A Community Action Plan for a Healthier Harris County
Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services, Harris County Healthcare Alliance, and the Healthy Living Matters Collaborative wish to thank everyone who contributed to the planning process, most notably, The Houston Endowment.

While a great deal has been accomplished, much work remains to be done in tipping the scale in favor of health for our children. Because everybody knows, healthy living REALLY does matter.
Dear Harris County,

On behalf of the Healthy Living Matters Collaborative, we are pleased to present the Healthy Living Matters Community Action Plan. We wish to express appreciation to the many individuals and organizations, both private and public, who guided the development of this plan. Commonly referred to as a national epidemic, the rates of childhood obesity have more than tripled in the last 30 years. For the first time in history, children in Harris County could face a shorter lifespan than their parents because they are overweight and obese.

Along with the adverse effects that obesity has on our children’s health, childhood obesity also imposes considerable economic costs on our local healthcare system and future workforce. In 2001, the economic cost of obesity was estimated at $10.5 billion. That figure is estimated to balloon to $39 billion by 2040. These challenges provide us the opportunity to re-examine how we are taking care of all children in Harris County.

Childhood obesity is an issue with multiple causes; therefore the solutions must be addressed by multiple sectors. To create substantial change in the settings that impact children—sectors including education, public infrastructure, transportation, community, and economic development, public health, healthcare, the business community—families and others must work together so that each and every child in Harris County has the opportunity to live a healthy and productive life.

In Harris County, one can find various initiatives that impact childhood obesity and more specifically, families’ access to healthy food options and opportunities for physical activity. Efforts span from the neighborhood level to the Greater Houston region. Through improved coordination and replication of best practices, the Collaborative is carrying out its mission to mobilize policy action to curb childhood obesity so that children in every home in Harris County benefits.

Each strategy deserves action. Some call for voluntary policy change and leveraged resources through further collaboration, while others require legislation and funding. It is our goal that this plan be used as a tool to help improve the health of the children of Harris County. We invite you to be a part of this important journey.

Sincerely,
The Healthy Living Matters Collaborative

Healthy Living Matters Collaborative Members
HLM Collaborative Planning

In the United States, almost 50% of children ages 2 to 19 are classified as overweight or obese according to the 2009-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). One in three children born in 2000 will develop diabetes. 34% of children ages 12 and over are overweight or obese. These alarming statistics show that our overweight and obese children are at greater risk for avoidable health problems and high medical costs. In response to this trend, the Healthy Living Matters Collaborative was created in 2011 with funding from the Houston Endowment. Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services provided project oversight and the Harris County Healthcare Alliance served as the fiscal agent.

The goal of our planning initiative was to develop policy action strategies to reduce childhood obesity through system-level and environmental changes. This plan included both short-term policy actions ready for immediate implementation, as well as longer term policies. During our two-year planning, the Collaborative created and sought opportunities to engage and educate community stakeholders as well as raise awareness of childhood obesity. We sought to communicate the impact of obesity and its relevance to diverse sectors, while actively seeking and prioritizing solutions through policies.

The Collaborative’s mission began with these planning objectives based on two public health planning models, Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MaPP) and Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE-EH).

HLM Planning Objectives

- Conduct various assessments specific to Harris County, including but not limited to evaluating barriers to active living and healthy eating
- Promote and provide learning opportunities related to childhood obesity and policy strategy
- Monitor ongoing federal, state and local legislation to track policy trends and developments
- Identify local issues and prioritize policies that have an impact on childhood obesity
- Ensure an evaluation process is in place that establishes accountability measures for maintaining key inputs to support the Collaborative
- Develop a Community Action Plan to serve as a road map for policy implementation

These guiding principles shaped the planning process and its objectives.
Based on our objectives and guiding principles, HLM conducted locally-based assessments that explored Harris County’s food and built environments, school district and campus-level policies, and childcare facilities. HLM reached out to a diverse sample of Harris County community residents through the structured stakeholder engagement process. From that data, plus community feedback, several policy strategies emerged that addressed nutrition, physical activity, and healthy communities for all Harris County children, families, and caregivers. Residents and stakeholders were central in the development of the Community Action Plan.

The Healthy Living Matters Community Action Plan (CAP) represents the collective effort of more than 100 partners. The plan provides a comprehensive overview of the obesity epidemic and challenges everyone in Harris County to mobilize around a core set of priorities to reduce and prevent obesity and obesity-related diseases where our children eat, play, and learn.

**OUR MISSION: TO MOBILIZE POLICY ACTION AND CURB CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN HARRIS COUNTY.**

**OUR VISION**

What better way to establish a vision for the health and future of the children of Harris County than to ask them personally? Children from the Keep Fit Program offered by Texas Children’s Health Plan were asked to list or draw three words, phrases or images that best described a healthy, strong and vibrant Harris County. HLM Collaborative partners contributed their descriptions as well.

From that exercise emerged a vision that illustrates what stakeholders see as a healthy future—a community that is strong, active, safe, knowledgeable and energetic about the health of all children in Harris County.
WHY POLICY?

Addressing childhood obesity through policy change allows for change across multiple programs and populations. Policy encourages more widespread adoption of standards to create healthy environments across communities, worksites, schools, businesses, and healthcare.

Making healthy choices as an individual requires accessible, affordable food options and healthy living conditions, such as a safe neighborhood. Legislative, regulatory policies, plans, and institutional policies exemplify policy areas that can influence the health of the community.

SELECTING OUR PRIORITY POLICIES

To prepare our Policy Scan, the HLM Policy Team assessed and researched policies and practices across sectors impacting childhood obesity. HLM reviewed issues related to health, nutrition, physical activity, and obesity in age groups from infants to age two and kindergarten to high school age.

