

empowering

youth!

Students as Change-Agents for
Wellness in Schools and Communities



Acknowledgments

We are indebted to the following individuals for careful review of, and constructive suggestions regarding, the content of this document in various stages of its preparation.

Carla Hall, Chef and Co-host of ABC-TV's *The Chew*

Ann Marie Krautheim, MA, RD, LD, President & Chief Wellness Officer, GENYOUth

Tyler Kwapis, high school student, Michigan, Fuel Up to Play 60 Youth Council Member

Sarah M. Lee, PhD, Team Lead Research Application & Evaluation Team, School Health Branch, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Yvonne T. Maddox, PhD, Acting Director, National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, National Institutes of Health

Zak Malamed, University of Maryland student, Founder and Executive Director, Student Voice and GENYOUth AdVenture Capital Inspiration Panelist

Katie Morgan, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility North America, SAP

Anisha Patel, middle school student, New Jersey, Fuel Up to Play 60 National Ambassador

Molly Pelzer, RD, LD, FAND, Sr. Vice President, Health and Wellness, Midwest Dairy Council

Jean Ragalie-Carr, RDN, LDN, President, National Dairy Council

Audrey Rowe, Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Janet Thornton, BSN, RN, Fuel Up to Play 60 Program Advisor, Director of Health Services, Coffee County (TN) Schools

Grateful acknowledgment is made to **National Dairy Council** and **Midwest Dairy Council** for generous funding of this report.

The kinds of youth empowerment profiled in this report are made possible by the support of GENYOUth's valued corporate partners and funders, without whose underwriting and ongoing assistance we could not undertake work so necessary to our children's, and our nation's, future.

About GENYOUth:

A leading nonprofit, GENYOUth brings leaders in health and wellness, education, government, and business together in a movement to empower America's youth to achieve a healthier future by uniting partners, raising funds, and uplifting the student voice. GENYOUth has established itself as a thought leader in youth health and wellness and collaborates with its partners to convene experts, conduct research, publish perspective reports, and build programs that make a lasting difference in the pursuit of healthy, high-achieving youth. Founded in 2010 through a public-private partnership with the National Dairy Council and the NFL, GENYOUth has raised funds, increased visibility and commitment to school wellness among health and wellness leaders, educators, students, parents, community leaders, and businesses. Learn more about GENYOUth partnership, volunteer, and donation opportunities at www.GENYOUthNow.org or contact us at info@GENYOUthNow.org.

GENYOUth
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View the interactive report online at www.GENYOUthNow.org.

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GENYOUth welcomes you to post your feedback about how we can collectively uplift and support youth. Tweet your thoughts to **#EmpowerYouthNow**, and check out how we're already activating youth in positive ways!



FOREWORD

Movers, Shakers, Change-Makers



Of all of the roles I play as CEO at GENYOUth, my primary one is *advocate for, and supporter of, youth empowerment* in the service of improved nutrition and physical activity in schools and communities. What does this mean? In simplest terms, it's bringing youth to the table and giving them a voice in conversations about their health, their schools, their success, their future.

Perhaps it's because I'm a mother of four that I have always had such trust in the wisdom of children when it comes to shaping their own futures. I have observed — both with my own children and with students in the 73,000 schools nationwide enrolled in our signature program, Fuel Up to Play 60 — that providing youth with the tools and information they need and then setting them

free to make decisions and solve problems is the most effective way to deal with the toughest of challenges.

At GENYOUth, that belief has become our moral compass. It is, quite simply, the way we do business. GENYOUth's guiding philosophy is the belief that, in the quest for cultures of wellness in our schools, students themselves are the primary voices to which we must be listening. *Empowering students as their own agents of change is what differentiates GENYOUth from other worthy groups working in the field.*

This document is intended to share the thinking and the experience behind that philosophy — with the aim of helping to elevate the conversation around benefits that come from em-

powering youth in the service of social change.

In this report, we look at:

- * why youth empowerment is important and effective, and what GENYOUth and others in the field have discovered;
- * how we at GENYOUth endorse and apply student-led change more and more across our various initiatives;
- * what we're learning about what works; and
- * how GENYOUth continues to affirm its commitment to youth leadership for school wellness — and how others can help empower youth.

Whether it's in their roles as responsible Fuel Up to Play 60 Ambassadors, vocal Leadership Roundtable participants, innovative AdVenture Capital social entrepreneurs, visitors at the White House to attend a meeting on school wellness, or insightful Town Hall panelists, we recognize students as equals among our network of thought leaders and, often, decision makers. It's our priority — and, we feel, our responsibility — to elevate students to positions of leadership and influence.

The learnings we've gleaned, highlighted in this report, are the reason why, in our quest for healthy, high-achieving schools, giving students a well-deserved seat at the table is so important to us.

(continued on page 4)

Youth involvement in social change is nowhere more evident than in GENYOUth's flagship program. *Something is happening* when 73,000 schools sign on to Fuel Up to Play 60. And something is happening when 30,000 youth sign on as Student Ambassadors for their schools! GENYOUth understands that when youth are part of the equation, school and community wellness blossom.

But while we know a great deal about how empowering youth works, we need to learn more. Our important work is just beginning, and the time is now for our nation to once and for all offer youth the visible and vocal seat at the table that they — that we — need and deserve. With the partnership and engagement of stakeholders and supporters like you reading this report, as well as the insights we're gaining and the programmatic elements we already have in place, GENYOUth will remain steadfast in its commitment to youth-led social change for years to come.

Work with us — and join us on this journey. And in the meantime, as our commitment to school wellness evolves and expands, look to us to continue to champion youth engagement, youth leadership, youth voice, and youth empowerment in all their forms.



Alexis Glick, CEO
GENYOUth

INTRODUCTION

Leaders Today — and Tomorrow



I quote a good friend of mine when I say, “My pet peeve is when children are told that we will be the leaders of tomorrow.” Why not today? Why should youth wait until later to grab hold of the reins and shape their future when they can start now?

My journey with leadership and empowerment started with GENYOUth's flagship program, Fuel Up to Play 60. It began with my principal handing me an application and urging me to become a Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador. I was for-

tunate, honored, and excited to be selected, and I had no idea of the number of doors that were about to open for me.

