



# FUELING GREATNESS AMONG HISPANIC YOUTH

**Celebrating differences, addressing needs to help students be as healthy and successful as possible.**

**In our diverse society, the benefits that come with improved nutrition and more opportunities for physical activity in the school environment should be available to all youth. Language and culture should never be barriers when it comes to creating wellness environments in schools.**

According to the Pew Research Center, by the year 2025, the United States will be a “majority minority” nation. However, that landmark was already reached among U.S. public school students in 2014, the majority of whom come from non-white racial and ethnic groups.



Latino youth represent the largest, youngest, and fastest-growing minority group in the nation. Today, more than one in five youth between the ages of 10 and 19 in the U.S. is Latino. By 2024, Hispanic youth are projected to represent 29 percent of all U.S. public school students, increasing to nearly one in three school children by 2040.

Yet, Latino children and adolescents are more likely to be overweight or obese than their white peers, putting them at greater risk for developing chronic health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, asthma, type 2 diabetes, and psychological stress. According to current estimates, more than 41 percent of Latino children and adolescents

aged 6 to 19 in the United States are overweight, and nearly 23 percent are obese. Compared with their peers, Latino youth are also less likely to achieve an hour of physical activity each day.

Inequities in access to healthcare and opportunities to make healthy choices — whether at home, at school, or in the community — all contribute to higher rates of obesity among Latinos. Another contributing factor is the higher rate of poverty

**The single greatest skill we can give students is the ability to attain and maintain good health for the rest of their lives.**

*Gustavo Silva, Physical Education Teacher  
Richmond Intermediate School, St. Charles, Illinois*

and food insecurity among Latinos compared with their peers. Nationally, one in five children faces hunger and food insecurities, while among Latino families it is nearly one in three.

Prominent health figures have expressed concern. Dr. Elena Rios, President and CEO of the National Hispanic Medical Association, has stated, “Racial/ethnic healthcare and health disparities exist in our country, and according to the 2014 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) report on Quality and Disparities, they are not improving. There is a significant need among the Hispanic community for wellness programming.”

Given that more than 75 percent of Latinos speak Spanish at home (a 121 percent increase since 1990) and more than 35 percent of U.S. Latinos prefer to read content in “all Spanish” or “mostly Spanish,” Dr. Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable, Director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health

# Engaged and Active Schools: Year One Results

Recent survey data point toward a highly engaged and active audience among Fuel Up to Play 60 schools with large Hispanic student populations.\* Consider:

**87%** of educators who are familiar with the Fuel Up to Play 60 Spanish-language resources say they are very valuable to their school and students.

\*Schools with 20 percent or more Hispanic students

**85%** of schools conducted awareness-building activities to promote healthy eating and physical activity during the 2015–16 school year.

**58%** of schools implemented nutrition and/or physical activity improvements in the school to help students eat healthy and move more.

(Department of Health and Human Services), has said, succinctly, “I believe that language should never be a barrier to battling childhood obesity.”

## A Response: Building on a Successful Initiative

GENYOUth works to empower, encourage, and enable youth to be stewards of their own healthy, high-achieving futures — and Fuel Up to Play 60 is GENYOUth’s signature program. Created in partnership with the National Football League and National Dairy Council, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it’s the nation’s leading in-school wellness program, helping to transform more than 73,000 schools that reach over 38 million students since its launch in 2010 (see page 3).

In fall 2015, with generous support from the PepsiCo Foundation, GENYOUth launched Fuel

program, the Spanish-language version “transcreates” — not merely translates — it for the large and expanding segment of the country that feels most at home with the Spanish language.

To develop and launch Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español*, GENYOUth worked with the Hispanic community to define preferences and sensitivities — conducting formative research and focus groups with students, educators, and parents about the program elements, at-home extension materials and messages, the nature of Latino student leadership, and how to enhance the program in a way that would inform and strengthen an existing initiative as well as honor cultural preferences. Key learnings from these data-gathering activities reinforced the:

- Vital importance of and interest in culturally relevant and culturally appropriate material for students;
- Enormous opportunity for family engagement that a Spanish-language version of Fuel Up to Play 60 would represent; and
- Educational and moral imperative of ensuring that all youth have access to the same tools, information, and opportunities, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or language.

## Building Trust through Language

Dr. Lana Frantzen is on National Dairy Council’s Health and Wellness Team, and serves as Vice President for Health and Wellness at Texas’ state dairy-industry organization, Dairy MAX. One of her local school districts is 92 percent Hispanic, and she sees working with Hispanic students through the prism of trust — the trust that gets created when people are speaking the same language.

“Language is an extension of culture,” Frantzen says. “When someone communicates with you in your native language, trust is built, and any

Up to Play 60 *en español*, a cultural and linguistic adaptation of GENYOUth’s flagship program, designed to involve an ever-larger nationwide group of students as change agents for healthy schools. Built on the existing Fuel Up to Play 60

program is by definition going to be more impactful — especially when it involves food, another huge cultural signifier.”

