her to start an exercise and nutrition program for kids. "He told me to go back to sleep, that I couldn't save the world," Green-Jackson says. "I said, why not?"

Sure enough, Green-Jackson got out of bed the next morning and immediately began fundraising for her project, which she named Youth Becoming Healthy (YBH). Within a month, she had received $30,000 in grants. A team of volunteers helped to turn one of the classrooms at a local middle school into a fitness center. They brought in a mix of new and used equipment: four bikes, four treadmills, one Universal machine, an elliptical, and benches. They painted the walls the school colors—burgundy and white—and purchased Dance Dance Revolution, a videogame that allows players to keep track of how many calories they burn in "workout mode." Green-Jackson passed out sign-up sheets for the fitness program, which would take place after school, and 180 kids put down their names.

It was the winter of 2003, and Green-Jackson's timing was eerie. Right after she and her team of volunteers began renovating the classroom, her obese 43-year-old brother, Bernard Green, developed uncontrolled diabetes. Less than a month later, he died weighing 427 pounds. The loss instilled Green-Jackson with an even greater sense of urgency, and she decided to quit her job at the *Albany Herald* to focus full time

COURTESY OF JACKSON FAMILY

GREEN-JACKSON WITH BERNARD.

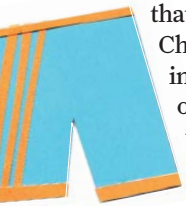
on helping children avoid the same fate as her brother. "People need to break bad habits while they're young and not wait until they're 40 years old," Green-Jackson says. Today, YBH has fitness centers in all six of Albany's public middle schools, as well as three elementary schools.

Grassroots projects like YBH have become increasingly common across the country as communities search for new and innovative ways to battle the nation's childhood-obesity epidemic. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, most schools have focused their time and financial resources on test subjects—reading, writing, and math—at the expense of activities like PE, says Judy Young of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Only one state—Alabama—meets the recommended 150 minutes per week of PE in elementary school and 225 minutes per week in middle and high school, according to the 2010 Shape of the Nation Report: Status of Physical Education in the USA, released by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the American Heart Association. Young says that proposed revisions to No Child Left Behind, which are in the works in many offices on Capitol Hill, underscore the correlation between physical activity and academic achievement. "If kids are not healthy and well, they're not going to be productive and able to use whatever other kinds of skills they have," she says. With dangerously low standards for physical education in most states, YBH serves as a model for communities that want to encourage kids—in a fun and healthy way—to move more and eat better.

A TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS HELPED TO TURN ONE CLASSROOM INTO A FITNESS CENTER.

The need for physical and nutrition education is particularly strong in Green-Jackson's home state, which has the third-highest rate of youth obesity in the country. (Mississippi and Arkansas rank first and second, respectively, according to a 2009 report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.) In Georgia, kids are required to take PE in elementary school but not in middle school. In fact, only 55 percent of middle-school students in Georgia meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requirements for recommended physical activity, but 15 percent are obese, according to the Georgia Department of Community Health.

That lack of exercise, combined with easy access to unhealthy food and drinks, is making kids sick, says Dr. Tanya Smith, a pediatrician in Albany



and the president of YBH. Smith says she has seen children as young as 4 with high blood pressure and full-blown diabetes. Many overweight preteen girls come to her with menstrual issues, and one of her young obese patients had such severe sleep apnea that he needed a tracheotomy. Obese children are at increased risk for a host of other medical conditions, including hypertension, asthma, and low self-esteem. "These kids are having issues that they have no business having," Green-Jackson says. And the price is high: according to the Georgia Department of Community Health, obesity costs Georgia an estimated $2.4 million a year (or $250 per Georgian each year).

YBH aims to reach children where they spend the majority of their time: on school grounds. Now in its seventh year, YBH offers a range of kid-requested activities, including hip-hop dance, martial arts, weightlifting, and walking clubs after school hours. In fact, YBH fitness instructors encourage all the program's participants to keep track of their total daily steps using a pedometer or step counter (every 10,000 steps equals five miles, which is the goal for the day). YBH also brings in nutritionists to teach kids about making better food choices and how to read labels. After opening fitness facilities in nine schools in Albany, YBH also started offering a free four-week camp last summer. In order to attend the camp, which is funded through donations, children must be referred by a pediatrician and have at least one chronic disease related to obesity. So far, the results have been promising. Green-Jackson estimates that since 2003, participants in YBH have collectively lost thousands of pounds.