Since then, I've attended Student Ambassador Summits where we've learned how to be leaders in our schools, how to be comfortable in front of video cameras, and how to speak in front of crowds and groups of important people. I went home from my very first Summit with lots of information about the importance of improved nutrition and physical activity, empowered with the tools I needed and eager to start making the changes in my school and community that I wanted.

I started with my middle school and focused on how I could personally be an advocate for change, which is a pretty hard job for an eighth grader to think about. But we had successes! We promoted breakfast in the classroom, and students suddenly loved the fact that they had the opportunity to have breakfast every single morning. We looked for opportunities for school-wide physical activity, and we came up with the concept of “T.E.X.T. Time” — “Talking Exercising to Tunes,” a 30-minute period during which students walk laps around the gym while talking to friends and listening to music.

Both breakfast in the classroom and T.E.X.T. Time received statewide attention, and since their founding, we've built on and expanded both. None of this would have been possible if I hadn't learned how to be an effective leader through the Fuel Up to Play 60 program, and especially as an Ambassador. Using the tools I got through Fuel Up to Play 60,

“I was fortunate, honored, and excited to be selected, and I had no idea of the number of doors that were about to open for me.”

I made effective changes. My focus now is working with my high school and with our local elementary schools on strengthening our nutrition and physical activity initiatives.

Here's the biggest thing I've learned: empowering students is essential to our collective success. The youth of today are full of great ideas, and creative, outside-the-box ways of achieving our goals that make us incredible advocates for change. Students just need an opportunity, a chance to display these qualities. Once given this opportunity, youth get hooked on leadership, and on the idea of proclaiming a student voice. That's what happened to me.

Decisions that affect kids are usually made by adults, who have total jurisdiction over youth. But programs and initiatives are a hundred percent better when kids have a say. It's one thing to be in a program, and an entirely different thing to be the program, or at least be part of the decision-making body about a program. Participation in managing a program allows for a level of personalization to youth that is essential. And no, leadership isn't easy — but what great leader ever worked from a template?

I owe most of my self-confidence to the way Fuel Up to Play 60 has empowered me. It's made me an assured speaker. And now I feel I not only have the confidence to speak up, but the ability to take action. Putting youth first hasn't just helped the Fuel Up to Play 60 program succeed — it's helped me succeed, and I know this program will lead to the success of others nationwide.



Tyler Kwapis
High School Student, Michigan
Fuel Up to Play 60 Youth Council



“Youth are a strong force for change and may well be our only real hope of finally creating healthy schools and communities. I believe our biggest missed opportunity in terms of fostering and encouraging youth empowerment is failing to involve youth in the conversation.”

Gerardo Lopez-Mena, MD,
National Hispanic
Medical Association



Learn more about the Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador Youth Council



Why Youth Empowerment Matters: What We Know

Building upon a legacy of youth-inspired social change, GENYOUth is breaking new ground in elevating students as change-agents for school and community wellness. *Why? Because the need for change has never been more urgent — or the opportunities to help more available.*

Historically, American youth-led social change has helped shape the evolution of society in positive ways. Youth have almost unfailingly been involved in making organizational and civic changes on their own behalf — from lowering the U.S. voting age from 21 to 18 in 1971, to campaigns involving substance abuse, seat belt awareness, stopping texting while driving, anti-bullying messages, and more.

In all these areas, youth have effectively helped lead the way for social change. Student involvement in advocating for healthy eating and physical activity environments and practices in their schools and communities continues this powerful tradition. (See pages 29-30 for a sampling of current thinking on youth and social change.)

Young people acting as change-agents for wellness is a newer form of youth engagement — one that GEN-YOUth is helping to forge through our programs, funding, and research. As a result of this work, GENYOUth is developing an expertise that is notably unique among peer organizations. Our body of knowledge about the hows and whys of youth empowerment for wellness is large and growing, rich with insights we aim to learn from, act on, and share with others.

Primary among our learnings: simply that student involvement matters when it comes to healthy schools.

Perhaps the clearest example is GENYOUth's flagship program, Fuel Up to Play 60. The nation's largest in-school nutrition and physical activity program, powered by the energy and creativity of students themselves, Fuel Up to Play 60 was launched in 2010 by the National Football League (NFL) and National Dairy Council, in collaboration with the U.S. Depart-

ment of Agriculture. Fuel Up to Play 60 empowers students to make changes in their schools by improving opportunities to consume nutrient-rich foods and get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. The program engages students in grades K to 12 with a focus on developing leadership skills in students in grades 5 and up, who are developmentally prepared to help lead change initiatives. And as the chart on this page dramatically indicates, when more students are involved in Fuel Up to Play 60, healthy eating and physical activity increase.

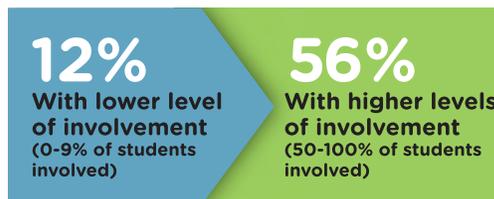
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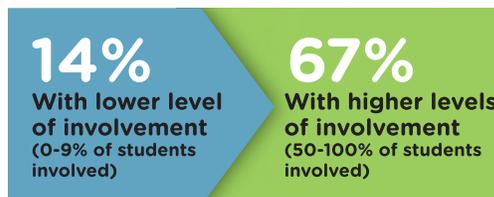
Impact of Student Involvement



Percent of students **eating healthier** increases when more students are involved in Fuel Up to Play 60:



Percent of students **getting more physical activity** increases when more students are involved in Fuel Up to Play 60:



Involvement is defined as participating in a Kickoff Event, taking part in Healthy Eating/Physical Activity Plays, visiting the Fuel Up to Play 60 website, tracking progress, helping to plan/implement activities, and/or participating in campaigns or youth challenges.

Defining Terms

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

An attitudinal, structural, and cultural process through which young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of others — including other youth and adults¹

STUDENT VOICE

The expression of individual and collective student opinions, experiences, knowledge, and wisdom

Whether it's formative and summative research collected for Fuel Up to Play 60, results of our AdVenture Capital student entrepreneurship initiative, or ongoing dialogues with experts and youth themselves, GENYOUth is gaining insights about youth empowerment for health and wellness.

Going forward, we are especially interested in learning more about why and how student involvement matters for healthy schools and communities, and roles that mentorship, training, and team-building play in supporting youth in these endeavors.