Frantzen continues, “What’s wonderful about Spanish is that it’s such a beautiful and rich language, and the key to a successful ‘second-language version’ of any initiative is that the sentiments and subtleties are captured and retained and enriched in the transcreation. Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* has definitely accomplished this.

“Another important thing that builds trust when working with Hispanic students is simply children being able to see others who look like them, speak like them, and eat like them. Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* materials really do provide that kind of sharing and identification,” Frantzen adds.

### Welcome, First-Year Findings

Informed by formative research, Fuel Up to Play 60’s Spanish-language materials include a Playbook with best-practice nutrition and physical activity action strategies for schools; student leadership materials; interactive student dashboard with tools and activities; and new take-home materials for families. Mini-grants funded by PepsiCo Foundation, Morgan Stanley, and Florida Dairy Farmers also helped to jumpstart healthy changes in schools in year one.

### There is a significant need among the Hispanic community for wellness programming.

*Elena Rios, MD, President and CEO  
National Hispanic Medical Association*

A detailed survey was circulated to program users in mid-2016 to assess the ways, and the extent to which, Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* was embraced in its first year.

The learnings (see box, page 2) have been extremely encouraging — including the fact that there is now unprecedented demand for Fuel Up to Play 60 funding from schools with high percentages of Hispanic students. In mid-2016, grant requests from high-Hispanic schools were up 124% over the previous year.

### Local Impact in Miami and Los Angeles

Today, the initiative is successfully helping to fill a gap in the Fuel Up to Play 60 program in regions with largely Latino student populations, and is opening up new opportunities for youth empowerment and family engagement. Two large



Fuel Up to Play 60 helps to enhance school wellness environments and create healthier schools and healthy, high-achieving students. Key elements of the in-school nutrition and physical activity program include leadership (student ambassadors who inspire and engage peers), adult champions (program advisors, school administrators, staff, and parents), and a tight focus on success (meeting and exceeding school wellness goals).

As a result of the program, today 13 million U.S. students are eating better, thanks to better access to nutritious, appealing foods like low-fat and fat-free dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in school meals and throughout the campus. Additionally, 16 million students are more physically active because of the program.

Free and customizable, Fuel Up to Play 60 helps schools achieve their wellness policies by offering:

- A Playbook with school-tested action strategies
- Funds to jumpstart healthy school environments
- An interactive digital platform
- Best-in-class tools and resources
- Special campaigns, recognitions, challenges, prizes, and awards
- The fun and excitement of association with the NFL

school districts are providing early glimpses into how Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* is being applied as well as the benefits to school communities.

In Miami-Dade County (Florida) Public Schools, administrators and educators decided that all schools receiving Fuel Up to Play 60 mini-grants (up to \$4,000 per school) would implement one Healthy Eating and one Physical Activity “Play,” and combined a grab-and-go breakfast implementation (“**Breakfast Anywhere, Anytime**”) with a walking club (“**100-Mile Club**”).

As a result, 93 percent of educators reported that students’ physical activity behaviors had improved, and 80 percent reported that students’ healthy eating behaviors had improved.



Moreover, students' average daily participation (ADP) in school breakfast increased seven percentage points — nearly triple the national average.

Dr. Jayne Greenberg, District Director at Miami-Dade, observed, “The insights we gained about pairing school breakfast with an inclusive physical activity program were important. But especially rewarding were the noticeable improvements in attendance, morale, and level of excitement around eating better and moving more. We further experienced greater participation in sports teams, and most importantly, the sheer level of engagement. We’re talking about engagement of students with peers, students being cognizant of their own nutrition and physical activity needs and habits, and, most of all, engagement of families.”

According to one Miami educator, “Parents and staff are working together in the morning to manage the running activities, which is building community relations surrounding a common goal. Parents are coming to school early to help, which increases parent participation and our sense of community.”

**Language is an extension of culture. When someone communicates with you in your native language, trust is built, and any program is by definition going to be more impactful — especially when it involves food, another huge cultural signifier.**

*Lana Frantzen, PhD, Vice President for Health and Wellness, Dairy MAX*

Another educator commented, “Since implementing this program, we see students coming back to school after hours and on the weekends with their families, being active, and playing games we played during program time.”

The Los Angeles Unified School District also implemented Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* with equally positive results. In L.A. Unified, individual local schools decided which of Fuel Up to Play 60's Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Plays they wanted to implement — from breakfast, snacking and farm-to-school themed Plays to walking,

## The Skill of Lifetime Health

Gustavo Silva is an educator and dean of students at Richmond Intermediate School in St. Charles, Illinois, a 40-percent Hispanic school district — and he is actively involved in Fuel Up to Play 60.