That kind of success doesn't come easily. Green-Jackson cites the cost of equipment and qualified instructors, as well as parental transportation to and from fitness centers after school hours, as the biggest obstacles. "One person can't do this alone," she says. She recommends gaining the support of the school board, hospitals, pediatricians, and other willing volunteers. "I've seen 20 other programs right here in this city we live in start and fail over the years," says Green-Jackson's husband, Larry, who became a certified youth trainer and now helps his wife run YBH. "We haven't failed because my wife stayed true to what she started. She continued to focus on the kids."

One of those kids is 14-year-old Malik Thomas, who, at nearly 400 pounds, sometimes struggles just to walk. Green-Jackson spotted Malik and his mother, Karen, at Walmart one day and approached them to tell them about YBH. "The first time that I met her, I told her she was just a godsend to me," Karen says. "Her brother had gone through the same thing. I could talk to her, and I cried.

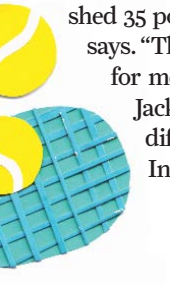
She cried with me." The Thomas family soon began participating in YBH, meeting with a nutritionist and several other families twice a week. The nutritionist gave out healthy recipes and even distributed a prize to the family that lost the most weight. ("That wasn't us," Karen admits.)

For families like the Thomases, YBH has become a reliable source of both physical and emotional support. Malik lost nearly 20 pounds at the YBH camp last summer and, even though he's in high school now, he still uses YBH facilities to exercise after school. "I'm just hoping that Malik can be normal and do some of the things that regular-size kids can do," Karen says. Green-Jackson, who always calls to check on Malik if he misses a workout session, continues to play a key role in reaching that goal. "She's very motivating," Karen says.

THE PROGRAM OFFERS HIP-HOP DANCE, MARTIAL ARTS, WEIGHTLIFTING, AND WALKING CLUBS.

Green-Jackson inspired one student not only to lose weight, but also to launch a health and wellness program of her own. Jasmine Warren enrolled in YBH in the sixth grade, when she was 11 years old and weighed 153 pounds. After a year of running on the treadmill, biking, and doing aerobics, she shed 35 pounds. "It was fun," Warren says. "The program was a big success for me." Warren says that Green-Jackson has made a "wonderful difference" in their community. Indeed, Green-Jackson encouraged Warren, who will be a high-school senior this fall, to launch Youth in Action for Healthy Lifestyles, a student-run program that aims to educate kids in Albany about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating. It brings together about 60 people ages 5 to 25 every weekend to participate in a range of physical activities—including aerobics, softball, jump-roping, soccer, and volleyball—at a local park, school, or convention center. Warren's staff now includes 10 teenagers who received training from the Dougherty County Health Department and who advise other students on nutritious eating. Green-Jackson continues to serve as a mentor to Warren. "She's been a backbone to my program," Warren says.

In the future, Green-Jackson would like to make it easier for kids to eat well both on and off school grounds. Serving a nutritious breakfast in the classroom would be a great place to start, she says. Green-Jackson also has some innovative ideas for the hours after the last bell rings: one day, she would like YBH to take mobile fruit and vegetable stands into low-income areas. There, she envisions launching gardening programs to teach children how to grow their own fruit and vegetables. "My wife is a big dreamer," says Larry. For all those she's inspired so far, that is turning out to be a very good thing indeed. □



Throw Away the Junk Food

Two NFL superstars share their secrets about exercise and healthy eating.

BY NAYELI RODRIGUEZ

What are the easiest ways to build fitness into a daily routine?

JONES-DREW: Going outside for a walk and talking, a pickup game of basketball or kickball; just whatever it is that you do, go outside and do it. Instead of getting a ride from school, walk home. Or take a bike. Swimming is a great way to get exercise, too; it's the best way, actually, and it's something people do for recreation, too.

