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## School nutrition examined in Monroe County

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In a large-scale effort to drive down the obesity rate among local children, a group of parents, health officials, and business and civic leaders are pushing for healthier lunch menus and safer play areas in all Monroe County schools.

Members of the HEALTHI Kids policy team, convened by the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, called Tuesday for a ban on junk food sold in schools, a set of county-wide nutritional standards for cafeteria lunches and vending machines, more lighting and adult supervision at recreational facilities, and after-hours access to play areas.

Though smaller programs have focused on nutrition and fitness in some schools or community organizations, the group is advocating for statewide policy changes and community standards that would tackle childhood obesity throughout the area, said Wade Norwood, director of community engagement at the Finger Lakes Health System.

"It's not just programmatic changes, but how can we do something more global? There needs to be a large community voice that says these are the important changes we would like to see." The policy team has met since February and examined lunches and snacks served that were "not acceptable, not appealing and not healthy," Norwood said.

Rochester father of three George Moses, a member of the HEALTHI Kids group, said he was disgusted when he learned what types of foods schoolchildren were eating.

"If it's killing the kids ... we don't need it," he said. "This is an adult problem. We actually control what our children eat."

The team expects to work with city and suburban school districts to make changes, send messages home to parents, and consult children on what types of healthy foods to put in cafeterias and vending machines. Grants from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation will fund smaller childhood health projects in the area to support the changes, but the team will rely mostly on funds garnered by lobbying state and federal legislators, Norwood said.

The team hopes to create policy changes by 2010 that will revamp school lunch menus and playgrounds.

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