

# from the *Heart*



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## *The Need:* Ending Child Obesity

The national childhood obesity rate has tripled over the last 30 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- and the epidemic is just as real in Martin County. Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease, develop diabetes, have sleep apnea and other health

problems, as well as poor self-esteem. Obese children are also more likely to be obese adults. This problem is more than simply a caloric imbalance; often there are cultural reasons for when and what is eaten, and physical activity may be more difficult if no option exists for supervised outside play time. It is important that children and their parents become educated on healthy food options and the importance of exercise so kids can grow to be healthy, active adults.



## *The Response:* School Health Program

### Martin County Health Department

Along with funding partners of the Martin County School District and the Martin County Health Department, the Council supports the School Health program as a way to keep our community's children healthy. School nurses are tasked with checking every student's BMI, or Body Mass Index, which is calculated using the height, weight and age of each child. Every year, students in public school grades 1, 3 and 6 are screened, and referral letters are sent to parents whose children are either underweight or overweight. While parents can opt out, other health screenings performed by school nurses include vision, hearing and scoliosis. For children who don't go to the doctor as often as they should, the school health program plays a vital role in keeping Martin County's children healthy and safe.

Florida Department of Health  
**School Health**  
Services Program

The Children's Services Council of Martin County is an independent district, approved by voters by referendum in 1988, to enhance the lives of the children of Martin County and to enable them to attain their full potential by supporting 34 impactful programs for youth in our community. Learn more about your agency at: [www.cscmc.org](http://www.cscmc.org) and [www.facebook.com/cscmc](http://www.facebook.com/cscmc).

# *The Response:*

## Active, Healthy Children

### *After-school and Mentoring Programs:*

**Big Brothers Big Sisters • Boys & Girls Clubs  
Martin County Parks & Recreation • City of Stuart  
Community Services Department • YMCA**

There's a better option than children heading home after school to a fatty snack and the television. The Children's Services Council funds a variety of after-school programs to keep kids active and help them learn how to make healthy food choices. Children can burn off the excess energy playing everything from kickball to learning gymnastics to participating in a Little League baseball team, while also receiving healthy snacks. Plus, some programs also incorporate culinary arts lessons that address cultural obstacles to health, such as cooking with lard. The positive peer pressure continues as well with children planting vegetable gardens and working with adult mentors to understand the importance of healthy decisions for a successful future.



**Big Brothers Big Sisters**  
of Palm Beach and Martin Counties, Inc.

**GREAT FUTURES START [HERE](#).**



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS**  
OF MARTIN COUNTY



### *Prenatal Care:*

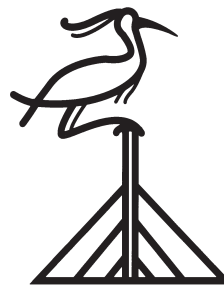
**Martin County Healthy Start**



Did you know that infants who are breastfed have a lower risk of childhood obesity? Martin County Healthy Start Coalition provides comprehensive prenatal health education for mothers to help ensure healthy birth outcomes for all babies born in our community. Mothers are encouraged to breastfeed their babies for a variety of reasons, including increased bonding and reduced risk of infections and allergies. But breastfeeding also creates a foundation of good health for children that can last a lifetime. To learn more, contact the Prenatal Outreach Center at (772) 463-2141.

### *Early Learning Programs:*

**Early Learning Coalition • Dunbar  
Child Care Center**



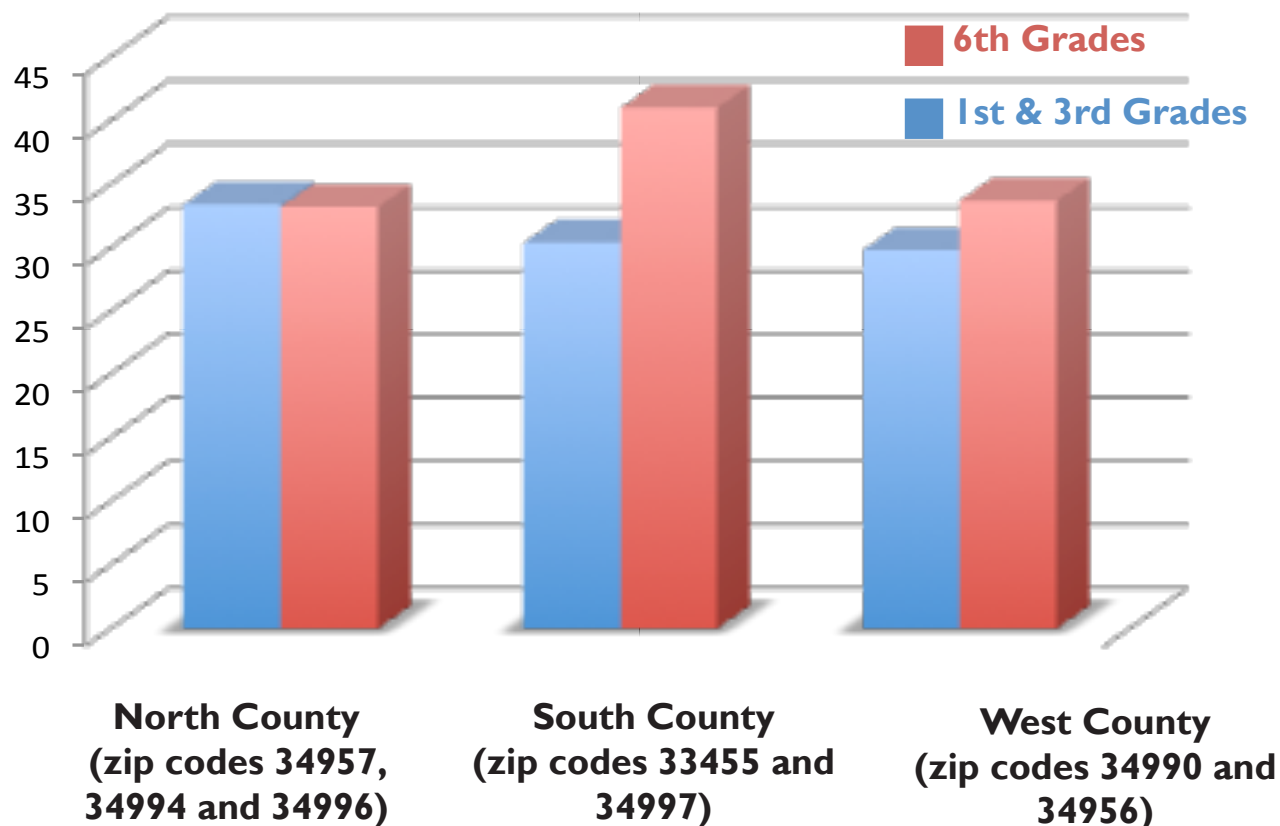
**Early Learning Coalition**  
Of Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee Counties, Inc.

Early learning programs are focused on getting our community's children prepared for kindergarten as well as keeping them safe and supervised while their parents are able to work and strengthen our Martin County economy. There's also something very important about allowing children adequate opportunities for active play and healthy eating so they can learn important health lessons and habits as early as possible. The Early Learning Coalition works with 37 day cares in our area to offer subsidized child care for families who otherwise couldn't afford it, while the Dunbar Child Care Center offers Early Head Start. Since prevention is much less expensive than cure, it makes sense to give extra attention to our our youngest residents!

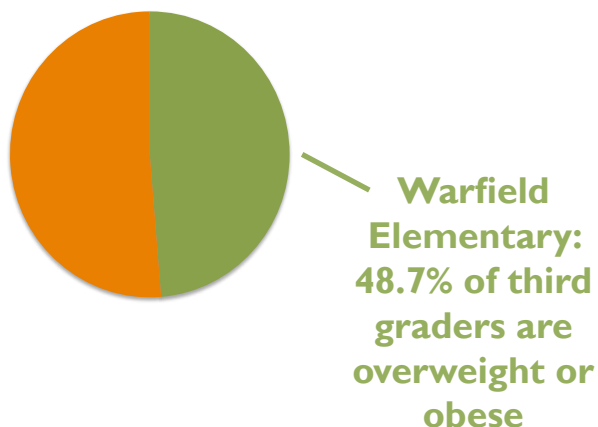
# *The Impact:*

## Progressing Toward Health

**BMI rates (Body Mass Index) for Martin County Students**



**Biggest problem area:  
Indiantown**



## And yet ...

Martin County has the highest percentage of food-insecure children on the Treasure Coast who do not qualify for federal nutrition programs (47%). Collaborations with the Treasure Coast Food Bank and House of Hope provide backpacks of healthy foods to children attending CSCMC-funded after-school programs.

### Success Story

*Editor's Note: Sam Velazquez, site coordinator of the Boys & Girls Clubs' Indiantown branch, takes health seriously. A long-time vegetarian, he works with his staff to change the eating habits of the kids living in the epicenter of Martin County's childhood obesity epidemic.*

When Program Coordinator Marta Giambrone and I first started here in Indiantown, the first thing we did was get rid of the soda machine. We stopped selling red hot sausages, pickled eggs and beef jerky for snacks. We replaced the whole milk with 1%, the sugary juices with juice that contains only 6% sugar and offer fresh fruit and granola bars at snack time.

We face a big task when it comes to changing the eating habits of children and teens here in Indiantown, where there are few healthy options. Traditionally, families eat fried chicken, chicken wings or barbecue. It's cheaper and easier to get Burger King than create a fresh salad. So when we introduce soups and salads, fresh fruits and vegetables to the children, often times they've never tried them before.

At the Club, we have a cooking club where we teach more than kitchen safety. There are lessons about the food groups, portion control and healthy options. I talk to the kids about the effects of sugar and fat on their metabolisms. I encourage the children to look around their neighborhood and see who is healthy. Many have never even thought of it before. We also work to keep the kids active, as well. We participate in the Presidential Fitness Program, where we test their fitness level, and play kickball, golf and soccer.

We know we are making a difference, too. The kids are now asking for fruits, vegetables, raisins and nuts. They go home and make yogurt parfaits and spinach salads for their parents. Some are even giving up Burger King. One thing is tough for them to give up: ranch dressing. They even like it on pizza! So, a lot of work is still needed to get these kids as healthy as they can be!

### Events & Meetings

**Dec. 4:** Council presentation to Martin County Board of County Commissioners, 9 a.m.

**Dec. 7:** Stuart Christmas Parade -- Look for our float!

**Dec. 24-25:** Christmas Holiday (Council offices are closed.)

**Jan. 1:** New Year's Day Holiday (Council offices are closed.)

*Please note: The Council does not meet in December.*

Would you like to schedule a presentation for your club or homeowners' association? Contact Suzanne Wentley at [swentley@cscmc.org](mailto:swentley@cscmc.org)!

### Council News

December brings the start of the Council's mid-year monitoring, run by Manager of Program Services Laura Haase. Laura visits each of the 34 programs funded by the Council to determine if the agency is complying with its contractual obligations. Specifically, she confirms that all employees and volunteers have up-to-date background checks, are on track with the 30 hours of training required each year and meet minimal requirements for their job descriptions. She runs numerous reports on SAMIS, the data-tracking software used at all agencies to determine impact, to ensure the children and families being served are Martin County residents and if the program is meeting the negotiated performance measures set in place to measure success. Laura reviews the intake procedures so that the program has adequate staff-to-child ratios and much more. These monitoring visits may last for hours and are designed to ensure that our tax dollars are being used effectively and efficiently in Martin County.

### Contact Us

**Children's Services Council of Martin County**

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