



**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**  
**Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

*Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: City Strategies to Combat Childhood Obesity*  
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National League of Cities (NLC)

*Speakers:*

**Frank Bass**, assistant superintendent for secondary education, Manchester, N.H.,  
**Gerald Johnson**, city manager, City of Lincoln, Calif.,  
**Susan Sheehy**, coordinator, Manchester Team Nutrition, Health Department, City of  
Manchester, N.H.

**ANDREWS:** I would like to welcome you to our monthly audioconference call, sponsored by the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. We are particularly excited to have our guests with us this afternoon and we will introduce them in just a brief moment.

The National League of Cities is appreciative of the support that we have received from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to focus on combating childhood obesity. Over the last 12 months, we have identified – through a research initiative – city strategies to combat childhood obesity. We recently published our eighth action kit that highlights five strategies that include: how cities can make the most of out of school time, promote access to nutritious foods, utilize parks and recreation, reshape the physical environment, and the fifth primarily looks at partnering and forging partnerships with schools, which is really the primary focus of today's call. Recently, in the last two weeks, the National League of Cities, in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators, hosted a school wellness planning leadership academy that brought together 14 city and school officials, senior officials in both cities and school districts that allowed these participants to spend time learning about different ways of working together to implement their local wellness plan. We were privileged to have in participation Action for Healthy Kids, Safe Routes to School, as well as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

On today's call, we have extended invitations to two speakers to share some of their lessons learned from the leadership academy but also to highlight some of the strategies that they have taken in their cities and in their school districts to combat childhood obesity. On the call today, we have from Lincoln, Calif., Jerry Johnson, who is the city manager for Lincoln, and

he will share the city's plans to combat childhood obesity and then we have a city and school representation from Manchester, N.H. Dr. Frank Bass, the assistant superintendent for secondary education in Manchester, will share the strategies that the school district has taken, particularly around looking at the local wellness policy, and implementing the local wellness policy, as well as Susan Sheehy who will also share the lens of how the City of Manchester, particularly within the health department, has taken efforts to combat childhood obesity. I would like to welcome everyone.

*BASS:* Thank you.

*SHEEHY:* Thank you.

*ANDREWS:* And, Jerry, would you start us off by giving us the lens of what you guys have done out in Lincoln, California?

*JOHNSON:* Sure. Lincoln is a fast growing community in the Sacramento Valley area of California. When I came to Lincoln in 2001, we had a population of about 11,000. Today, it is 40,000. General plan to 54,000, although we have a new general plan that would take us to 130,000. And both the current and the future general plan calls for city-school cooperation in many ways. One is that whenever a new school is built, the city is committed to building an adjacent park. The adjacent park allows the school to reduce the number of acres that they need, because of the play areas at the park and the athletic fields in the park are used by the schools during the school day, and likewise, the city is able to use multipurpose buildings, within the elementary schools and gyms within middle schools and high schools for community programming, after school hours and on the weekend.

During the time that I have been with Lincoln, we have built two elementary schools, with adjoining parks to those, and one middle school, and also an adjoining park there. Each of those schools are built in neighborhoods where we have intentionally provided trails from the neighborhoods to the schools, so that there really isn't any need for kids to be driven to school, because we have these very nice, multipurpose recreational trails that go from the neighborhoods to the schools.

Unfortunately, we certainly do not have 100 percent participation. Our participation rates in the walking programs are about 30 percent. We have done a lot of things to improve those numbers, working with the schools and with private partners. Our local hospitals have provided pedometers and have provided healthy snacks and other things to encourage kids that do walk or bike to school and the principals have established programs recognizing students that have walked a specific number of days to school consecutively or the number of miles that they have recorded, kind of "walking to the moon" in one case. We still have resistance from parents that kind of sleep in maybe and the kids get off late, so they feel they have to be driven to school to get there on time. We have other parents that are resisting because they think it is unsafe to walk. We have tried to combat that problem by having a walking buses kind of approach, where a parent will walk with 10 kids or things like that. We have a large COPs program, Civilians on Patrol. Fifty volunteers, mostly seniors, work with our police department and we have them out on bicycle patrols in the school areas to try to provide a presence that will address that feeling of insecurity, and while it is helping, we still have a long ways to go.

The school district has a high school farm, a 200 acre farm where they are producing non-food products, at this time. They do hay and they have a husbandry program there with their 4H programs. They also grow trees for us for planting on city streets and in parks, but we are encouraging them to do some kind of produce production that will show up in school cafeterias to kind of give kids more of a connection to the area of farms. We do sponsor a farm tour program in the fall and we have been successful in attracting a fresh produce market that is now serving our town with locally grown fruits and vegetables, and that has been somewhat of a success. I guess I probably left out some things, but we can get back to those as we get into the discussion.

**ANDREWS:** Yes, Great. Thank you, Jerry. I am curious, just before we transition over to Frank. The level of support, could you describe the level of support that expands within the city towards this issue of addressing the obesity issues? I guess the context really for me though when I think about this is was there something extra that you had to do within the city to make this a priority above other issues, in terms of realizing that this was a concern and that we, as a city needed to respond to this?