Issues were aligned, when possible, with existing or proposed state, county and city laws and ordinances, and were organized into four sections. The Child Care section captured policies related to children from birth to age two. The School section included policies for children in Pre K, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school. The Community/Built Environment section contained nutrition and physical activity policies for the community, as well as community land use. In the Family section, the team examined policies relating to household childhood nutrition and physical activity, such as parental health literacy.

Community input was obtained through key informant interviews and community surveys. Further, stakeholders invited HLM to meetings where childhood obesity was discussed and where HLM could obtain feedback on priorities. Policy suggestions from community stakeholders were added to the policy scan.

Ultimately, 16 policies were prioritized by the stakeholders, community forums, and HLM.

More detailed information about each policy is provided separately in the individual Policy Sheets and on the website: HealthyLivingMatters.net. Remaining policies considered by the community and the HLM Collaborative, but not selected as priority policies, are listed on page 24.
GLOBAL POLICY ON
CHILDHOOD OBESITY

G1. Advocate for Texas legislators to develop a statewide strategic plan to address hunger, nutrition, physical activity and obesity in children and families.

EAT

The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to support access to, and age-appropriate serving sizes of, healthy foods for all children in Harris County.

E1. Support legislation and policies at the state level that incent the purchase of healthy foods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars.

E2. Advocate for the development and passage of a state law to create a grocery/food* store loan program to address the problem of food deserts. (*Not limited to grocery stores, may include local grocers, convenience stores, etc.)

E3. Support development and adoption of local laws to promote breastfeeding in Harris County, including recognizing designated breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, legally protecting breastfeeding mothers from harassment in public and while at work, and ensuring mothers are guaranteed a Mothers’ Bill of Rights.

E4. Encourage use of available public lands in Harris County for the development of community gardens and farmers markets.

E5. Encourage school districts and appropriate public programs to increase awareness and promotion of school food options for low-income students during the summer.

E6. Advocate for low-fat, low-calorie drinks in schools and childcare facilities.
The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote opportunities for safe, adequate, and appropriate physical activity for all children in Harris County.

**P1.** Support the development and adoption of “Safe Neighborhoods” Policy:
- Eradicate abandoned houses;
- Ensure sufficient public safety officer coverage, encourage community policing approaches;
- Improve animal control efforts to reduce stray animals;
- Fix streets and sidewalks, promote Safe Routes to Schools efforts, build sidewalks in new developments, promote Complete Streets policy;
- Improve lighting in streets and parks; and
- Support the ongoing development of safe trails and parks, such as the Bayou Greenway Initiative and Utility Corridor Improvements.

**P2.** Support Harris County School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in implementing a policy that requires physical activity (PA) subcommittees and recommendations for joint-use agreements or community/school partnerships.

**P3.** Increase middle school physical education (PE) requirements to include moderate to vigorous activity for 6 semesters, high school PE requirements to 1.5 semesters, and make 1 semester of health education required for graduation.

**P4.** Institute a Texas policy on recess that encourages age-appropriate outdoor playtime.

**P5.** Conduct a study and encourage the Texas Education Agency to establish guidelines for outdoor features on public school campuses to maximize outdoor physical activity.
The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote health education opportunities related to nutrition, physical education, and general healthy living for all children, families and caregivers in Harris County.

**L1.** HLM recommends the development of guidelines to educate and incent administrators, school teachers, childcare providers, and other staff to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.

**L2.** Support a comprehensive “Community Health Literacy” strategy:
- Support a campaign for healthy eating for families;
- Expand community education programs on how to cook healthy;
- Expand public programs that teach community and backyard gardening; and
- Support a policy to expand coordinated school health strategies to grades 9-12.

**L3.** Establish state, city, and/or county healthy schools and healthy child care recognition programs with a training component.

**L4.** Promote outdoor classrooms and incorporate active learning into core curriculum subjects to increase physical activity in Harris County school districts.

*Policy Note: Changes to the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy (TPSNP), were proposed after the completion of the HLM review process. Thus, this policy and the related federal policy are not addressed in this Community Action Plan.*
OBESITY IN HARRIS COUNTY

As are many communities throughout the United States, Harris County is concerned about the health of its children. It is estimated that 34% of Houston area children (aged 12 and over) are overweight/obese. While the main cause of childhood obesity is an imbalance of the number of calories consumed and the amount of physical activity, there are many environmental factors that influence a child’s opportunities to maintain a healthy weight.

Childhood overweight/obesity rates in Harris County are higher in communities with higher rates of minorities and people living in poverty. Often, these communities have less access to healthy food and fewer opportunities to engage in physical activity outdoors. The map below illustrates the areas in Harris County with the highest percentage of children ages 5 to 17 who are overweight or obese. Community areas shaded in brown have higher rates of childhood overweight/obesity than community areas in green.

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGES 5 TO 17 WHO ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

Data Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010, University of Texas School of Public Health

1. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
2. Obesity can lead to emotional issues, such as poor self-esteem and depression.
3. Overweight and obese youth are at higher risk for heart disease and diabetes.
4. Obese youth are more likely to be bullied.
5. Overweight/obese kids are more likely to be obese into adulthood.
6. Annual medical costs are $3,192 higher for an obese person than for those with a healthy weight.
7. Overweight children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
8. Obesity-related illnesses cost the U.S. $168.4 billion in annual medical expenses.
9. Obese youth are more likely to be bullied.
10. Annual medical costs are $3,192 higher for an obese person than for those with a healthy weight.
11. 77% of Harris Co. kids (ages 6-17) do not get the recommended amount of physical activity.
12. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
13. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
14. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
15. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
16. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
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20. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
21. Obese children are more likely to develop health problems at a younger age.
OUR APPROACH TO ASSESSMENTS

The main goal of the assessments was to better understand challenges to active living and healthy eating across various settings where children eat, play and learn. To achieve this goal HLM:

- Collected information about the ease of access to community features that support physical activity and access to healthy food
- Examined the local food system serving Harris County
- Asked early child care providers and school districts about their policies and practices that support healthy eating and physical activity

Using multiple data sources and facilitating several rounds of discussion, two community areas were prioritized to better understand challenges to active living and healthy eating among residents. The selected communities are Near Northside-Fifth Ward and Pasadena-South Houston.