Read more!



Pew Research Center's "Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next"



Deloitte's Millennial Survey



Gates Foundation's "Impatient Optimists"



Edelman Berland's Millennial Research

GENYOUth and Millennials: Understanding, Accessing, and Empowering this Influential Demographic

The Millennial Generation, a demographic that includes youth now reaching adolescence and young adulthood, is a diverse and powerful influencing force in American society today, and GENYOUth is very much engaging with, and learning from, this pivotal generation — who serve as our programs' and initiatives' participants, leaders, and mentors.

Demographers', marketers', and social scientists' discovery of, and fascination with, the influence of Millennials mirrors and complements GENYOUth's knowledge of the vital importance not merely of focusing on youth, but empowering them.

A variety of organizations are carefully studying Millennials' behavior, with a special eye on their increasing social empowerment. According to Edelman Berland, this generation's "power to influence is increasing," with 74% of Millennials in a study believing they have influence not only over their peers, but also over those in other generations. The Pew Research Center, meanwhile, has focused on the concepts of "generational equity" and "the next America," studying how young people will cope with the enormous social challenges they inherit, and finding them up to the task. Writing for the Gates Foundation, Jennifer James noted, "During my conversations with Millennials I have always been impressed by their desire to change the world and the sincerity they bring to the task." And Deloitte's Millennial Survey 2015, which studied young people entering the business world, found that "more than half (53%) aspire to become the leader or most senior executive within their current organization."

The research and thinking of these groups frankly validates our work and encourages us. From our founding, we've known that Millennials — and so-called Generation Z coming right behind them — are a force in society to be reckoned with, a tsunami of potential for positive change in school and community wellness as well as other areas of social need. Fostering this potential is GENYOUth's aim, as we work in parallel with these other distinguished groups — with whom we always aim to partner and collaborate — to comprehend and support this unique demographic cohort.



What We're Learning

GENYOUth has gained insights and drawn conclusions around elevating and enabling youth to improve school and student wellness, drawing on our growing inventory of youth conversations and interviews, the results of student surveys and program utilization surveys, findings from Student Ambassador Summit events, reports of student focus group sessions, insights from youth advisory group gatherings, and more. Here's some of what we're currently learning.

What changes happen when students are involved in creating healthier schools?



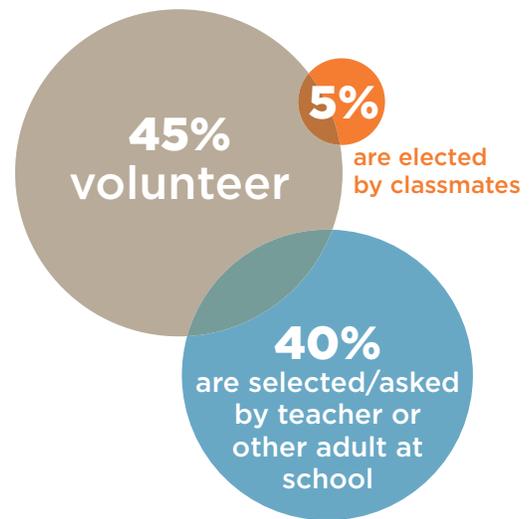
Schools with higher levels of student involvement are notably more likely to:

- Implement school-wide actions to improve the healthy eating and physical activity environment.
- Have more adults involved in school wellness efforts.
- Stay engaged with wellness activities and improvements.

More students are aware of and involved in creating healthier schools when:

- One or more student leaders help to engage their peers.
- One or more adults is a wellness champion at school.
- Physical education and school nutrition leaders support school wellness improvement efforts.
- Proper nutrition and physical activity are an important part of the school culture.
- There is a strong wellness policy.
- Parent volunteers support healthy changes at school.
- Mini-grants have been provided to jumpstart healthy changes.

How do students become wellness leaders at school?



Based on 2014 Fuel Up to Play 60 student survey.



“Who better to make decisions than the ones who will live with the consequences of those decisions? In my experience, youth are more likely to follow what their peers say than instructions from adults.”

Chris, age 14, Richland High School, Washington

Data are from annual Fuel Up to Play 60 Utilization Survey conducted online with enrolled K-12 educators/staff (n=-10,000/year representing about 8,000 schools). Data are statistically weighted to correct for non-response and sample bias.

Why do students lead school wellness efforts?

Youth want to be leaders for healthier schools and students because they like to . . .



What do students need to become better leaders?

To help them lead healthy changes in schools, students say they want:



Leadership training and more opportunities to act in leadership roles

Training in communication skills, including public speaking and using social media

Access to mentors and peer-learning opportunities



“To feel connected, youth want to be involved. I know the adults in my life care about me, but it’s when they involve me in making decisions or solving problems that I really want to make a difference.”

Hunter, age 17,
Mountain View High School, Idaho

Page 10 data based on focus groups and surveys with Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassadors.

What, according to youth, are the necessary characteristics of successful youth-led initiatives?

APPROACHABLE

Inclusive and easy to use

SUPPORTED

Facilitating guidance and mentoring

EMPOWERING

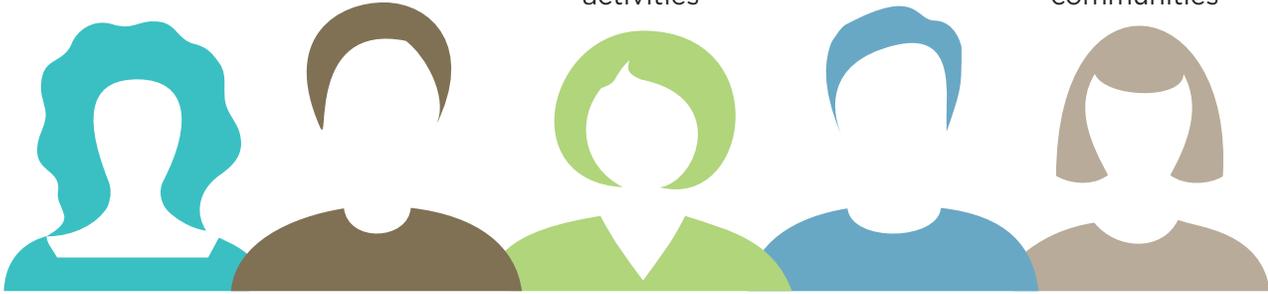
Enabling students with tools, training, and self-directed activities

SOCIAL

Nurturing community-building and storytelling

TRANSFORMATIVE

Focused on growth and change in people, schools, and communities



What motivates – and challenges – students as change-agents?

