



## YMCA taking a very "Active" role in children's health.

By Bill Barnett, Marketing and Public Relations Director for the Lincoln YMCAs.

The Lincoln YMCA provided physical fitness activities for more than 36,000 individuals last year in YMCA Youth Sports programs. The YMCA also provides youth swimming programs, fitness training classes, gymnastics, martial arts, wall climbing, boxing, summer camps, and a variety of after-school programs, which promote physical fitness for participants.

In 2005 the Lincoln YMCA was selected by YMCA of the USA as an Activate America Pioneering Healthy Communities leader. As a result of its selection, the Lincoln YMCA received funding to implement a collaborative community-wide approach to combat childhood obesity and Type II diabetes. The new program, called Weigh Cool™, will establish criteria and provide recognition that focuses on children's nutrition and physical activity habits. The program will be implemented through public schools and other youth serving organizations that reach youth and their families as well as the community at large.

### Finding ways to be Weigh Cool™

The Weigh Cool™ program will designate schools, activities, programs and even food choices as Weigh Cool™ if they meet established guidelines. Ultimately, information will be distributed throughout the community to help children and families make better health choices every day, and raise awareness of this important community and national issue.

Working with community leaders, the YMCA plans to establish a prescribed curriculum and reward those who meet the criteria of being Weigh Cool™. Barb Bettin, Lincoln YMCA President, said, "By working with community-based partners and collaborating with organizations and programs

already in place, Weigh Cool™ will provide children and families with realistic ways they can incorporate nutritious food choices and an active lifestyle into their everyday routine. And more importantly, it will provide strategies and techniques for sustaining these healthy activities throughout their lives."

With nearly 60 million adults and 9 million children obese or overweight, increasing levels of physical fitness and better food choices for children and families has become more and more important in every community. Study after study shows that today's children may not be getting the required amount of exercise for weight management and good health. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the current generation of American children could be the first to lead shorter lives than their parents. And, data from the recently published 1999-2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey shows 16 percent of youth ages 6-19 are overweight. That is triple the rate of 1980.

"Like adults, children need physical activity to help manage stress, reduce frustration, create energy and ensure they do not become one of the rising number of inactive, out of shape and overweight kids," Rhonda Rhodes, Executive Director of YMCA Youth Sports tells us. "A healthy snack, physically fit body, positive self-esteem and feelings of personal security can have a hugely positive effect on learning."

### Kids spend six or more hours a day sitting at desks

With kids back in school, sitting at their desks for six or more hours a day, this becomes even more important. Experts agree that school-age children need to be moderately to vigorously active for a minimum of 60 minutes a day. While increased

focus on academic testing has prompted many organizations to focus their after-school programming solely on academics, the alarming rise in childhood obesity and the elimination of physical education at many schools, make it increasingly important for parents to strike a balance between academic enrichment and playful, recreational activities for their children before, during and after school.



YMCAs are partners in supporting children's learning. In Lincoln, the YMCA collaborates with Lincoln Public Schools and is the lead organization at both Elliott and Lefler Community Learning Centers. Nationwide, more than 80 percent of YMCA school-age programs are located at schools, and 71 percent of YMCAs collaborate with elementary schools. In fact, YMCAs are stepping in to provide recreational programming and physical education at schools affected by budget cuts and for home-schooled children.

"With the YMCA's long history in after-school programs, fitness, and youth sports, it makes perfect sense for us to partner with schools, community leaders and other organizations in this effort to combat obesity in our children" said Barb Bettin.

The nation's YMCAs have been engaging children in safe, quality after-school programs that complement and supplement children's in-school learning for more than 50 years. Today with more than 9,000 after-school programs across the country, the nation's YMCAs are a leading resource for parents looking to find meaningful and fun afternoon activities for their children. The Lincoln YMCA serves more than 48,000 Lincoln area kids during non-school hours with an array of programming for youth, including Elliott and Lefler Community Learning Centers, Adventure Club at four Lincoln Elementary Schools and the Northeast Y location, after-school programs at Scott Middle School and Cooper YMCA, and Fundays at Northeast and Cooper YMCA.

To find out more about YMCA after-school programming, youth sports, and youth and family fitness at the Lincoln YMCA visit [ymcalincoln.org](http://ymcalincoln.org).



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