Smaller focus neighborhoods within these priority communities were selected for in-depth analysis. These focus neighborhoods will serve as future pilot sites for the implementation of strategies to curb childhood obesity. By implementing and evaluating efforts in these areas, HLM can contribute to the broader evidence-based strategies for reducing childhood obesity.

The graph below displays key demographic and health indicators for the priority community areas. For many indicators, the Near Northside-Fifth Ward and Pasadena-South Houston communities exhibit characteristics that suggest children in these communities are at higher risk for developing obesity than other children in Harris County.
In each of the focus neighborhoods, a comprehensive assessment was conducted to understand the challenges and opportunities for being physically active and eating healthy food. Several approaches were used to gather input from the public including:

- The use of large maps to indicate where participants lived and where they saw challenges and opportunities in the community for healthy lifestyles
- Focus groups with parents to gather feedback about what affects their ability to get healthy food and be physically active, and what policy changes they would recommend to help keep their children healthy
- Interviews with key stakeholders to gain additional understanding of the communities’ existing infrastructure, cultural conditions, and gaps in service
- Surveys to assess the broader community’s perceptions of opportunities and challenges to active living and healthy eating

The majority of survey respondents were concerned about childhood obesity and desired to live in an environment that was more supportive of active lifestyles. Residents need to feel secure to be active.

Cost, convenience, and limited time were primary barriers to healthy eating for families. Most survey respondents reported traveling up to 5 miles to grocery shop. While respondents felt parents are responsible for kids’ health, they also felt schools and the community have roles as well.
Aligning Local Efforts and HLM in the Priority Communities

As part of Healthy Living Matters community outreach, three community projects have been instituted that support healthy strategies for addressing childhood obesity in Houston/Harris County. The primary goal of these projects is to empower and strengthen communities for policy change. The following three projects will occur in the Near Northside/Fifth Ward and Pasadena communities:

• Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) will address access to healthy food by increasing enrollment in SNAP. More families are eligible for the program than are currently enrolled. They are planning to partner with local organizations in the Kashmere Garden area to offer opportunities to join SNAP. Of note, access to SNAP benefits have been indicated as an important policy strategy during the HLM Community Forums.

• Avenue CDC will build a trail next to Ketelsen Elementary School where children will be able to play and families will be able to enjoy physical activity together outside of school hours.

• Recipe for Success will implement a food nutrition and education program at several elementary schools in the area, including Berry and Matthys Elementary.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EACH PRIORITY COMMUNITY

**Kashmere Gardens**

- **Provide Somewhere to Go**
  - 1-A Neighborhood Park near Hogan Street
  - 1-B Walking trail at Ketelsen SPARK Park

- **Provide a Route to Get There**
  - 2-A Trail along Mattie Bayou
  - 2-B Trail connection to LBJ Hospital
  - 2-C Trail along historic Trail south of Hutcheson Park
  - 2-D High-frequency transit connections to light rail line

- **Create a Feeling of Security**
  - 3-A Enhanced lighting at local parks
  - 3-B Provide police patrols

- **Provide Separation from Traffic**
  - 4-A Easier crossings on Guarnen Street
  - 4-B Light rail crossings at Henry Street and Everett Street
  - 4-C Bike route on Henry Street
  - 4-D Bike lanes on Hogan Street

- **Interesting Environment**
  - 5-A Activities at Castillo Park
  - 5-B Activities at Kashmere MultiService Center

- **Access to Healthy Food**
  - 6-A Host enrollment days for SNAP (food stamps)
  - 6-B Provide cooking and nutrition education classes
  - 6-C Coordinate a buying club for fresh produce

**Ketelsen Elementary**

- **Provide Somewhere to Go**
  - 1-A Neighborhood park on Kerrs Street
  - 1-B Park programming at Memorial Park

- **Provide a Route to Get There**
  - 2-A Trail and linear park along Little Vince Bayou
  - 2-B Trail and linear park along Vince Bayou
  - 2-C Sidewalks leading to major destinations
  - 2-D Ellaine Ave. extension to City Hall

- **Create a Feeling of Security**
  - 3-A Pedestrian lighting along Pasadena Blvd.
  - 3-B Pedestrian lighting at schools, historic sites, and Memorial Park

- **Provide Separation from Traffic**
  - 4-A Pedestrian island to encourage walkability
  - 4-B Improvements to pedestrian realms at intersections along Pasadena Blvd.
  - 4-C Traffic signals on Ellaine Ave. to improve access to Walmart

- **Interesting Environment**
  - 5-A Park programming at Memorial Park

- **Access to Healthy Food**
  - 6-A Host enrollment days for SNAP (food stamps)
  - 6-B Provide cooking and nutrition education classes for parents in English and Spanish

**Pasadena**

- **Provide Somewhere to Go**
  - 1-A Neighborhood park on Kerrs Street
  - 1-B Park programming at Memorial Park

- **Provide a Route to Get There**
  - 2-A Trail and linear park along Little Vince Bayou
  - 2-B Trail and linear park along Vince Bayou
  - 2-C Sidewalks leading to major destinations
  - 2-D Ellaine Ave. extension to City Hall

- **Create a Feeling of Security**
  - 3-A Pedestrian lighting along Pasadena Blvd.
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### KEY DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOCUS NEIGHBORHOODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within 1/2 mile of these schools</th>
<th>Household Income (weighted average)</th>
<th>Households on SNAP (weighted average)</th>
<th>Households with Zero Vehicles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kashmere Gardens Elementary</td>
<td>$23,795</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ketelsen Elementary</td>
<td>$25,135</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kruse Elementary and Gardens Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris County Average</td>
<td>$51,440</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assessing Our Local Food System