- Appreciation from peers
- Social engagement
- Excelling in things they love to do
- Respect from admired adults
- Making their families proud
- Taking care of important people in their lives

- Building a resumé for college and the future
- Bragging rights
- Having an impact on their world
- Being independent
- Bucking the system a bit



- It can be hard to go it alone.
- New situations can be intimidating.
- It's not always easy to get constructive feedback and support from peers and adults.
- It's hard to stay self-motivated when the going gets tough.

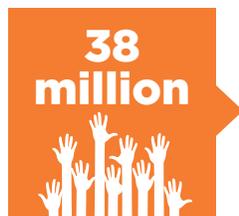
- It's hard to motivate others.
- Self-confidence can be fragile.
- Without experience, it's hard to anticipate hiccups and barriers.
- Failure usually feels like failure, rather than a chance to grow.

Page 11 data based on ethnographic research conducted in 2014 with middle and high school students across the U.S. as part of GENYOUth's AdVenture Capital program. Done in collaboration with gravitytank™ Innovation Consultancy.

For a brief review of research and thinking by others in the field of youth empowerment, see “Youth and Social Change: A Sampling of Current Thinking” on page 29.



Reaching and Engaging Students



Students reached through the program nationwide



Students actively involved in the program* nationwide



Students serving as School Wellness Ambassadors

Because of Fuel Up to Play 60...



18 million students now have **access to healthier foods** at school.

13 million students are **eating healthier**.



17 million students now have **access to more physical activity** opportunities at school.

16 million students are **more physically active**.

**Involvement is defined as participating in a Kickoff Event, taking part in Healthy Eating/Physical Activity Plays, visiting the Fuel Up to Play 60 website, tracking progress, helping to plan/implement activities, and/or participating in campaigns or youth challenges.*

Data above are based on the 2013 and 2014 Fuel Up to Play 60 Utilization Surveys, Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60 reporting, and program enrollment data. Based on educator observations and reporting in enrolled schools.



“Fuel Up to Play 60 helps students establish lifelong habits and champion healthy changes within their homes and families. It also helps them build leadership skills that can fuel their academic success and their success as part of a future workforce.”

Jean Ragalie-Carr, RDN, LDN, President, National Dairy Council

“I want to step out and make a difference. I want to be a leader because I like helping people.”

Heaven, age 14,
St. Charles Catholic
High School, Louisiana



See Heaven
and other
Fuel Up
to Play 60
Ambassador
Spotlights





Student Influence and Impact: What We're Doing

Empowering youth can be as simple as listening to them. In its varied programs and initiatives, *GENYOUth* is fostering skills that empowered youth require — and then enabling the expression and the action to which those young people aspire. Given the resources this work demands, and the access and programming we already have in place, the ways in which GENYOUth and its partners can empower young lives are limitless.

Within GENYOUth’s three-part mission — creating a movement, aggregating partnerships, and raising funds — youth are our primary agents of change. Traditionally, when it comes to creating healthy schools, students have been an overlooked source of wisdom and action — while, inarguably, they are the most important participants. When youth are actively engaged in a problem that concerns them, outcomes are better.

What are we doing to lay the groundwork? Above all, fostering practical skills. Through Fuel Up to Play 60, AdVenture Capital, and other initiatives, GENYOUth’s work with youth focuses on **five areas of practical skill development and skill-building**. These include:

Leadership. Developing a vision and building a team, understanding your personal leadership style, practicing peer-to-peer outreach

Communication. Public speaking, media interviews, and social-media familiarity and expertise

Program Expertise. Cultivating knowledge of major program elements, strategic planning on how to leverage programs like Fuel Up to Play 60 and AdVenture Capital at their school

Making the Case. Developing the ability to use research and insights to make a case for change

Interpersonal Skills. Relating to and working with peers and adults, building support and understanding around a topic, managing conflict and differing opinions, overcoming obstacles, building confidence through experience

GENYOUth nurtures child health and wellness in the school and local community by focusing on uplifting youth —

by giving them a platform and resources to share their voices and help achieve a healthier future. Much of this work has been marked by the growth of Fuel Up to Play 60, a program in which nearly three-quarters of all U.S. school districts are enrolled, and that encourages students to take

Traditionally, when it comes to creating healthy schools, students have been an overlooked source of wisdom and action — while, inarguably, they are the most important participants.

responsibility for consuming nutrient-rich foods (low-fat and fat-free dairy, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains) and achieving at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Additionally, GENYOUth is empowering students, working collaboratively with adults, in three principal areas: **building skills, elevating youth voice, and taking action.**



“I love being a part of something and being able to proudly say, ‘Yeah, I was there for that,’ or ‘I helped to make that happen.’ We need more opportunities for kids to just dig their hands in and grab a piece of the action.”

Saira, age 16,
Piscataway High School,
New Jersey

Building Skills



“I now see myself as being able to make a change, that I am capable of anything. I love taking what I have learned and using it to inspire others and teach them how to make a change.”

AdVenture Capital
student grantee



Top right and above:
Students at the
Fuel Up to Play 60
Student Ambassador
Summit

A6NASIONAL6CADQE6OF6LEADEQR

Fuel Up to Play 60 Ambassadors — now 30,000 strong and growing — are youth change-agents and leaders for school wellness. The annual Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador Summit brings together hundreds of students at the top level of engagement in the program to receive training, support one another’s learning about health and wellness, and celebrate their successes in making change with their fellow peers and influencers — including NFL superstars. The Fuel Up to Play 60 Youth Council — former Ambassadors at the highest level of engagement in the program — plan the majority of Summit activities on behalf of their peers, and also drive the action on the ground, and the momentum that fol-

lows the event. Dozens of Fuel Up to Play 60 trainings on student empowerment, leadership development, and community engagement are held annually in NFL team stadiums across the

country — in addition to almost 600 school-based events held yearly with NFL players or team experts, augmenting digital lessons and tools via FuelUpToPlay60.com.

