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NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Childhood Obesity Grants Succeed in Helping Children Achieve Healthy Weight

RALEIGH, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund childhood obesity grants succeeded in helping children achieve a healthy weight through small, dietary changes, according to an evaluation of the grant program conducted statewide by East Carolina University.

East Carolina University researchers reviewed the results of 19 childhood obesity grant projects funded by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund that aimed to help North Carolina children achieve a healthy weight. ECU researchers looked at 1,346 children from 4 to 18 years old who were grouped into one of four categories when the projects began: underweight, healthy weight, overweight and obese.

Using approaches such as nutrition lessons that encourage less sweet beverage consumption, 90 percent of the children stayed in their category or improved over the three years of study. Among overweight and obese children in the study, 51 percent improved their weight category. For some, improving their weight category meant they actually lost weight. For others, it meant they grew taller while maintaining their weight. Some did both.

“Childhood obesity is a real challenge for North Carolina and there are real consequences for the future health and wellbeing of our kids,” said HWTF Chair Lt. Governor Bev Perdue. “These evaluation results demonstrate how important healthy eating is to achieving a healthy weight.”

The projects were part of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund’s childhood obesity grant program, which aims to reduce obesity and encourage healthful lifestyles in the state. Projects across the state each received approximately \$300,000 to \$400,000 over three years. The full evaluation report is available at: http://www.healthwellnc.com/hwtfc/htmlfiles/fundprty_obesity-grants.htm.

“These projects have demonstrated small changes can make a difference,” said lead researcher Dr. Lauren Whetstone, clinical associate professor of family medicine at ECU’s Brody School of Medicine. “While physical activity may well have played a role, outcomes were largely achieved by the dietary changes that took place, at least in this study.”

The historic effort comes against the backdrop of mounting studies showing that North Carolina’s young people are dangerously overweight. A report recently released from the Washington-based Trust for America’s Health indicates that North Carolina’s children are the fifth most obese in the United States.

About the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund funds programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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