Health for Achievement
Evidence to Action

Health for Achievement is a 5-year NIH-funded study that examines the impact of health on academic achievement. We are using information collected from 12 participating New Haven Public Schools to develop new programs that raise awareness and motivate positive health practices. Over the past few years, we have conducted research with more than 1,800 middle school students regarding their physical health, health behaviors, school and neighborhood environments. The results of our research have been disseminated both locally and nationally, aiming to educate our communities and encourage better health for all students. This report provides a summary of select findings from the research.

Health Impacts Connecticut Mastery Test Scores

Healthier students are better able to learn. Students who had 9 or more health assets (such as physical fitness and healthy weight) were twice as likely to perform at goal on all Connecticut Mastery Tests (reading, writing and mathematics) compared to those with fewer health assets.¹

![Graph showing percentage of students with academic achievement categorized by number of health promoting factors.](image)

- Sugary drink consumption increased with more screen time (e.g. computer and TV).²
- Students who drank fewer sugary drinks were more likely to report parents who encouraged healthy eating habits.²
- Each additional sugar-sweetened beverage consumed was associated with an increase in hyperactivity symptoms, such as being unable to concentrate in class.³
- Students who reported consuming any energy drinks had significantly more hyperactivity symptoms compared to those who did not consume energy drinks.³

![Image of students engaged in activity.](image)

38% of students drank 3 or more sugary drinks everyday, and consumption increased with screen time.

Health for Achievement is a partnership between New Haven Public Schools, CARE at the Yale School of Public Health, and the Yale Rudd Center.
Given the rapid trajectory of childhood obesity and its adverse consequences on both health and academics, Health for Achievement takes specific aim at preventing childhood obesity.

- Almost one-half of the middle school students evaluated were overweight or obese.¹
- A more positive school climate was associated with lower body mass index among students.⁴
- A higher body mass index was associated with living:⁵
  » further from a grocery store.
  » in a neighborhood with more property crime.
  » within a 5-minute walk of a fast food outlet.
- Students from lower income families who “shift and persist”—that is, they can deal with life’s stresses by reframing them more positively while at the same time persisting in optimistic thoughts about the future—were protected from the effects of lower income on weight and obesity.⁶
- Weight-based teasing is associated with increased blood pressure and body mass index over time.⁷
- Nearly 1 in 4 obese children were not counseled about their weight by their health care provider.⁸

**Evidence to Action**

Health for Achievement is working with 6th graders in 12 designated schools implementing targeted interventions to promote positive health behaviors. These interventions, guided by the research, have been developed throughout the course of the study and are focused in specific health areas such as nutrition, physical activity, emotional health, and others. Efforts so far include:

- encouraging NHPS health and wellness policies in schools such as healthy celebrations, fundraising, and providing nutritious drinks with meals
- interactive menu boards in cafeterias showcasing healthy food and information
- new physical activity equipment for P.E. class
- educational materials on good health practices for school libraries
- nutrition education workshops in cafeterias
- Mighty Milers! a motivational running program for students

New health programs are planned for the upcoming 2013-2014 school year. Researchers intend to evaluate the link between changes in physical activity levels and nutritional habits to project efforts. Our goal is to develop, implement and evaluate programs and policies that improve health and achievement for all students.