

SYNOPSIS
URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116
BOARD OF EDUCATION
STUDY SESSION
OCTOBER 4, 2005

The Board of Education spent last night's study session wrapped around issues of children's health – increased obesity, lack of exercise, higher rates of asthma and Type II diabetes. Panel members talked about their own area of expertise and everyone left the room thinking that the time for discussion is up and we need to be creating solutions.

Panelists included Joe Yaeger, UHS graduate and former Gerber School employee who is now co-owner of iPower gym for parents and children in Champaign; Sara Wagner, nutritionist for ARAMARK; Charlene Stevens, Community Health Nurse with the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District; Justine Karduck, Nutrition/Education Coordinator, UI McKinley Health Center, and Dr. Kimberly Glow from our school-based health center.

All the speakers were armed with statistics regarding children's health issues – numbers that most of us hear repeatedly. And all the speakers agreed that while schools play an important role in reducing obesity and improving nutrition among our students, and increasing their physical activities, we have to be able to reach parents with these fundamental changes as well. Economics play a huge role in a child's nutrition and overall health issues so we must create networks to reach segments of our population which are sometimes difficult to reach.

Dr. Glow pointed out the dichotomy that exists in schools between academics and physical activity. In our efforts to raise test scores, and since the school day is finite in terms of time, we're just not able to include the emphasis on physical education that public schools stressed decades ago. In that transition, a perception has been created that physical education teachers have been devalued in terms of their contribution to the overall education of our children.

And nutritionist Justine Karduck talked about targeted messages that are being used in other public schools reminding students to walk to school, chose to drink water rather than a sweetened drink, posters and fliers calling for specific actions to improve nutrition and increase physical activity. Modeling by staff is also an issue – it's difficult to get students to cut down on their soda intake if teachers and other role models are drinking pop in front of the kids.

A 2004 federal law requires all public schools to create a local wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006/07 school year. The committee to design this policy must include parents, students, representatives of ARAMARK, the school board, school administrators and the public. Given last night's discussion though, another element to come out of the policy discussion will most likely be action steps to fix the problems too.

As school board member Mark Netter said, "We can't do it alone."