CREATIVE, ENTERPRISING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

GENYOUth’s AdVenture Capital initiative gives Fuel Up to Play 60 students power to enact healthy changes in their schools and communities, while



developing the social entrepreneurship skills and disposition that will serve them in school and beyond. By giving students the opportunity to earn grant funding, experiences, and mentoring for their ideas to improve nutrition and physical activity in their schools and communities, this “pitch and invest” program helps students think and act like entrepreneurs and leaders, and realize that their voice matters.

MENTORSHIP AND INSPIRATION

GENYOUth’s network of thought leaders and young adult mavericks form the Inspiration Panel. These youthful leaders, ranging in age from 17 to 24, have already made names for themselves in fields such as education, sustainability, government, and entrepreneurship. AdVenture Capital grant winners receive one-on-one mentoring from the Inspiration Panelists. As the initiative scales to a new and robust digital platform, the Inspiration Panel, too, will grow to support students, leveraging the insight and expertise of young leaders, corporate partners, and former program grantees who can coach their fellow applicants.

Elevating Youth Voice

YOUTH AT CENTER-STAGE GENYOUth's city-based Town Halls generate new networks, galvanize community support, and encourage new investments in local schools. Students are always included as key members of these gatherings. Youth have equity in these discussions because, perhaps more than any other stakeholder group, they know what health and wellness solutions can work and be most sustainable with their peers, in their schools, and in many cases, in their communities.



Students at GENYOUth's second Leadership Roundtable

AT NATIONAL GATHERINGS GENYOUth's two national thought-leader Summits have convened nearly 1,000 leaders in education, philanthropy, health and wellness, nutrition, physical education, physical activity, and business — catalyzing new ideas, energy, and commitments for healthy schools. Students are prominently featured on the agenda as both speakers and key panelists.

THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF DIALOGUE Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassadors visited the White House to weigh in on opportunities and challenges in improving school meals and the physical activity environment in schools. As a Founding Partner of *Let's Move!* Active Schools, GENYOUth works in collaboration with ChildObesity180, SHAPE America, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Nike, Partnership for a Healthier America, and the Presidential Youth Fitness Program on programs, measurement, and grant opportunities for deserving youth.



Student Ambassadors with Sam Kass, former White House Senior Policy Advisor for Nutrition Policy

KEY PLAYERS IN MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS GENYOUth collaborates with outlets that include The Time Inc. Magazine Company (publishers of *TIME for Kids* and *Sports Illustrated Kids*), Discovery Education, and other groups that provide a powerful means of recognizing and showcasing the voices and stories of students. GENYOUth and *Sports Illustrated Kids* have established a network of youth correspondents who share their work through Fuel Up to Play 60 and AdVenture Capital in video segments that run on the *Sports Illustrated Kids* website and in magazine pieces.

OPINIONS BEING HEARD Whether it's national coverage of the student reporters who interview top executives, including the CEO at events like SAP's SAPHIRE NOW Global Business Technology Conference, or appearances by Fuel Up to Play 60 students on network TV's *The Chew* and *The Rachael Ray Show*, or in the GENYOUth's YOUthTalk™ series to share the student point of view at events, GENYOUth is committed to elevating the youth voice.

Taking Action



See student journalists in action at SAP's SAPPHIRE NOW conference, where they interviewed, and learned from, forward-thinkers and innovation leaders from around the world



Fuel Up to Play 60 students learned invaluable business skills and interacted with industry leaders at the Quaker Oats Cook-off at the Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador Summit



“It’s all about communicating. Students want to be heard. We have to figure out how to listen.”

Carla Hall, Host,
ABC-TV’s *The Chew*

STUDENTS LEADING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

Launched nationally in 2010, Fuel Up to Play 60 creates a culture of wellness in schools, based on student-originated, student-led, student-implemented solutions to nutrition and physical-activity challenges. The program is, and continues to be, built on authoritative guidance, science-based theories, expert input, and participatory research about what’s needed and what’s working to address childhood obesity and school wellness. Fuel Up to Play 60 is powered by engaged, informed, and dedicated students working with committed educators, administrators, school nutrition and physical education professionals, and other adults to make positive changes in their school wellness environment.

“If students have the opportunity to discuss school meal plans and physical-activity options with administrators, we’ll be more motivated to make healthy changes.”

Blair, age 18, Little Rock High School, Arkansas

YOUTH IN PRODUCT INNOVATION

Fuel Up to Play 60 students have played, and continue to play, a major role in helping to create new, student-appealing school breakfast options. At the 2013 Student Ambassador Summit, students taste tested school breakfast recipes, then helped name the recipes, three of which were presented by Ambassadors on ABC-TV’s *The Chew* and at the 2014 Student Ambassador Summit. Now students are working in collaboration with

school food service professionals to adopt some of the recipes in their school menus.

GETTING MOBILIZED

In the summer of 2014, GENYOUth and National Dairy Council, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and working closely with groups like Feeding America and D.C. Central Kitchen, supported 20 feeding events in 11 states.

DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

GENYOUth recently partnered with innovation consultancy gravitytank™ in a student-centered design process that informed the creation of a new AdVenture Capital digital platform. The work began with consultation with students as part of an ethnographic study in four different areas of the U.S. The insights derived served as the



Students lead a LEGO energizer activity at GENYOUth's 2014 Summit

foundation for initial concepts and features for a platform and program conceived side by side with students. In concept labs, students provide continuous feedback on the work. As the platform and program grow, students will assume vital advisory roles in the online community as mentors and content contributors.



“With their enthusiasm, energy, and optimism, youth make things happen in school, even as adults are claiming that it takes too much time, costs too much money, or that kids will never accept it. Energized students need adults who will support them.”

Robert Murray, MD,
American Academy
of Pediatrics and
Ohio State University

www.AdCapYOUth.org



Read what students are saying about creating healthy changes in schools in the Fuel Up to Play 60 Huddle



“When students take action, good things can happen — for themselves, their peers, and their school. It also helps lighten the load for educators, too!”

James Overton, M.S. Ed,
Health and Physical Education Teacher,
Quibbltown Middle School, New Jersey;
Fuel Up to Play 60 Program Advisor

The Digital Realm

Youth’s overwhelming adoption of digital and social-media technologies are far in excess of most adults’, underscoring that youth are already leaders in shaping culture and driving social change via platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and others. Importantly, technology here is not so much a “cause” of youth empowerment as much as it is an enabling mechanism. Digital dominance of communication now and in the years to come will strengthen the student voice — providing ever-greater reach, access, expression, and influence — and in turn, greater change and impact. At GENYOUth, this is something we see every day and encourage, as students who are leaders increasingly use social media to research topics, broadcast and share perspectives with others, and report progress.



