HEALTH AND EDUCATION INITIATIVE
American University’s Department of Health Studies strives to address the devastating effects of childhood obesity by better understanding the relation between policy, health, and education.

**TODAY’S CHALLENGES**

**Childhood Obesity**

1 out of 5 children aged 6-17 are defined as obese*

*Based on data from 2014.

$177 billion per year is spent by the US in direct medical expenses and indirect costs such as lost productivity*

21.4% of youth aged 10-17 in Washington, DC are obese* (3rd highest pediatric obesity rate in the country)

**Teacher Preparedness**

94% believe teaching health education in schools is important

only 35% reported feeling prepared, empowered, or able to integrate health education into their current curricula

*Based on a 2012 survey of a sample of middle school teachers in Washington, DC.

**WHAT WE’VE FOUND**

Through a five-year study of school-based wellness legislation, we found the **Healthy Schools Act (HSA) of 2010** has had a positive impact on the school environment.

Enhanced meal standards have led to schools serving more healthful food, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

**WHAT WE’VE DONE**

- **Engaging Elementary Students with Taste Tests to Promote Vegetable Consumption**
  - We sought to increase consumption of select vegetables through a taste-test competition, which resulted in:
    - Increased consumption of broccoli, sweet potatoes, and spinach
    - After a taste test, students were 2 to 7.2 times more likely to consume target vegetables

  - We implemented the Community Voices for Health Curriculum in 15 middle schools, which resulted in:
    - Increased vegetable consumption, increased breakfast consumption, and lower soda consumption among students
    - Increased self-efficacy among teachers for integrating health information into the curriculum

**WHAT’S NEXT**

- **Healthy Schoolhouse 2.0**
  - We seek to help improve health literacy and reduce existing health and academic disparities in elementary school students. By designing, implementing, and evaluating a set of research, education, and extension activities in six elementary schools throughout Washington, DC, our program will:
    - Establish a professional development program for teachers that will teach them how to integrate nutrition concepts into their classrooms
    - Identify an individual's spheres of influence – personal, school, community – to establish a knowledgeable support system that fosters healthy habits in and out of the classroom