The HLM Collaborative sought to better understand the food system that supports making healthy food available to children and families in Harris County. Key factors considered in the assessment:

- Our region’s capacity to support demand
- Where food is grown
- How far it travels to the store
- Where stores are located throughout Harris County

The most significant challenges to the local food system are time, availability of labor (aging population and lack of interest among younger generation), and farm capacity. Findings from the assessment revealed that:

- Among counties within the region, Harris County has the lowest proportion of agricultural land due to urban development; only 23% of Harris County’s parcels were used for agriculture (2010).
- Urban development continues to be the primary land use in Harris County; less than a quarter (23.8%) of land in Harris County was used for farming (2002-2007).
- Northeast Harris County has fewer grocery stores and lower median household income than other areas.
- Community gardens cluster in communities where income is higher.

In order for the region to encourage a local food system, it has to encourage opportunities to increase the capacity of area farms.
In January 2014, HLM hosted a brunch and appreciation ceremony for individuals representing 8 Harris-County area child care facilities (both centers and homes). These individuals completed the HLM Early Child Care Survey and were randomly selected to receive a $1,000 Toys R Us gift card to purchase toys and equipment for their facilities that encourage physical activity. In response to the assessment findings which revealed a need for more training about physical activity, HLM facilitated a 1.5 hour training as part of the event and focused on the benefits of and barriers to physical activity in early childhood, ways to engage young children and their families in physical activity, as well as the importance of policy in promoting change. All participants received a training certificate that can be provided to their Child Care Licensing representative in order to help meet their required annual training hours, as well as a number of resources to help support their efforts in promoting physical activity with children in their care.

ASSESSING ACTIVE LIVING AND HEALTHY EATING PRACTICES AND POLICIES IN EARLY CHILD CARE

HLM also learned more about the challenges faced by early child care providers when providing healthy nutrition and physical activity opportunities to children in their care. Four hundred ninety-seven respondents representing various positions within early child care settings responded to the Healthy Living Matters: A Harris County Early Child Care Survey. Key findings revealed:

- Child care home respondents reported offering more fruits and vegetables to children in their care than respondents from child care centers.
- Child care center respondents reported offering sweets/fatty/salty foods at a higher rate than they are offering fruits and vegetables.
- The majority of child care providers reported making water readily available and refraining from offering sugary drinks to children.
- Thirty-nine percent of child care providers reported offering 60 minutes of free play and 28.6% offered 60 minutes of structured play at least once per day.
- Respondents reported that physical activity training opportunities are rarely offered to teachers or staff.

Additionally, HLM conducted focus groups with thirty child care home providers to learn more about their views on the importance of nutrition and physical activity, their perceived roles, and the training needed to provide a healthier environment for children in their care. The findings from the focus groups suggests that providers need assistance with implementing healthier eating and physical activity opportunities in their facilities.

ASSESSING ACTIVE LIVING AND HEALTHY EATING PRACTICES AND POLICIES IN SCHOOLS

CHILDREN AT RISK worked with the HLM Collaborative to develop and conduct two surveys. Both district and campus-level policies and practices were assessed to better understand children’s opportunities to be healthy at school. Detailed findings along with the survey methodologies can be found in the final Harris County Schools Assessment Report, available at HealthyLivingMatters.net. Key findings from the assessment include:

- Inadequate outdoor facilities and competing demands for teaching other subjects were the top barriers to implementing recess and physical education; approximately 1 out of every 3 campuses reported at least one barrier to implementing physical education.
- Both district (100%) and campus-level administrators (99%) strongly agree/agree that childhood obesity among children is a concern.
- Both district (67%) and campus-level administrators (92%) felt more strongly about the need to influence student health through increasing physical activity than improving nutrition in the school setting.
- Student access to vending machines was minimal among elementary campuses (1%); 46% of intermediate/high school campuses completely restricted access, and 12% of intermediate/high school campuses allow access to vending machines throughout the day.
Event Highlight: House Resolution 1135

Elected officials frequently make policy decisions that impact one’s ability to be healthy, and are therefore critical to the discussion of reducing childhood obesity. In collaboration with State Representative Dr. Alma Allen, HLM hosted a legislative briefing in Austin, TX during the 83rd Legislative Session. Thirty legislative staff, elected officials, and other stakeholders attended the briefing, and it became immediately apparent that the issue of childhood obesity is a priority in many areas across the state of Texas. HLM provided information on relevant bills filed during the session, and identified policy champions and future opportunities to collaborate on childhood obesity related policy. On the day of the briefing, HLM was recognized by Representative Dr. Allen on the House floor as House Resolution 1135 was presented, honoring HLM for its efforts in addressing childhood obesity.

OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In order to understand and act on opportunities for policy change, HLM connected with a variety of stakeholders and community members. Our strategy was two-fold. First, we worked to engage sectors that make decisions and policies that impact healthy eating and physical activity opportunities for children and families. Second, we aimed to enlist the Harris County community in determining which policy areas could have the most impact on childhood obesity.

Goals for engagement in Harris County:
- To educate on the issue of childhood obesity, policy and how each sector can influence and/or impact child health
- To understand the most critical policy changes needed to make healthy living easier for children and families

TO BUILD SUPPORT AND ENSURE SUCCESS, WE WORKED WITH THESE SECTORS IN HARRIS COUNTY.
Caitlyn Floyd, a Healthy Living Matters Youth Ambassador, has committed to making healthy policy changes in the organizations she serves. Caitlyn sits on the Humble ISD Student Advisory Committee and works with school board members to influence district policies, including those that support healthy living. She is also a member of the Youth Police Advisory Council, a group of students who meet regularly with the Houston Chief of Police. Caitlyn has represented HLM at the Safe Routes to Schools Conference in Sacramento, CA, the Southern Obesity Summit in Nashville, TN and participated in a youth panel discussion for the Harris County Healthcare Alliance. Her work to improve access to healthy options earned her the Rising Star Finalist Award from the Michael and Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. Caitlyn plans to study law and international business when she begins college. She plans to use what she’s learned through HLM to create policies in her home to ensure that her future children are given the opportunity to live active, healthy lives.

COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIVING INDEX: A YMCA PARTNERSHIP

HLM collaborated with the YMCA of Greater Houston to facilitate the Community Healthy Living Index (CHLI), a series of community conversations in 8 neighborhoods and 8 after-school programs across Harris County. Community members and stakeholders from sectors including schools, businesses and public safety developed action plans with recommendations for healthy changes.

Recommendations for after school programs:

- Age-appropriate play equipment and programming
- Healthier food and drink choices
- Staff training in nutrition and physical activity
- Parent education in nutrition and physical activity

Recommendations for neighborhoods:

- Capacity building for community advocates
- Access to safer places to be active
- Access to healthier foods

Community forums are an effective way to engage large numbers of community stakeholders around a specific issue. A forum was held in each of the four Harris County Commissioner Precincts to describe what HLM learned from its policy scan, assessments, and engagements and to have participants prioritize policy strategies to improve opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. Participants’ feedback was incorporated into the HLM Community Action Plan.

**PRECINCT 1**

Held at Finnigan Park Community Center in the Fifth Ward, over 100 attendees participated. Youth Ambassadors from Wheatley High School and the Youth Police Advisory Council joined in a panel discussion highlighting their vision for a healthy future. Stakeholders from community organizations and schools, including the Assistant Principal of Wheatley High School, were also in attendance.

**PRECINCT 2**

Held in both English and Spanish at the La Porte Neighborhood Center, over 90 attendees represented the La Porte and Pasadena communities, public safety, school, and academic sectors. The La Porte Neighborhood Center attracts residents of the nearby Pasadena community, one of HLM’s priority communities.

**PRECINCT 3**

Held in both English and Spanish at the Alief Family YMCA, more than 100 attendees participated, including residents, Alief ISD representatives, and community-based organization leaders. Alief YMCA Senior Program Director Liz Ramos highlighted the need for community collaboration to improve the health of Harris County.

**PRECINCT 4**

Held at the YMCA of Greater Houston Training Center, the results of the Community Healthy Living Index (CHLI) were highlighted. YMCA of Greater Houston President and CEO Clark Baker kicked off the meeting, which featured presentations by CHLI facilitators. The forum hosted more than 80 stakeholders from a variety of different sectors, including schools, businesses and faith-based organizations.
PASADENA ISD, located in an HLM priority community, has shown great progress in providing healthy options for its students through policy and programs. The district has implemented the E3: Equation for a Healthy Life—Education, Exercise and Eating Right program for health literacy. The goal of the program is to empower students, parents, faculty, and community members by providing them with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The program provides nutrition classes and physical activity for students at Pasadena Schools and teams students with teachers to set personal health goals. Support from HLM will extend this program to other schools in Pasadena, including elementary and middle schools.

The Pasadena ISD School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) is working to involve parents in the creation and implementation of wellness policies that encourage physical activity and healthy eating.

In addition, the district has hired a full-time Coordinated School Health Specialist, ensuring the sustainability of their extensive efforts to create a healthy environment for students.

Pasadena can serve as a model for other school districts that are interested in making the healthy choice the easy choice for their students.

Alief ISD is another example of a team committed to improving the health of their students. The district SHAC is currently working to incorporate the HLM Policy Priorities into their work.

PARTNERSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

According to the Texas Department of Children and Family Services, approximately 200,000 children in Harris County receive child care from a registered or licensed child care facility. There is great potential to impact a large number of children in early child care. Interviews with key stakeholders and experts in child care revealed a key need for child care providers who requested training and resources for implementing current policies, rather than the creation of new ones.

While trainings exist for providers working at child care centers, there are currently no evaluated trainings for in-home child care providers.

Partnerships with researchers from the University of Texas at Austin focused on what tools in-home providers need in order to implement nutrition and physical activity policies. Workshops developed for in-home providers included a hands-on cooking demonstration on how to cook healthy foods with children.

Focus groups found that:

- All participants expressed desire to have an in-person training on nutrition and physical activity specific to in-home child care providers
- Weather is an important barrier to physical activity
- Cost of healthy foods is an important barrier to providing healthy foods
- Most participants saw themselves as role models for the children under their care
- Some participants would be more likely to attend trainings if education credits are provided
YOUTH SECTOR

HLM worked with Wheatley High School, the Youth Police Advisory Council, and KIPP Houston to learn from students. We discussed their barriers to good health and worked to let them know how they are vital to creating policy change. Through partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, an initiative of the Clinton Foundation, HLM engaged more than 90 young people in Harris County with social media activities, workshops, and a Youth Summit.

HLM facilitated three workshops designed to raise awareness among high school youth about how policy affects how and where those students eat, play, and learn. The Healthy Places=Healthy People workshop explored the relationship between the built environment and health. Plans and Policies allowed students to explore how policies impact their well-being. Through PhotoVoice, participants posted pictures of both opportunities and barriers to healthy living on HLM social media sites (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). Their work was featured at the May 2013 Youth Summit attended by more than 80 participants, including youth, families, public safety officers, and other stakeholders.

PhotoVoice pictures

“Abandoned lots and stray dogs make healthy living harder
I would not want to run or walk here.”—Tarnesha

“This court needs help. The lights don’t work.
The roof leaks. The nets aren’t secure.”—Kiannah

YOUTH AMBASSADORS

As a result of HLM, some participating students became Youth Ambassadors who advocate for healthy changes. In September 2013, Caitlyn Floyd was recognized as a Rising Star Award Finalist by the Susan and Michael Dell Center for Healthy Living. Her efforts to promote healthy living in her school earned her a full sponsorship to the 2013 Southern Obesity Summit. HLM also sponsored local young people to attend the 2013 Safe Routes to Schools conference in Sacramento, California. They learned how other US communities are creating opportunities for physical activity.

Youth recommendations to increase access to healthy foods and physical activity:

- Regular crime patrol
- Animal control
- More options for healthy fruits and vegetables in school
- More physical activity requirements for gym class
- School gardens
- Healthier foods at corner stores
- Better sidewalks
HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH INSURANCE SECTOR

HLM conducted interviews with executive and senior leaders in the health care and health insurance sector to identify policy strategies that could be adopted or strengthened to address childhood obesity. Additional feedback was obtained from Board members of the Harris County Healthcare Alliance.

The Health Care and Health Insurance sector recommended the following.

For the Community: Inventory of programs for obesity prevention, nutrition education, physical activity, and more

For Health Care Providers:

- System for evaluating obesity-related outcomes (BMI) as a quality of care metric
- Continuing Medical Education on breastfeeding and obesity prevention

For Health Insurance Providers:

- Coverage for nutrition counseling and education, including food literacy
- Coverage for obesity nutrition services
- Wellness benefits expanded to include children
- Coverage for lactation consultants
- Prenatal coverage
- Coverage of disease management programs

COMMUNITY PLANNING TEAM SUCCESSES

HLM owes many of its successes to its collaborative members. Here are just two examples of the HLM Community Planning Team members who made healthy changes in the organizations they serve.

Tiffany Thomas is an Alief ISD Trustee and has shown her commitment to increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity for children in Harris County through the many roles she plays in the community. In particular, Tiffany has pledged to provide the youth of her church with healthy foods during snack time. Tiffany worked to change the snack menu for children in her church to healthy options.

Lisa Helfman is the founder of Brighter Bites, a program designed to provide elementary school students and their families with fresh produce at no cost. Brighter Bites partnered with the Houston Food Bank to increase demand for healthier food choices for children and their families. Since becoming a member of the Community Planning Team, Lisa has worked to expand the Brighter Bites program to Kashmere Gardens Elementary, an HLM priority community, as well as other Harris County schools. Brighter Bites exemplifies the positive impact partnerships can have on community health.
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

As HLM moves forward in implementing priority policies, each strategy will require a custom approach involving various sectors, policy levels (local, state, city, organizational, individual), and timelines.

HLM will also monitor whether community capacity is strengthened and how partners are implementing the policy action strategies. Policy strategies impacting school-district level policies, school campus policies, and city level policies will be areas of interest for priority neighborhood pilot projects. Through site specific projects, further testing and measurement of policy strategies can be more formally evaluated and designed. More comprehensive obesity prevention policy efforts will allow for wider adoption, as well as successful change at the systems level, thereby helping to reduce childhood obesity in Harris County.

Guiding principles will be adhered to with each approach. These include:

- continuous community stakeholder engagement to mobilize decision-makers in applicable sectors to support the prioritized policy strategies
- policy approaches that are data-driven and/or supported by evidence or best practices
- implementation of policies that do not contribute to inequities
- policy monitoring and response and a combination of grassroots and grass tops policy advocacy
- multi-strategy approaches that address both nutrition and physical activity where appropriate

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CAP—Community Action Plan
CHLI—Community Healthy Living Index
HLM—Healthy Living Matters
IOM—Institutes of Medicine
MAPP—Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships
PACE-EH—Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health
PE—Physical Education
SHAC—School Health Advisory Council
SNAP—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
TPSNP—Texas Public School Nutrition Policy
TX-AHEC—Texas Area Health Education Center
Evaluation of a multi-component, complex issue like childhood obesity can be quite challenging due to the dynamics of community coalitions, the range of programs, policy, and environmental components along with limitations of available designs. The use of research, policy analysis, and evaluation is a process, not a discrete event, just as program planning and policy making are themselves processes that combine scientific evidence with other considerations. The Institutes of Medicine’s (IOM) 2013 Evaluating Obesity Prevention Efforts: A Plan for Measuring Success, has identified several key goals and strategies for obesity prevention. Several of those indicators align with HLM policy strategies. The following table lists some of the major IOM indicators coupled with prioritized HLM policy strategies that may be used to address that specific indicator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IOM INDICATOR</th>
<th>HLM Policy Strategies to Address Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the proportion of children aged 2-19 who are overweight or obese</td>
<td>Advocate for Texas legislators to fund the development of a statewide strategic plan to address hunger, nutrition, physical activity and obesity in children and families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Increase the proportion of children aged 0-17 years living in safe neighborhoods | Support the development and adoption of “Safe Neighborhoods” Policy:  
  • Eradicate abandoned houses;  
  • Ensure sufficient public safety officer coverage; encourage community policing approaches;  
  • Improve animal control efforts to reduce stray animals;  
  • Fix streets and sidewalks, promote Safe Routes to Schools efforts, build sidewalks in new developments; promote Complete Streets policy;  
  • Improve lighting in streets and parks;  
  • Support the ongoing development of safe trails and parks, such as the Bayou Greenway Initiative and Utility Corridor Improvements.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
<table>
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<th>IOM INDICATOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>States and school districts adopt policies that prohibit the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages in schools and require that schools offer a variety of no-or-low-calorie beverage options that are favorably priced</td>
<td>Advocate for low-fat, low-calorie drinks in schools and childcare facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the proportion of worksites that offer an employee health promotion program to their employees</td>
<td>HLM recommends the development of guidelines to educate and incent administrators, school teachers, childcare providers, and other staff to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the proportion of schools that require cumulative instruction in health education that meet the National Education standards for elementary, middle, and senior high schools</td>
<td>Increase middle school physical education (PE) requirements to include moderate to vigorous activity for 6 semesters, high school PE requirements to 1.5 semesters, and make 1 semester of health education required for graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase joint/shared use of community facilities for all persons outside of normal school hours.</td>
<td>Support Harris County School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in implementing a policy that requires physical activity (PA) subcommittees and recommendations for joint-use agreements or community/school partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of states that require regularly scheduled elementary school recess</td>
<td>Institute a Texas policy on recess that encourages age-appropriate outdoor playtime.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Increase the number of public and private schools that require daily physical education for all students                                                                                                    | • Conduct a study and encourage the Texas Education Agency to establish guidelines for outdoor features on public school campuses to maximize outdoor physical activity.  
• Promote outdoor classrooms and incorporate active learning into core curriculum subjects to increase physical activity in Harris County school districts. |
| Increase nutrition standards for foods and beverages in child care settings.                                                                                                                               | Establish state, city, and/or county healthy schools and healthy child care recognition programs with a training component.                                                                                                               |
| Increase the proportion of healthy food outlets                                                                                                                                                           | Encourage school districts and appropriate public programs to increase awareness and promotion of school food options for low-income students during the summer.                                                                         |
Envision Harris County as a place where every child, regardless of socioeconomic status or zip code will have an equal and healthy start. We cannot accomplish this in isolation. Families, educators, city planners, businesses, local leaders—all of us can help to make healthy choices for Harris County’s children. There is a significant opportunity right now for Healthy Living Matters to take a leadership role in the effort to reverse the trend of children in Harris county facing shorter life spans than their parents. We cannot be satisfied with success within individual realms of influence only. We must learn to work more collaboratively to shift social norms and to focus on children’s health across all sectors.

