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SScale Down Quarterly Update

Scale Down teams and workgroups are continuing their focused efforts to achieve the SC Obesity Action Plan objectives so that the healthy choice is the easy choice for all South Carolinians. As work continues to advance the 74 objectives of the plan, progress is being realized, not only through statewide efforts, but also as the objectives are translated into action and activities in local communities. Much appreciation goes to all of the stakeholders who are working to support the policy, systems and environmental approaches needed to turn the tide on obesity in our state.

Highlights of Key Efforts in Obesity

Open Community Use

There are many reasons to be physically active. We may engage in physical activity to improve our health, to connect with friends, to relieve stress or to have fun. In order to be active, South Carolinians need spaces and places that are safe, affordable and convenient.

Unfortunately, many South Carolina communities lack affordable and safe recreational facilities. Schools have a rich opportunity to fill that void. Local schools have a variety of outdoor recreational facilities—playgrounds, fields, courts and tracks—where people can engage in physical activity. Being intentional about making schools' outdoor recreational facilities available for communities to use is an effective, affordable way to promote and support physical activity among all local residents. [The South Carolina School Boards Association \(SCSBA\)](#) and [the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control \(SC DHEC\)](#) are in full support of schools and school districts allowing communities free access to their outdoor recreational facilities. SCSBA published an open community use model policy in the *2014 Policy and Legislative Update*. The association encourages all school districts to adopt and implement the model policy and open the schools' outdoor facilities for community members to use and enjoy.

To better understand the current status of open community use, SC DHEC assessed and published [The Status of Open Community Use in South Carolina 2015](#). In addition, SC DHEC and [Eat Smart Move More South Carolina](#) have partnered to develop an open community use playbook, [Breaking Physical Activity Barriers Through Open Community Use](#), which provides guidance to school administrators, teachers and community members interested in adopting and implementing open community use as a strategy to increase physical activity and promote healthy lifestyles. The goal is to increase the number of school districts that adopt the SCSBA's model policy, which in turn will increase the number of schools practicing and promoting open community use.

You can find schools in your area that are open for community use at www.letsgetc.org.

[org](#). If your local school isn't listed, contact the principal to find out if the school's recreational facilities are open to the public.

For more information about the statewide efforts to support open community use, please contact Emily Pineda, Healthy Eating/Active Living (HEAL) Special Projects Coordinator, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, SC DHEC at pinedaes@dhec.sc.gov.

Spotlight: McLeod Child Development Center

Child care settings are ideal locations to improve eating habits, increase physical activity and educate young children about how to make healthier lifestyle choices.

By implementing policy, system and environmental changes in the child care setting, we can help children establish healthy behaviors at a very early age. The McLeod Child Development Center in Florence, SC serves as a model for embracing new and innovative opportunities that encourage lifelong learning and support the development of healthy habits.

In 2015, McLeod Child Development Center was one of five Florence child care centers selected to participate in the Preventing Obesity by Design (POD) South Carolina pilot project. This project was implemented through the collaborative work of SC DHEC, the [South Carolina Department of Social Services ABC Quality Rating and Improvement System \(ABC Quality\)](#), the [USC Early Childhood Education Program](#) and the [North Carolina State University College of Design Natural Learning Initiative](#). Each participating pilot site received training, design assistance and technical support to create an outdoor environment that encourages physical activity and healthy eating.

From the beginning, McLeod Child Development Center embraced the pilot concepts and implemented many of the outdoor learning components in the center's design plan. "The Preventing Obesity by Design plan is based on the research by Nilda Cosco and Robin Moore," said Flicka McBratney, director of the McLeod Child Development Center. "The premise of this research is that if you design the space in a certain way children will move through the space actively without adult intervention."

"The first additions included raised planting beds for the children to plant vegetables and a performance stage," continued McBratney. "The children began using the stage right away. Because their activity was play-based and child-generated, all of the children in the center used the stage differently. After a generous grant from the McLeod Foundation, we were able to add a concrete primary path and sod. This primary path acts as an anchor for the rest of the plan. Immediately, as if by magic, we began seeing children running, riding tricycles and just walking hand-in-hand around the path."

The design continued with the addition of a natural, loose materials area (e.g., shells, pinecones, leaves), sand area and an area for music and sound. An herb garden maintained by the preschool classes and a sensory garden for the infants have also provided a connection with growing plants and the natural world. "With the development of each new area we have seen an increase in activity with children of all ages as they travel through the space in play," explained McBratney.

Future plans include a boat and dock, a secondary path and dry creek bed, a gazebo, an arbor, a fern garden, a mud kitchen and art area. "We also plan to add plants rooted in South Carolina history like indigo and rice. The beauty of this plan is that it can be established in stages, so that it can grow and change with the size and wishes of the child care center," added McBratney.

During the past year, the center has also embarked on a new opportunity to support

breastfeeding by pursuing [the SC Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care \(BFCC\) designation](#). The South Carolina Program for Infant/Toddler Care (SCPITC), with support from the [SC Department of Social Services, Division of Early Care and Education](#) and in partnership with the [MUSC Boeing Center for Children's Wellness](#), established the BFCC designation to recognize child care programs that promote, protect and support breastfeeding. The application to apply for this special designation, which includes ten criteria, was opened to child care programs in November 2015.

"We were pleased to discover how much support we provided to breastfeeding mothers before starting this process," said Kimrey Ann Haughn, assistant director of the McLeod Child Development Center and the driving force behind the effort. "Our center had an existing area for mothers to nurse privately as well as policies for storing breast milk."

"However, throughout the process of achieving the BFCC designation, we realized that we did not do much to normalize breastfeeding with our children. Since completing the ten steps, we have purchased books and animals with babies that attach to the mother to nurse. This addition has been great for children with new siblings as we incorporate their home life into our program. In addition, our preschool children were excited to share their stories about how babies drink milk and could even relate it to their experiences of seeing a baby goat drink milk from his mother during a field trip to a local farm."

"As we completed the training component in step two, our staff learned so many great benefits to breastfeeding. Now, we feel we can competently support mothers as they go back to work and encourage pregnant mothers to at least try to breastfeed," said Haughn.

Haughn worked closely with SCPITC, who made the process seamless and provided access to many great resources such as education guides, children's books, posters and internet resources for specific questions families may have. The SCPITC staff were also very helpful and supportive throughout the process, according to Haughn.

"Once you enter step two (staff training), you realize how important it is to support breastfeeding mothers as they return to work. Also, knowing the benefits makes you want to advocate breastfeeding to all pregnant mothers," added Haughn.

As a result of the dedicated efforts of the staff and director, the McLeod Child Development Center was the second child care center in South Carolina to receive the BFCC designation.

Connecting the Dots

With these advances and others, significant progress is being made to achieve the objectives in the South Carolina Obesity Action Plan. The dedication and collaborative spirit of a diverse array of state and local partners are the fundamental reasons for this success. Many thanks to all of the stakeholders who continue to work diligently on policy, systems and environmental approaches that are making SC communities healthier places to live, learn, work and play. Working together, the ambitious goal of reducing and preventing obesity in our state will be achieved!

To find out how you can get involved with SScale Down, please contact info@scaledown.org. To learn more about SScale Down, visit Scaledown.org.

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