Equal parts inspiration and information, YOUTHTalk™ is a unique platform designed to further GENYOUth’s overall mission of empowering youth as their own best agents of change for school wellness and other urgent topics of importance to them, their schools, and their communities. Presented at GENYOUth national and regional events and available digitally, YOUTHTalks™ are short, single-topic monologues in which students, supplied with nothing more than a microphone and a spotlight, cogently tackle issues related to nutrition, physical activity, and school and community wellness — describing for audiences of both adults and young people the nature of challenges and hurdles met, solutions devised, and successes achieved.



See Jacob Lindsay’s YOUTHTalk™ at GENYOUth’s 2014 Nutrition + Physical Activity Learning Connection Summit

The Face of Youth Empowerment

Stories from youth who are helping to inspire and lead healthy changes in their schools and communities



USING THE POWER OF MEDIA

“I’m **Josh Miller**, a Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador, and I won AdVenture Capital funds in 2013 to make my idea of Motivational Mondays — a physical activity program during recess — a reality in my middle school. While promoting the exercise concept we developed, I, along with other Fuel Up to Play 60 Ambassadors from Minnesota, was given the opportunity to anchor the Minnesota Vikings Huddle TV show, and talk about student health and wellness on-air. Overall, Motivational Mondays benefited about 1,000 kids locally. But the Vikings Huddle program aired in the largest market in the state, so many more people saw it — the TV show was super helpful in getting the word out to the public about Motivational Mondays!”



Watch Josh’s one-on-one interview with an NFL player

“My goal was to provide convincing reasons why my school should start breakfast in the classroom.”



NEGOTIATING IN THE SERVICE OF STUDENT HEALTH: AN IMPORTANT PART OF LEADERSHIP

Rachel Diehm, age 12, the Nebraska Fuel Up to Play 60 State Ambassador, has met with the Papillon-LaVista School District superintendent to ask for support in starting breakfast in the classroom at her middle school, Rumsey Station. “The meeting with my superintendent included a physical education teacher, the district school nutrition representative, our school’s Program Advisor for Fuel Up to Play 60, and a representative from Midwest Dairy Council. John Spatz, the executive director of the Nebraska School Board Association, also joined the group. My goal was to provide convincing reasons why my school should start breakfast in the classroom. The meeting resulted in a concrete plan to survey more students as well as parents, and move forward with providing breakfast in the classroom at Rumsey Station and possibly other schools in the district.”



SOCIAL MEDIA AS YOUTH EMPOWERMENT TOOL

New Jersey Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador **Anisha Patel**, age 14, recognized the issue of physical inactivity in her middle school as well as the surrounding community, and proposed using her GENYOUth AdVenture Capital award funds to build a fitness trail that is accessible to her school and people in her community. To publicize and promote the project, she turned to social media:

“Using Facebook and Twitter, I began to post updates on my project. I picked these social media networks because they’re commonly used by students as well as adults. By posting dates, ideas, and plans for projects and events that align with our health and wellness club, I’ve received comments and messages back about suggestions to improve our program and add to the work that we have done. This lets us know what the public wants, and opens up the opportunity for our audience to freely express their opinion on what we’re doing. With a click of a button, we can learn how many people are interested in our work (number of followers), how many people are engaged in what we’re doing (likes, retweets, etc.), and how many people are actively participating in what’s being discussed (comments and messages). Social media has also given me the opportunity to hear from sponsors who are interested in and can help expand my project!”



Meet Anisha and other AdVenture Capital grantees

“Social media has given me the opportunity to hear from sponsors who are interested in and can help expand my project!”



GOOD LEADERS COMMUNICATE!

Liberal High School in Liberal, Kansas, isn’t unusual in offering grab-and-go breakfast stations in hallways after first period so students can pick up breakfast on the way to their next class. The concept has increased breakfast participation — and students’ overall nutrition — significantly in schools across America. What’s unique about Liberal is the enthusiasm with which student leaders promote, publicize, and encourage participation in school breakfast. Once kiosks were available offering healthy breakfasts, student leaders sprang into action and mobilized communication efforts school-wide. Graphic arts classes used their creativity to design and produce breakfast posters, and the video production class developed a “Second Chance Breakfast” promotional video. The team’s near-professional-quality commercials and breakfast-focused news reports aired every day as part of school announcements during the week leading up to the program’s launch.



See Liberal High School’s “Second Chance Breakfast” video



TRUE STUDENT LEADERSHIP: EQUAL PARTS ENERGY, ENTHUSIASM, AND EXCELLENCE

Frank Martinez, age 15, of Rochester, Minnesota, is excited to learn more about being a more effective leader as one of five Fuel Up to Play 60 National Ambassadors. Frank helped implement many Fuel Up to Play 60 initiatives at Rochester Alternative Learning School last year, including breakfast menu taste testing and group games and activities around eating better and moving more. Says Frank, "I look forward to helping spread Fuel Up to Play 60's message of eating healthy, staying active, and making a difference to my school, state, and country!"



[Watch Frank's Fuel Up to Play 60 video](#)



Future Directions: Where We're Going

GENYOUTH aims to ensure that youth have *the power, the potential, and the permission* to create healthful environments that increase their chances for success in school and in life. What could be more important to their future — and our nation's?

Our Work Has Just Begun

At GENYOUth, we are learning more daily about how to create a meaningful dialogue with students, and how to cultivate them as both strategists and action-takers equivalent in influence and impact to the many adults who have helped our programs grow. But there is still a great deal of work to be done. Crucial to this work is a continuing quest to understand more about key issues, including:

- * The correlation between student involvement and sustainable change in school buildings.
- * The roles that mentorship, training, and team-building play.
- * Understanding what motivates youth to adopt health-promoting behaviors.
- * The impact of active and early involvement on students' maturity, personal development, career success, health and well-being, and life satisfaction.

