

# Preliminary Report

Shaping America's Youth® Town Meeting  
 Dallas, Texas – April 22, 2006



Nearly 600 participants gathered on April 22nd at the Dallas Convention Center to identify what the various sectors of the community can do to create healthier lifestyles for children. The purpose of the meeting was to develop and gather support for obesity prevention programs in the Dallas region as well as to gather input for a National Action Plan, a detailed plan that will provide unified direction to nationwide efforts to improve nutrition and increase physical activity among children.

The meeting was convened by *Shaping America's Youth® (SAY)*, a unique public-private initiative created in 2003 to bring together the efforts of many groups and programs working to combat physical inactivity and inadequate nutrition among children. SAY seeks to identify community programs and solicit grassroots input in order to find effective ways to promote childhood exercise and healthy eating and to put these into action. The meeting was hosted locally by Children's Medical Center Dallas, the Community Council of Greater Dallas, and the Dallas Area Coalition for the Prevention of Childhood Obesity.

The SAY Town Meeting was free and open to all. Outreach was conducted through community organizations, events and print coverage, and radio and TV public service announcements. Free childcare, transportation, and language translation were provided in order to encourage participation by a diverse cross-section of the Dallas community.



## Who Attended the Shaping America's Youth Town Meeting?

Shaping America's Youth sought to represent the diversity of the Dallas area. Participants' demographics are compared below to the make up of the city, according to 2000 U.S. Census Data.

<u>Gender</u>	<u>April 22</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity**</u>	<u>April 22</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Female	78%	50%	African-American/Black	27%	16%
Male	22%	50%	Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	4%
<b><u>Age</u></b>			Caucasian	48%	56%
15-19	15%	7%	Hispanic/Latino	37%	24%
20-34	23%	25%	Native American	1%	1%
35-44	26%	17%	Mixed Race	6%	2%
45-54	19%	12%	Other	13%	11%
55-64	14%	7%	<b><u>Affiliations Represented**</u></b>		
65 and better	3%	8%	Youth	21%	
<b><u>Household Income*</u></b>			Parents/Guardians	53%	
Less than \$25,000	19%	23%	Educators/Schools	26%	
\$25,000 – 49,999	28%	29%	Community Leaders/ Service Providers	22%	
\$50,000 – 74,999	13%	20%	Business/Private Sector	18%	
\$75,000 – 99,999	10%	11%	Healthcare Community	25%	
\$100,000 and over	18%	18%	Legislators/Policymakers	2%	

\*12% Not sure of their household income

\*\*May total more than 100%

## How Did the Meeting Work?

Shaping America's Youth, which registered over 1,000 participants from throughout the Dallas area, enlisted the talent and technology of *AmericaSpeaks*, a national non-profit and nonpartisan group that developed a remarkably effective real-time process to generate information and ideas.

To increase participation and input, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting<sup>®</sup> divided the total group of participants into groups of 10. A trained facilitator worked with each small group throughout the day to ensure each person had an opportunity to share their opinion. Throughout the day, the meeting's lead moderators presented discussion questions to the group. The ideas from each discussion were collected through networked computers stationed at each table. A team of data analysts reviewed the comments from all of the tables simultaneously and reported the common ideas back to the group almost immediately.

Then, using keypad polling devices, the participants reviewed and prioritized these ideas in order to develop a clear plan for action. The results from the polls were reported instantly to the group via large video screens. Polling was used both to gather demographic information and to give participants the opportunity to prioritize options.

Before their discussions began, participants had an opportunity to learn more about the issue. SAY developed a comprehensive issue guide that provided information about the causes and prevalence of inactivity and poor nutrition among children in Dallas, the state of Texas, and the nation. Participants listened to a brief presentation about these issues, reviewed the issue guide, and discussed these issues in detail. In addition, local and national issue experts were available throughout the program to address specific, issue-related questions generated by the tables.

## Participation of Political & Community Leaders

Local, state and national leaders have strongly supported the SAY initiative and the Dallas Town Meeting. Speakers included Dallas Mayor Laura Miller, professional athlete and Dallas Cowboys' star Bradie James, Acting Director of the Regional Department of Health and Human Services, Don Perkins, Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price, and Dr. LeAnn Kridelbaugh of the Dallas Area Coalition to Prevent Childhood Obesity.

The local host organizations with the support of Dallas community leaders will continue the SAY mission by helping to implement the ideas generated by participants. Citizens who would like to become involved locally in Dallas are invited to call (214) 871-5065 ext. 212.