We recognize that a robust effort to really move the needle on this issue will require defined responsibility and budgetary commitment to accomplish the policy strategies presented in this plan. This may include requests to existing and new partners, as well as sharing and leveraging resources for implementation of specific plan components. We ask that you think about what you or your organization can do to get involved in this important movement because...

Healthy Living REALLY does matter!
OTHER POLICIES CONSIDERED

The following policies were part of the HLM policy scan because they were either considered by the HLM Policy Team, or they were proposed as policies for consideration by youth and community stakeholders. These policies were not ranked as priority policies by community participants at the four Harris County community forums or by the HLM Collaborative.

**EAT**
- Teach school districts about how to donate leftover foods to charities.
- Propose a city or state ban on trans fat foods in restaurants and schools.
- Advocate to legislators to ensure that families and children have access to food programs even when a caregiver is not in compliance with federal or state requirements.
- Support a state bill to prevent the sales of competitive foods at elementary, middle, and high schools during the school day.
- Support the expansion of school breakfast to all students in public schools.
- Support the expansion of farm to school programs throughout school districts.
- Assess the quality of food at public schools, how much food is being eaten, and identify programs where food is good and the program is successful.
- Request that the Texas School Health Advisory Committee develop a checklist for SHACs to use to assess their district’s type of food advertisements, messages, etc.
- Propose a school district level policy to ban all food advertising on school property or ban advertising on school.
- Standardize nutrition requirements across all levels of childcare, including currently unregulated care facilities.
- Support current childcare policies on: availability of water, not forcing children to eat, and not using food as a reward.
- A policy specifying limits to foods of low nutritional value in schools is needed.
- A policy that restricts vending machines to locations outside of children’s play areas is needed for licensed and registered childcare facilities in Texas.
- Advocate for more healthy food choices in the school cafeteria.
- Increase quality of protein in school cafeterias.
- Promote more options for healthy fruits and vegetables in schools.
- Promote more options for healthy drinks in schools.
- More convenient healthy stores are needed.
- Promote the development of school gardens.
- Coordinate a bulk buying club/Food co-op.
- Require healthier restaurants in the school so students don’t have to leave campus.
- Require healthier foods at corner stores.

**PLAY**
- Support the use of eminent domain to take private property for recreational purposes.
- Advocate for the use of state taxes from the sale, storage or use of sporting goods to fund Texas State Parks.
- Propose ROI study to build the case for the economic and health value of incremental investment in sidewalks on County streets versus the cost to the healthcare system, and the County for the treatment of obesity and lost productivity.
- Advocate for legislation to prohibit TV/Video, computer, or video games for children under the age of two years at Licensed and Registered Childcare Homes.
- A policy that mandates amounts and types of physical activity (indoor and outdoor) for specific children’s age groups is needed for licensed and registered childcare facilities.
- Support changes to the Fitnessgram Policy that includes a random sampling of students throughout elementary, middle, and high schools to gather data.
- Encourage local school districts to apply for Carol M White Physical Education Program funding.
- Advocate for Texas Education Agency to focus on improved school sidewalks and enforcement programs for school cross guards.
- Encourage SHACs to work with schools to submit SRTS project requests, and to promote “Active Transport” to and from school.
- Advocate to Texas Education Agency to propose physical activity policies/legislation to regulate after-school programs.
- Keep streets clean.
- Provide better equipment at our parks.
- Provide teen-specific exercise facilities.
- Provide park programming.
- Improve safety for community physical activity.