How can healthy teens positively influence their peers' fitness? Challenge your friends, and encourage them to come outside. Even if you can't get them to eat healthy, if you exercise with them you're doing them a favor.

If you exercise, can you pay less attention to what you eat? You really want to be doing both. You're always going to go back to your foundation and what you know, so it's all about learning responsibility and great habits. I had a higher metabolism when I was young, so the things I'm used to eating, now that I'm older, my body's not burning them in the same way. What I'm doing now is re-teaching myself, trying to get going the right way. I wish I'd started eating healthy earlier because then I'd be used to it.

Do you have any good tips on how to eat healthy during the day? Always carry fruit. It helps your body and uses enzymes to help your body break down what you've already eaten. Even McDonald's sells fruit, and it's always good to snack on those because it fills you up right away, it's not putting a lot in your stomach, and it helps break down everything else as well.

You don't always have to eat the exact perfect meal, but having fruits and vegetables in your diet will help out a bunch. I like fruits like nectarines, pineapples, and mangos. And I'm a big broccoli fan—you can't knock it till you try it! □

MAURICE JONES-DREW, running back for the Jacksonville Jaguars

HINES WARD,
Pittsburgh Steelers
wide receiver

Why is eating healthy so important?
WARD: As a football player you have to watch what you eat. The same goes for our nation's kids. A third of them are dealing with an obesity problem. And now with the economy taking away school programs that educate students on how to eat healthy, it's really up to the kids to get outside and apply their knowledge on how to eat well on their own instead of sitting on their couch playing Xbox all day.

Where should students start when it comes to making healthy eating choices? Throw away all the junk food. If you don't have the accessibility, it makes it easier to eat healthy. Ask your parents not to buy certain things, and that makes it easier to have good eating habits. Try not to eat after 8 o'clock at night. Drink a lot of water. And if you want a snack, there's nothing wrong with that, but get fruit, like grapes or apples.

How can students help their friends eat healthy? Nutrition is everything. It takes a lot to be disciplined about that. Sometimes it takes a friend; ask a friend to help you. You can convince your friends to help each other out. Ask each other, "Did you drink water?" Encourage your friends. At the end of the day, if they lose weight, they are proud of it and they'll thank you.

What good changes can healthy eating bring for teens? They'll have more energy and more self-esteem. You should care about exercising because it makes you feel a lot better and improves your confidence. A lot of kids who are better with their health are more confident than kids who aren't eating as healthy or who don't care.

Are there any big mistakes to avoid when starting to work out? You have to want to do it. You can talk a lot about it, but if you don't take [the] road to doing it, then you won't get in shape.

You don't have to start out right away, you can go slowly. It's like smokers—you can't quit overnight. Walk a mile. If you feel comfortable after that, add a half a mile. It's hard for the first week, but in the long haul, if you're disciplined enough to do it, it's amazing how it works. □

AL MESSERSCHMIDT—GETTY IMAGES (2)

What Kids Eat

There are recommendations—and then reality.

BY IAN YARETT

73 percent of the recommended dairy.

But 31 percent of milk intake is in the form of whole or 2 percent milk. Choose low-fat or fat-free milk products instead, and make sure to find other sources of calcium if you don't consume milk.

57 percent of the recommended oils.

But 28 percent of those oils are in the form of corn-based salty snacks and potato chips. It's best to get your fats from fish, nuts, and vegetable oils, while minimizing consumption of solid (saturated or trans) fats like butter or margarine.

44 percent of the recommended vegetables.

But 22 percent of those vegetables are in the form of fries and potato chips. Stay away from fried food when possible, and eat more green and orange vegetables.

71 percent of the recommended meats and beans.

But 33 percent of those are in the form of sandwiches and burgers. Choose lean meats, fish, and poultry—baked, broiled, or grilled rather than fried—and try to eat beans, nuts, and seeds, as opposed to just beef.

45 percent of the recommended fruits.

But 53 percent of those are in the form of juice. It's better to minimize consumption of fruit drinks, which are high in sugar.

118 percent of the recommended grains.

But 27 percent of those grains are in the form of sandwiches, burgers, and pizza. More whole grains like brown rice or whole-wheat bread would be a better choice.

SOURCES: INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE