



# Jefferson County's Steps Program

Promoting healthy behaviors among school employees

## What is the public health problem?

Chronic diseases related to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors concern both the public health community and school officials in Jefferson County.

- Among Jefferson County residents, only about 25% reported eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, according to 2006\* Steps Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data.
- About 40% reported being physically inactive.
- Nearly 8% reported having diabetes, about 38% reported being overweight, and nearly 25% reported being obese.

## How Steps is responding

The Steps Program helped implement a school wellness program for the school staff to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity behaviors.

- Jefferson County's Steps Program helped a rural school district set up a School Health Advisory Committee and develop an action plan for schools. After implementing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *School Health Index* (SHI)<sup>†</sup>, staff wellness was identified as an area in need of improvement.

- Health promotion activities such as after-hours walking groups and classes on proper nutrition were conducted over a 2-year period.

## What is the impact?

- 105 district staff members have participated and lost a total of 430 pounds.
- Expenditures by the district's self-funded health care plan decreased, resulting in a reduction in employees' health care insurance premiums. In fact, the Board of Education was able to waive one month of insurance premiums for everyone, totaling almost \$300,000 in savings.

## Why this program is working

The SHI, developed by CDC, is a self-assessment tool that includes research-based guidelines for school health programs. Evidence has shown that it is an effective tool in establishing the policies and practices needed to improve health-related behaviors of young people and school staff members. In addition, studies indicate that comprehensive work-site health programs focused on lifestyle behavior change lead to improvements in health behaviors among employees and a return on investment for employers.

\* Most recent data available

<sup>†</sup> <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>