## Family Actions

Since families have the greatest single impact on a child's eating and activity habits, participants began their discussions by considering what actions could be taken within families to improve nutrition and increase activity among their children. Participants identified many actions specific to the following age ranges, and these were ranked as the highest priorities:

### Prenatal to 5 Years Old

- Parents should lead by example (36%)
- Make healthier food choices (27%)
- Start kids being active early: for example dance with children (24%)

### 6-11 Years Old

- Model and teach healthy eating and activity to children (36%)
- Educate parents on healthy eating and food preparation (23%)
- Provide health foods not junk in the home (11%)

### 12-19 Years Old

- Set a good example as parents (27%)
- Provide healthy food choices at home and at school (26%)
- Encourage participation in enjoyable physical activities: for example family walks (16%)

## Barriers to Family Actions

Having addressed the actions that families could take to benefit their children's health, the participants then discussed barriers that can impede these actions. By identifying these barriers early in the day, participants were encouraged to address these barriers in the future discussions and to develop strategies to overcome them.

Please note that participants were not asked to rank barriers – all will be considered in detail by SAY and the Dallas Area Coalition for the Prevention of Childhood Obesity in future planning and for inclusion in the National Action Plan. Participants identified a variety of barriers for families with children of various ages, and the following examples appeared across multiple age ranges:

- Healthy food choices are more expensive - it's cheaper to go out for fast food
  - "Lack of time to fix meals, go grocery shopping, exercise, or do anything!"
  - "Lack of knowledge of what a healthy meal is and how to cook one"
  - "Not enough safe recreation available in the community"
    - Parents are not being good role models
    - High "marketing of unhealthy food that is geared toward our youth"

## Supporting Families

Moving beyond families, participants turned their attention to the other members of the community with a stake in improving children's health. While families play a central role in impacting children's behaviors, families are strongly impacted by the social and cultural context around them. Participants were asked to identify specific ways that these stakeholder groups could support families in the priority actions identified earlier in the day. Following are recommended actions, in order of priority, for each of the stakeholders:

### Healthcare Community

- Decrease health insurance premiums if enrolled in wellness program (57%)
- Educate children and parents about proper nutrition and physical activity (15%)
- Remove unhealthy food choices from health care facilities – candy vending machines (10%)

### Business/Private Sector

- Partner with the community and schools to promote healthy children (32%)
- Fund activities and facilities for healthy living. "Let fast food companies build parks at schools instead of selling food in schools" (25%)
- "Offer healthier choices at restaurants. Promote them." – offer nutritional information and smaller portion sizes (15%)

### Educators/Schools

- Involve parents and community in school PE and nutrition programs (59%)
- Increase PE time: "no child left on their behind" (40%)
- Provide healthier food options in schools (16%)

### Community Leaders/Service Providers

- Require schools to emphasize health/nutrition (31%)
- Encourage media (including Spanish-language TV and radio) to offer PSA's on nutrition (23%)
- Increase security in parks and recreation areas (13%)

### Legislators/Policy Makers

- Mandate improved nutrition and physical education in schools (35%)
- Tax unhealthy foods – subsidize healthy foods (30%)
- Increase funding and time for physical activity in schools (11%)



For more information on  
**Shaping America's Youth**,  
please visit our website at:  
[www.shapingamericasyouth.org](http://www.shapingamericasyouth.org)

or call us at 1-800-SAY-9221.

## National Actions

Recognizing that local and regional efforts to promote change will benefit from commitment on a national level, participants considered what actions might be taken by national leaders and institutions to help improve nutrition and increase activity among children. The following actions were identified and ranked\* in order of their potential impact:

- Healthcare community should create a national, unified marketing and education campaign to improve nutrition and increase physical activity (51%)
- Educators/schools should develop national standards for nutrition and PE in schools (44%)
- Legislators/policymakers should fund initiatives to educate the public on nutrition and fitness (20%)
- Business/private sector should sponsor nutrition and fitness education for employees and the public (11%)
- Community leaders/service providers should increase availability of health education in communities (5%)

\* totals more than 100% because participants were asked to vote twice

## Next Steps

In the final stage of the meeting, participants discussed how to implement these ideas within the Dallas area. Dr. LeAnn Kridelbaugh of the Dallas Area Coalition to Prevent Childhood Obesity was on hand during this section of the program to hear from participants and learn how to support their continued actions.

Following today's meeting, members of the community will be invited to participate in projects designed to implement the recommendations generated during the day. The Dallas Area Coalition to Prevent Childhood Obesity (launched by Children's Medical Center and the Community Council of Greater Dallas) is an alliance of 88 local organizations dedicated to expanding community resources to help families increase children's physical activity and healthy eating.

The Coalition invites you to get involved! You are invited to attend the *Uniting for Healthier Families* Luncheon on May 16<sup>th</sup> from 11:00am to 1:00pm at Brookhaven Country Club to join in the fight against childhood obesity. You are also invited to attend the Coalition's monthly meetings – held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month from 1:30 to 3:00pm at the Community Council of Greater Dallas (1349 Empire Central, Suite 400).

Stay tuned for more from *Shaping America's Youth* – in late 2006, recommendations from all the SAY Town Meetings will be presented to Congressional officials as a proposal for a National Action Plan to reverse the incidence of childhood overweight.

Please Note: Complete results from the Town Meeting will be available in the near future on the SAY website: [www.shapingamericasyouth.org](http://www.shapingamericasyouth.org).