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Modeling healthy behavior for children

July 14, 2:24 PM ▸ Atlanta Elementary Education Examiner ▸ Charlis Cunningham



4 year old LeVar Hunt, Jr. gets active at a neighborhood park. Photo by Charlis Cunningham

There was a [recent study](#) released that ranked Georgia second in the nation for childhood obesity, with 21.3% of our children obese. Even though childhood obesity has been a recent matter of national attention, it is not the only health issue plaguing our youth. In response to childhood health issues, [HealthMPowers](#) has initiated a crusade in Georgia schools to improve the health status and environment for students.

This a non-profit organization was founded in 1999 and incorporated in 2000 with a goal of targeting schools across Georgia by the end of the decade. “The HealthMPowers’ program is designed to provide students, school staff, and families with information,

skills, resources, and motivation necessary to take responsibility for their own health.”

In efforts to increase the quality of life in children, adults must initially model and guide healthy behaviors. With its mission “to empower students, school staff and families,” HealthMPowers recognizes the role teachers and parents play. As caregivers adults control a majority—if not all—of a child’s food intake and daily activities.

To make the case of enhancing child health a stronger one, there is a definite relationship between [health and academic achievement](#). In all the efforts to improve our school systems it seems education reform cannot ignore the pressing health concerns among children. A healthy mind and body is one that functions better in an academic setting.



The Banks family goes out for a summer walk and share a light snack with two-year-old granddaughter, Kennedy (7/3/10) Photo by Charlis Cunningham

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HealthMPowers Executive Director—
Christi Kay

HealthMPowers served more than 44,000 students in 59 schools in 15 different counties in 2008 and 75 schools in 2009. During the 2009-2010 academic year participating school districts around the Atlanta area included Atlanta City, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties. “We have been growing every year since 2003,” says [Executive Director of HealthMPowers](#), Christi Kay. She has been a leader in health education in Georgia for more than 25 years. “We would like to see it expand. Schools have been helpful in creating natural links to the class.”

The program provides all necessary materials and resources which align with [Georgia Performance Standards](#). In short periods throughout the week teachers can easily and consistently, over the period of the school year, set students on track to lead healthy lifestyles.

Even with great lesson plans and programming in the schools and community, parents still remain as a child’s first teacher and influential mentor. Kay explains that engaging parents has been a challenge. “What we’re trying to do is get the children to take the message home.” It is a great responsibility for young students to be expected to live healthy without being provided the necessary support or having health-promoting environments.

HealthMPowers’ mission on improving child health calls for adults to step up and be responsible figures. We shape our future through our youth and a bright future requires well-educated and healthy kids.