

*Tennessee*

## Tennessee: Blazing the Trail Toward Statewide Coordinated School Health

### Problem Overview

Inadequate physical activity, unhealthy eating behaviors, and other health risk behaviors can affect the physical and social well-being of young people, as well as their academic achievement. Risk behavior levels are high among Tennessee's high school students:

- 66% did not meet currently recommended levels of physical activity.
- Only 18% ate fruits and vegetables at least 5 times per day.
- 33% were overweight or at risk for becoming overweight.

To improve students' health and strengthen their academic achievement, Tennessee has embraced a coordinated approach to school health.

### Program/Activity Description

Tennessee has steadily strengthened efforts to support a coordinated system for improving the health of its students. Early efforts focused on increasing support and awareness of the Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP) model and its importance to adolescent health and educational achievement. As a result, in 2000, Tennessee's State Legislature authorized a 5-year pilot program that implemented CDC's coordinated school health approach in 10 counties. Evaluations found that the pilot programs reduced absenteeism and increased

- The number of health education staff and school nurses.
- The availability of social services.
- Health screenings for students.
- Student opportunities to participate in physical education and activity programs.

Based on these successes, school health advocates convinced state legislators to appropriate \$15 million in 2006 to expand CSHP statewide. Every school in Tennessee will be required to conduct the CDC-developed *School Health Index* to assess current school health efforts and direct planning activities for implementing a coordinated approach to school health.

The collaboration between Tennessee's Departments of Education and Health has made this expansion possible, along with support from nongovernmental partners such as Tennessee's Action for Healthy Kids and the Tennessee School Health Coalition. In addition, CDC continues to provide technical assistance and CSHP-related materials.

### Program/Activity Outcome

Tennessee is the first state in the nation to mandate and fund a coordinated approach to improving students' health in every school district in the state. This huge undertaking holds great promise for improving the health and academic achievement of the youth of Tennessee.

