

# Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity WANTS YOU!

by **Beth Trapani,**  
PANA Spokeswoman

Students at Wilkins Primary School celebrated ACES Day (All Children Exercising Simultaneously) and Keystone Healthy Zone Event Day in May. PANA is hosting another event to promote physical activity, "Walk to School Day" October 5, 2005.

***"If we don't act now, we will be raising the first generation that will not live as long as their parents do."***

It's a sobering statement about the effects of childhood obesity, and one that's repeated time and again by national health experts, including the U.S. Surgeon General. There's no question - childhood obesity is officially an epidemic.

In fact, Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, says, "If you looked at any epidemic - whether it's influenza or plague from the Middle Ages - they are not as serious as the epidemic of obesity in terms of the health impact on our country and our society."

It's not enough to make a personal pledge to eat right and exercise. If we are going to make a community-wide difference, we need to help support change by not only being good role models, but by helping to create healthier environments that encourage better eating and increased physical activity. We need to help create places that make the healthy choice the easier choice. And we need to reach our children, when



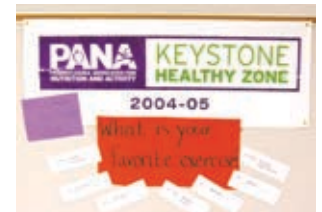
Students at Montgomery Elementary School take a break to add more physical activity to their school day. They learned that jumping rope can be a great way to get some exercise!

they are still forming their habits (and national health statistics show overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults.)

PANA, Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity, a statewide coalition of more than 400 public, private, academic, professional and volunteer groups, is working to end the obesity epidemic by promoting policies and environments that support healthy eating and activity. PANA works to create healthier schools and com-

munities, and its programs are leading the nation, according to the Centers for Disease Control which funds PANA and several other states in similar efforts.

PANA was established by the Pennsylvania Department of Health to carry out Pennsylvania's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan to Prevent Obesity and Related Chronic Diseases. In addition, the Departments of Education, Agriculture, Public Welfare, Conservation and Natural Resources, Transportation, and Community and Economic Development are working in partnership with PANA to coordinate state agency support for environments and policies that support healthy eating and physical activity.



PANA's first and most visible initiative is Keystone Healthy Zone Schools, a free program that recognizes and rewards schools for their commitment to better nutrition and increased physical activity.

Enrollment is open to all public and private schools in Pennsylvania by completing an on-line survey about their policies and practices regarding nutrition and activity each year. By doing so, PANA is able to track and study information about even more effective ways to encourage healthier habits, and to help evaluate its own programs.

In return, schools receive access to PANA's trainings, resources, materials and grant applications. "Action Kits for Change," for example, offer step-by-step instructions on how to offer healthier foods and beverages while still turning a profit, and how to offer more quality (and quantity) physical education.

PANA has heard from hundreds of its schools about the

## SO HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

innovative ways they've made improvements, including: creating mileage clubs that allow kids to use their miles walked to 'travel' across the state, country or continent, learning about the lands they're 'walking through' in social studies classes; hosting healthy food promotions in the cafeteria; initiating student-run healthy eating advertising campaigns. The list is long - please see the sidebar for more details!

PANA's Keystone Active Zones program also provides resources and in some cases, funding, for communities to develop websites to promote their local parks and trails, offering incentives and 'passport' programs to schools and businesses to help promote physical activity.

The success of PANA and its programs depends entirely on the participation, dedication and passion of parents, educators, community members, business owners and "Community Champions" (volunteers who sign up with PANA) like you.

On Tuesday, September 13, PANA will host a free, statewide satellite meeting that will provide an overview of PANA's initiatives, including its partnership with the healthcare community and with the new Centers for Food Innovation at Penn State University, which works with the food industry to develop healthier products. The meeting will be offered at locations throughout the state (visit [www.panaonline.org](http://www.panaonline.org) for site locations and to register) and will also provide an update about legislation currently under consideration in Harrisburg to support healthier school environments, and ways that you can advocate for that legislation.

PANA has a full year of statewide events to promote healthy eating and physical activity, many of which are based around schools but that rely on community involvement for success. On October 5, PANA is organizing a statewide Walk to School Day, to coincide with national Walk to School Day. We'll provide schools with the training, materials and resources to host a safe, fun event to encourage physical activity. On October 19, PANA is organizing its second annual Great Pennsylvania Apple Crunch, in which schools will be encouraged to host apple taste-testings, school wide apple crunches, and apple-oriented classroom lessons and activities - all designed to promote apples and other fruits and vegetables as great, healthy snacks.

If you are a parent, check to see if your child's school is a Keystone Healthy Zone School. If so, ask them to proudly hang their Keystone Healthy Zone banner - so students are reminded of the importance of making healthy choices. Enrollment is open to schools each spring, but if your school missed the enrollment period, they can still use the resources on our website ([www.panaonline.org](http://www.panaonline.org).)

Schools tell us all the time that parents are the most powerful motivator of change, so be sure to attend school board meetings and talk to your principal about why healthy food choices and more opportunities for physical activity are important. And encourage them to get involved with PANA, to use our resources and participate in our events.

Schools in your area need volunteers to help with the Great Pennsylvania Apple Crunch and Walk to School Day. Call and volunteer your time. If you own a business, find ways to coordinate with the school to help promote these events and healthy practices, in general. Many gyms and sporting goods stores partner with schools to donate month-long memberships or equipment as prizes for contests, and offer their experts as motivational speakers for students. Restaurants and grocery stores have also found many innovative ways to partner. All kinds of businesses have found ways to support their local schools in their healthy initiatives.

Log onto PANA's website at [www.panaonline.org](http://www.panaonline.org) and enroll as a Community Champion and make plans to attend our September 13 meeting. There are endless opportunities for involvement - from helping spearhead your county's development of a Keystone Active Zone campaign, to getting involved with a local PANA coalition, to lobbying your legislator to support bills to promote healthier schools, to volunteering your time to ensure local schools are making steps to become healthier places.

Together, we can make a real difference! Your support - as a role model and a Community Champion will help create a healthier future for our children, and all of us.

Contact Beth Trapani at: 215-234-4647  
Beth coordinates PANA's communications and media relations, working to get publicity for PANA's programs and for the schools and communities making positive changes. Beth spent most of her career as a journalist; most recently as a morning anchor for KYW Radio in Philadelphia, and as the anchor of Philadelphia's first headline TV news show on UPN-57. After conquering her own battles with weight (which began in childhood) and seeing what a difference good nutrition and fitness made in her life, she wanted to find a way to use her communication skills to help others do the same. She has found her dream job helping to create a healthier, more active Pennsylvania. She works out of a home office in Green Lane, Montgomery County, where she lives with her husband, who is superintendent of schools in the Quakertown Community School District, and her golden retriever. She works out at Club Genesis in Harleysville but her favorite physical activity is horseback riding.



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