“I would ask educators this question,” he says. “What is the single greatest skill that you can develop in your students that will impact the rest of their lives? I would argue that the single greatest skill we can give students is the ability to attain and maintain good health for the rest of their lives.”

He continues, “Just teaching kids that the meat in fajitas can be grilled chicken instead of fried is a step in the right direction — and we absolutely find that kids actually take that information home. I grew up in an immigrant household myself, so I know what the nutrition patterns are like. There are times when you have money, so you eat well, and times when you don't have money, and you eat poorly, or not at all. You end up with a kind of yo-yo nutrition that isn't good, and I see this among a lot of Latinos.”

“In terms of physical activity,” Silva says, “we like to get our kids into sports that anyone can do, like cross-country running or walking.”

As proof of his success, Silva offers, “In my 100-Mile Walking Club, my heroes are two Hispanic twin brothers. Neither of them is particularly athletic, but



Hear more from Gustavo Silva in *¡VAMOS!*  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfmqkq2OCBM>)

walking was something they knew that they could do — with dedication — more of than anyone else. And they did — they each walked 230 miles last year.”

Silva is careful to cite flexibility as a core value in working with diverse populations of students.

“One of the things I've learned,” he says, “working with bilingual and cross-cultural classes, and with kids who come from different cultures and traditions, is that nothing can be set in stone — you always have to adjust and modify. If a child has a disability, an allergy, a preference, a dislike of a particular sport, whatever — you adjust, you modify, you're flexible.”

in-class physical activity breaks, and dance. At the end of the school year, 83 percent of L.A. educators reported an improvement in students' healthy eating behaviors, and 92 percent confirmed an increase in students' physical activity behavior. In L.A., school breakfast ADP jumped a robust 6 percent — like Miami-Dade's, substantially above the national average.

One L.A. educator commented that the increases in healthy eating and physical activity have, in turn, "increased attendance and improved school morale." Another educator reported that "students have taken on leadership roles" to implement the program. And yet another educator stressed how "Fuel Up to Play 60 funding helped to beautify our campus and utilize areas that were previously untouched and sitting idle."

### Creating a Culture of Wellness

The American population as a whole has a wider variety of cultural differences and a greater array of health and wellness needs and sensitivities than ever before. The opportunity to celebrate those differences and address those needs is one we should seize.

Culturally relevant initiatives such as Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español* can help make that happen — by empowering diverse youth as change agents for healthy school communities and helping to build students' leadership skills and workforce readiness.

The positive results aren't limited to nutrition and physical activity tangibles; they also spill over into the intangibles of excitement, engagement, morale, and higher levels of family involvement. And together, these results help to create a new culture of wellness in school communities.

Learn more about GENYOUth and our work at [www.genyouthnow.org](http://www.genyouthnow.org).

## RESOURCES

GENYOUth report on *The Wellness Impact: Enhancing Academic Success through Healthy School Environments* (<http://www.genyouthnow.org/reports/the-wellness-impact-report>)

GENYOUth report on *Empowering Youth: Students as Change-Agents in Schools and Communities* (<http://www.genyouthnow.org/reports/2015-empowering-youth-report>)

**Hispanic Heritage Foundation**  
([www.hispanicheritage.org](http://www.hispanicheritage.org))

**"The Nation's Latino Population Is Defined by Its Youth,"** Pew Research Center ([www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/20/the-nations-latino-population-is-defined-by-its-youth](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/20/the-nations-latino-population-is-defined-by-its-youth))

**Profiles of Latino Health, 2015**, National Council of La Raza ([www.healthylatino.org/nutrition/healthcare\\_disparities/profiles\\_of\\_latino\\_health\\_2015\\_a\\_closer\\_look\\_at\\_latino\\_child\\_nutrition](http://www.healthylatino.org/nutrition/healthcare_disparities/profiles_of_latino_health_2015_a_closer_look_at_latino_child_nutrition))

**Fuel Up to Play 60 *en español***  
(<https://espanol.fueluptoplay60.com/>)

# GENYOUTH<sup>®</sup>

EXERCISE YOUR INFLUENCE™

Founded in 2010 through a public-private partnership with the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, GENYOUth empowers students to exercise their influence, develop as leaders and social entrepreneurs, and create a healthier future for themselves and their peers. To support students and schools, we convene networks of private and public partners and raise funds for a range of nationwide nutrition and physical activity initiatives that bolster healthy, high-achieving students, schools and communities. Building on a legacy of passionate and empowered American youth, we believe that all youth, students in particular, are change agents who deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential by identifying and leading solutions that positively impact nutrition, physical activity, and student success across our nation. Learn more about GENYOUth partnership, volunteer, funding, and donation opportunities at [www.genyouthnow.org](http://www.genyouthnow.org) or contact us at [info@genyouthnow.org](mailto:info@genyouthnow.org).

**With appreciation for the expertise and counsel of**