**LEARN**
- Encourage state legislators to propose funding for childhood health promotion grants/programs.
- Monitor the implementation of HB 3401, a bill to encourage recipients of public benefits to access food health and nutrition information online.
- Propose a city, county, or state funded study to evaluate the efficacy of Health Literacy activities.
REFERENCES

1 University of Texas. School of Public Health. Health of Houston Survey. 2010
5 Several sources of data were used to describe the health of communities in Harris County. The two main sources of data used were the Health of Houston Survey and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey.
6 Where available, FITNESSGRAM and U.S. Census Bureau data were used to prioritize focus neighborhoods. FITNESSGRAM® is a youth fitness assessment and reporting program. FITNESSGRAM® tests focus on criterion-referenced standards for health-related fitness, which means that they are based on levels of fitness required for good health rather than on averages or peer comparisons. Each student’s score is compared to Healthy Fitness Zone® (HFZ) standards developed by the FITNESSGRAM®. The HFZ standards are age- and gender-specific, and allow for changes in growth and maturation. For more information about FITNESSGRAM® visit the Reshaping Texas website at http://www.reshapingtexas.org/fitnessgram.
7 Focus neighborhoods were defined as the half-mile around selected elementary schools. Information about the food environment was captured within a 2-mile radius around the schools. While the schools provided the focus location for the assessment, not all analyses or recommendations were related to access to the schools.
8 Detailed findings from the HLM Built and Food Environment Assessment of the focus neighborhoods can be found at healthylivingmatters.net
9 The assessment included compiling data from the U.S. Census of Agriculture to better understand the state of agriculture in and around Harris County. Compiling an inventory and examining the distribution of farmers markets, community gardens and food pantries throughout Harris County to identify gaps in the local food network and interviews with farmers and other key stakeholders supporting the local food system.
10 Detailed findings from this assessment are in the Harris County Food System Assessment Report at healthylivingmatters.net
11 Detailed findings from this assessment are in the Healthy Living Matters School Assessment Report at healthylivingmatters.net
12 The results of this assessment are not officially representative of all Harris early child care providers. The results are based on a convenience and anonymous sample and reflect the views of any provider that chose to participate in the survey therefore, multiple surveys could reflect the experience of several staff from one child care establishment/center. For example, a director and a teacher at the same child care establishment could have completed the survey. In light of this limitation, the survey results are reported as “respondents” versus “unique providers” in an effort to be clear that in some cases, multiple surveys may have been submitted by several individuals from one child care center.
13 The Healthy Living Matters: A Harris County Early Child Care Survey is based on the Texas CORD Early Childhood Center Survey developed by the University of Texas. School of Public Health
15 CHILDREN AT RISK and Healthy Living Matters consulted an advisory board with a range of expertise for feedback on the content of the survey tools and incorporated the board’s input into final versions.
16 Twelve districts participated in the district-level survey and, of the three-hundred forty-nine schools that were randomly selected to participate, 139 (40%) schools completed the campus-level survey.
17 Data sources such as the Health of Houston Survey, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, FITNESSGRAM, and HLM assessment data are just a few of the data options available to HLM to help measure the progress of these indicators.
21 http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/childhood-obesity/basics/symptoms/con-20027428

HEALTHYLIVINGMATTERS.NET
GLOBAL POLICY ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY—GI. Advocate for Texas legislators to develop a statewide strategic plan to address hunger, nutrition, physical activity and obesity in children and families.

EAT: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to support access to, and age-appropriate serving sizes of, healthy foods for all children in Harris County.

E1. Support legislation and policies at the state level that incent the purchase of healthy foods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars.

E2. Advocate for the development and passage of a state law to create a grocery/food* store loan program to address the problem of food deserts. (*Not limited to grocery stores, may include local grocers, convenience stores, etc.)

E3. Support development and adoption of local laws to promote breastfeeding in Harris County, including recognizing designated breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, legally protecting breastfeeding mothers from harassment in public and while at work, and ensuring mothers are guaranteed a Mothers’ Bill of Rights.

E4. Encourage use of available public lands in Harris County for the development of community gardens and farmers markets.

E5. Encourage school districts and appropriate public programs to increase awareness and promotion of school food options for low-income students during the summer.

E6. Advocate for low-fat, low-calorie drinks in schools and childcare facilities.

PLAY: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote opportunities for safe, adequate, and appropriate physical activity for all children in Harris County.

P1. Support the development and adoption of “Safe Neighborhoods” Policy:
   • Eradicate abandoned houses;
   • Ensure sufficient public safety officer coverage, encourage community policing approaches;
   • Improve animal control efforts to reduce stray animals;
   • Fix streets and sidewalks, promote Safe Routes to Schools efforts, build sidewalks in new developments, promote Complete Streets policy;
   • Improve lighting in streets and parks; and
   • Support the ongoing development of safe trails and parks, such as the Bayou Greenway Initiative and Utility Corridor Improvements.

P2. Support Harris County School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in implementing a policy that requires physical activity (PA) subcommittees and recommendations for joint-use agreements or community/school partnerships.

P3. Increase middle school physical education (PE) requirements to include moderate to vigorous activity for 6 semesters, high school PE requirements to 1.5 semesters, and make 1 semester of health education required for graduation.

P4. Institute a Texas policy on recess that encourages age-appropriate outdoor playtime.

P5. Conduct a study and encourage the Texas Education Agency to establish guidelines for outdoor features on public school campuses to maximize outdoor physical activity.

LEARN: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote health education opportunities related to nutrition, physical education, and general healthy living for all children, families and caregivers in Harris County.

L1. HLM recommends the development of guidelines to educate and incent administrators, school teachers, childcare providers, and other staff to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.

L2. Support a comprehensive “Community Health Literacy” strategy:
   • Support a campaign for healthy eating for families;
   • Expand community education programs on how to cook healthy;
   • Expand public programs that teach community and backyard gardening; and
   • Support a policy to expand coordinated school health strategies to grades 9-12.

L3. Establish state, city, and/or county healthy schools and healthy child care recognition programs with a training component.

L4. Promote outdoor classrooms and incorporate active learning into core curriculum subjects to increase physical activity in Harris County school districts.