GENYOUth will be studying and reporting on these and related issues in future reports and briefs — learning as we go through ongoing programmatic refinement, constant innovation, pilot tests of new initiatives, and, yes, trial and error. Near term, GENYOUth will empower youth to advance nutrition and physical activity in schools and communities by focusing on three areas:

Knowledge-Sharing. We'll gather, analyze, and disseminate insights and best practices related to youth leadership — intelligence that will help GENYOUth and other youth-wellness-focused initiatives to optimize youth ideas, energy, and voice.

Elevating Youth Voice. We'll drive action through innovative programs and initiatives that uplift and advance youth voice.

Support. We'll develop partnerships that bring funding and resources to further empower youth efforts that drive social change for health in America's schools and communities.

In all of the above, GENYOUth will collaborate with other groups on this important work, as well as provide valuable guidance and direction to

those for whom youth empowerment is a priority, as it is for us. Thus, expanding the potential for partnerships and collaborations with supporters and colleagues eager to further research and work in youth leadership is a priority.

“When youth solve problems, they feel empowered and communities cultivate future generations of individuals committed to unraveling society's challenges. Both students and communities benefit from young change-makers.”

Sophie Bernstein, High School Student, Missouri (Alliance for a Healthier Generation Youth Advisory Board Member)

Addressing Disparities and Diversity

We celebrate the fact that youth empowerment is a crucial tool for change in schools and provides a gateway to civic engagement. And with an eye toward addressing disparities of all kinds, we understand that empowerment of youth must mean empowerment of all youth. This implies a sharp focus on underserved and minority communities, where the need for youth leadership is in some ways greatest.

Similarly, our recognition of the need for equity among culturally diverse groups in our schools is seen in the coming launch of Fuel Up to Play 60 en Español. Likewise, another way our flagship program is expanding, with an eye toward new opportunities for youth leadership, is the growth of the Fuel Up to Play 60 “alumni” initiative, an acknowledgment that the program has been in existence long enough that its veterans are now “out in the world,” yet still want to stay engaged. The success of the program is creating demand for former Student Ambassadors to remain

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involved, giving rise to an initiative now in development to engage alumni Student Ambassadors and university students as mentors to help advise students and schools.

A Time of Urgency and Opportunity

Students have valuable, relevant ideas that improve the content of programs and make buy-in from others, including parents, educators, and school administrators, easier. Their insights are a crucial tool in overall outreach and impact. Youth empowerment matters.

Empowered youth really do have the potential to drive the next wave of social change for health and wellness in America, and our schools are a key setting for enabling that movement. With that in mind, collectively, we need to continue to cultivate youth who possess leadership potential, and to help develop their abilities in dynamic, positive, encouraging ways.

“It’s amazing what you can learn if you pay attention and listen to kids. Their insights are often unvarnished. We need to think more about how we can trust them to carry the message. They’re up to the task.”

Jeff Miller, NFL Health & Safety

Critical to that is GENYOUth’s outreach to dedicated and supportive partners to join us in this work; this report is an example of that outreach. Given the economic, health, and societal challenges the next generation of American youth face, there is little time to waste, and the time to act is now.

AN INVITATION TO COLLABORATE

GENYOUth has embarked on an ongoing and ambitious journey toward a future of energized, inspired, accomplished, and empowered youth. *This journey is fueled by funders and partners whose support, expertise, and resources are so vital to our work. Please join us in...*

- * Conducting **knowledge-sharing events and opportunities** to trade insights and seek to better understand how youth-centric leadership transforms health and wellness in schools and communities.
- * Identifying, fostering, and elevating **successful models for youth voice and leadership** for the cause of healthy, high-achieving schools and students, featuring models developed by students themselves.
- * Identifying and disseminating **best practices for empowerment and innovation** in student-centered, school-based wellness programs.
- * Providing experiential programs that **link Fuel Up to Play 60 and AdVenture Capital students with businesses, universities, and big thinkers** to fund and help bring innovative solutions to life.
- * Expanding the Fuel Up to Play 60 Student Ambassador Summit to **prepare leaders and catalyze action**.
- * Expanding GENYOUth’s **YOUTHtalk™ digital platform** to augment live student presentations and perspectives.
- * Offering **specialized trainings and mentoring** to share the unique expertise of partner organizations.
- * Providing **mini-grants** to schools to help jump-start healthy changes.

Give Youth a Seat at the Table: How You Can Empower Youth

SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

Actively encourage students to assume leadership roles to help set the vision for healthy schools. * Make sure students are full-fledged members of district or school wellness councils or school health advisory committees. * Involve youth in program planning, implementation, and participation. * Listen to their ideas, and then help broadcast the student voice in your schools. * Elevate youth to positions of decision-making and influence, working collaboratively with adults. * Encourage students to join and take advantage of leadership development opportunities through Fuel Up to Play 60.

BUSINESSES

Recognize that students are informed consumers, with out-of-the-box thinking and genuine insight. * Work with GENYOUth to involve students in product research, development, and testing. Solicit their ideas for improvements. * Celebrate that youth represent a vibrant future customer base for your products and services, as well as your future workforce. * Offer students internships and other real-world opportunities in your companies. * And, most important, lend your time, expertise, and funding to programs and initiatives in which the empowerment of youth and the fostering of youth leadership are cornerstones.

PARENTS

Support your children's desire to shape their own destinies when it comes to working for improved nutrition and physical activity in both school and community. * Communicate your enthusiasm for their willingness to take part in a health advisory council or committee, and applaud their desire to make their school a healthier place. * Encourage their involvement in programs such as Fuel Up to Play 60 as part of service-learning. * Talk to your principal or

superintendent, and communicate that listening to youth voice is important to you!

STUDENTS

Your voice matters! Recognize that you have knowledge, insight, and the power to create change! * Be a good role model for other students at your school. Eat well and move more. * Ask your teacher or principal about your school's wellness policy — and what you can do to help make sure it's working. * Help your school to organize walkathons or family food-and-fitness fairs, improve playground facilities, or sponsor wellness-themed fundraisers (visit FuelUpToPlay60.com for ideas). * Be willing to take part in a school health advisory council or committee. * Share your ideas and time to make your school/district a healthier place. * Spread your enthusiasm for improving your school's nutrition and physical-activity practices with other students, teachers, and with your parents, too. * And, of course, join Fuel Up to Play 60, become a Student Ambassador, and apply for an AdVenture Capital grant for your school! **Visit FuelUpToPlay60.com and AdCapYOUth.org.**

MEDIA

Share compelling stories of students who are making a difference in their schools and communities, and elevate models for other students and adults from which they can learn. * Feature student-created content and youth points of view, ideas, leadership, and work. * Invite youth to serve as advisors and content co-creators. * Offer students internship and incubator opportunities. * Leverage student interest and engagement with social media to produce and share content across social channels where students talk, and listen, to one another. * Work with GENYOUth to mentor youth leaders and social entrepreneurs on how to be effective communicators and mentors themselves.



“Changes can’t be made in schools unless everyone is on board and walks through the door in the morning with the mindset of ‘a better today.’”

Noa, age 16, Morse High School, Maine

APPENDIX

Youth and Social Change: A Sampling of Current Thinking

YOUTH: AN UNDERUSED RESOURCE

In recent years there has been a good deal of thinking done, and research conducted, in the area of youth empowerment for social change, public health, and education reform. This research has collectively examined the importance and the efficacy of youth engagement, youth advocacy, and civic participation by youth, and their impact on the larger culture. It has provided a legacy of expertise and knowledge upon which GENYOUth's own youth-focused programs and approaches have been, and continue to be, built.

A consensus seems to be that, when it comes to reforms in education and public health, youth are an underused resource for community change.² Research demonstrates inarguable benefits for young people who are involved in working for change, with additional research showing that organizations and communities benefit as well.³

Since the early 2000s, theorists and commentators have actively called for increased youth involvement in public affairs,^{4,5} noting both the positive impact youth can have on civic issues as well as the growth youth can experience as they mature.

“The field of leadership has much to offer in terms of help-

ing build up young people's skills and capacities in order to make positive contributions to their communities, alongside building their employability skills,” says a 2009 Young Foundation report.⁵ The same report notes that giving youth the chance to develop and apply leadership can benefit not only the young person, but also his or her peer group and the society at large. Pointing out that leadership skills are necessary to young people's transition to adulthood, the report stresses that youth leadership opens the way for the tackling of important social challenges that results in constructive social progress. It is through civic engagement, in the end, that young people's views and aspirations are put to positive use in building communities.⁶

YOUTH VOICE IN SCHOOLS

In the school arena specifically, student voice and empowerment have contributed to education reform efforts⁷ as well as to improvements in school performance. Several authors have noted the efficacy of student voice as an ingredient in school reform, particularly when students are involved as equal partners and designers of change.^{8,9,10} Schools generally discover that meaningful student involvement increases students' commitment to their own goals

and achievements, and studies suggest that student voice can be an indispensable tool for enhancing student performance overall.

Prominent voices in youth empowerment are informing and leading research and advocacy for student involvement and engagement in schools. For example, the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (www.qisa.org), led by Dr. Russell Quaglia, is driven by a belief in the value of the student voice. In over two decades, Quaglia's organization has shown that students who develop a belief in their abilities, and who are positively engaged in their own education, are students in whom high aspirations develop. These are precisely the students most likely to reach their fullest potential, not only in school but in life.

Another leader is Adam Fletcher, whose Freechild Project's (www.freechild.org) mission is to advocate, inform, and celebrate social change led by and with young people around the world, particularly those who have been historically denied the right to participate. Fletcher and Freechild feel it is simply unethical to deprive young people of participation in decisions that affect them. In raising youth to a position of parity with adults within education, Fletcher

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contends he is doing nothing less than democratizing educational practice.

TAKING ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Most recently, youth and their mentors have turned their attention to childhood obesity prevention, offering models for both evaluating and encouraging youth advocacy at the individual, environmental, and policy levels.¹¹ In fact, youth engagement in school nutrition policies has been shown to jumpstart student acceptance in a range of health-related areas.¹² Students are increasingly involved in advocating for healthy eating and physical activity environments and practices in their schools and communities, even at the elementary school level.¹³

This is encouraging for two reasons — because peers represent a vital environmental influence on secondary-school students' food choices, and can help promote healthful eating behaviors at school,^{14,15} and because peer influence has also been related to increasing physical activity among youth.¹⁶

More recent investigations underscore the role that youth advocacy can play in the field of obesity prevention.^{11,17,18} “By involving youth in their communities,” say researchers Rachel Millstein and James Sallis, “advocacy can produce ownership, engagement, and future involvement, yielding sustainable changes.”¹¹ Involvement is the operative word here, as additional studies have found that

GENYOUth welcomes you to post your feedback about how we can collectively uplift and support youth. Tweet your thoughts to #EmpowerYouthNow, and check out how we're already activating youth in positive ways!

youth participation in student-led school health improvement teams can both impact students' perceptions of control and lead to proactive health behaviors and additional positive outcomes.¹⁹

A number of researchers and social scientists have explored the issue of youth-adult partnerships for social change, and have developed youth empowerment “typologies” — depicted variously as ladders, pyramids, and flow charts, for example — that portray power dynamics between youth and adults, and pathways for authentic youth participation. These typologies reinforce the concept that young people can be effective change-agents for themselves and their communities.²⁰

FUEL UP TO PLAY 60

Indeed, GENYOUth's flagship in-school health and wellness program, Fuel Up to Play 60, is adult-supervised but student-centric, offering students the

opportunity to be involved in and help lead efforts to improve schools' and students' nutrition and physical-activity practices. Results within a variety of school contexts indicate that high levels of student engagement and improvements to the nutrition and physical activity environments are achievable.¹⁶ A two-year Fuel Up to Play 60 pilot study showed that student participation in wellness-policy implementation can lead to positive changes in school practices and students' behaviors, especially when students are engaged. Students who were aware of the program were significantly more likely to report healthier eating and activity behaviors than students who were not aware of the program.^{21,22} Annual surveys of educators in enrolled schools reinforce the pilot study findings, showing that when students are involved in Fuel Up to Play 60, schools are more likely to report improved eating and physical activity behaviors among students (*see page 7*).

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About GENYOUth:

GENYOUth empowers students to create a healthier future for themselves and their peers by convening a network of private and public partners to raise funds for youth wellness initiatives that bolster healthy, high-achieving students, schools and communities nationwide. We believe that all students are change-agents, who deserve the opportunity to identify and lead innovative solutions that positively impact nutrition, physical activity, and student success. For more information about GENYOUth, visit: **www.GENYOUthNow.org**.