**JOHNSON:** Well, the school district has the Body Mass Index numbers and I don't have those in front of me, but it did certainly confirm that we have a significant problem. We are participating with the school district and with many people in the community on a youth task force to try to address youth issues and certainly health and childhood obesity has been identified as an initiative that we need to address.

**ANDREWS:** So, it was through that identification of needs that kind of allowed the issue to rise to the surface.

**JOHNSON:** It was, although we have been sort of actively trying to design our community to encourage active living and getting people out and, at the recent leadership conference, it had occurred to me that we ought to be changing the name of our recreation department to the Department of Recreation and Wellness. When I got back from the conference, I flew that trial balloon and it has really received a great deal of acceptance and enthusiasm here. So, we are going to be going in that direction.

**ANDREWS:** That's great. Thanks, Jerry. Frank, did you want to share some of the strategies and steps that the school district has taken to address the childhood obesity?

**BASS:** Sure, I would be glad to. You know, first and foremost, a little background on the Manchester Public Schools. We are the largest school district in the state of New Hampshire. We cater to about 17,500 students. We are a Federal Refugee Relocation Center. We have approximately 2,000 students, who obviously come from war torn areas or impoverished areas around the world and have come here to Manchester, N.H., as their next point of demarcation to a better life and what we have discovered is that we are representing over 78 languages, and that we have upwards of 80 different countries being represented, and what makes our task a little bit more difficult is realizing full well that a great majority of these students do not have any formal

education, per se, in their background, so that has been quite an undertaking and quite a challenge for the Manchester schools to deal with that population.

As you can also guess, being a large urban centered area, we have a great many students that are on free and reduced lunches. What that means is that we have a pretty good sized Title I budget, which allows our schools to get extra resources towards those ends. I believe that we have nine schools that are designated as Title I schools. As for the schools, there are 23 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools and one vocational technical center.

Our high schools and middle schools are on the side of being overcrowded. There are about 2,200-2,300 students at each of our three high schools and our middle schools range about 1,000 per school. So, that is certainly far and above where we would like them to be. What does this have to do with obesity? Well, quite a few things actually. First and foremost, 22 percent of our students in the Manchester schools would be defined as obese. Point number two, because we have such a disparate population, and because we are working with so many different kinds of people, we find that health habits in general are very difficult to get a handle on and to try to present any kind of main stream formatting for students and parents, in terms of healthy choices, has become quite difficult.

However, that being said, one of the biggest things that has been able to help us move off the dime, so to speak, is to implement a new wellness policy. As you know, under federal legislation, we have to do that. So, we are able to get our board to enact a new wellness policy, which actually Susan Sheehy and others helped to craft. That policy, now, is in effect. Sue, myself, and others now work with the schools with our food and service director to make sure that all the things that are contained within that policy are actually happening. We will be the first to tell you that we are not 100 percent there. We are maybe 90-95 percent there, but at least we have that policy and it has teeth, and that is going to help us out tremendously.

As far as the schools are concerned, on an individual basis, what can we do to combat obesity and how has this conference helped this and how has this policy helped us? Well, I think there are two big responses to that. One is a program that Sue has been very instrumental in getting going and it is called, "Get Moving Manchester," and basically what it does is target mostly our elementary and middle school populations and try to get them to understand that healthy choices do make an impact on your overall sense of self, as well as nutrition issues and health issues, in terms of going to the doctor. What we have discovered is that the students have responded to this program in great measure.

Basically, what it is, is just chronicling the kinds of exercise that you do, over a six to eight week period, and Sue will give you more definitive terms on it later, but the upshot is that they have to chronicle what they do for exercise and chronicle what they eat for food and we try to make a game out of it. I think I heard Jerry talking about "walking on the moon." Well, we do similar kinds of things. We try to create a theme around it so that maybe you are doing the Presidential Range, maybe you are creating some new cookbook. You know things like that so the kids buy into it. And then we have our mayor come to each of the schools to make the presentation of awards. You know, those individuals, those teams, those schools that produce the best results, obviously get, you know, various awards from the mayor. We found that to be very successful.

Sue and I are now embarking on a pilot program at two of our elementary schools and one of our middle schools and the idea there is to take the "Get Moving Manchester" notion

and just kind of ratchet up a bit if we could. We are going to do a BMI index of every single 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grader on April 1<sup>st</sup> and they put into action a program, over an eight week period, and then do a BMI test on June 1<sup>st</sup>. In addition, there is a program called, and Sue may be able to help me out here, I think it is called, “Fit for Kids” or something like that?

*SHEEHY:* It is called “Fit Kids.”

*BASS:* “Fit Kids,” and that has a very prescribed series of calisthenics that the kids have to do, with various measures that go with it, so we will pretest and posttest our kids there as well. In the intervening time, we are going to make sure that every single class, and I am not talking about physical education and health, but every class of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, get outside the building, they go for walks, they do an exercise of some sort and it is chronicled. So, every teacher has to buy into it and every student has to buy into it. We are going to have a – how shall I say, a celebration night, the last day of March and bring all the parents in as a kick off activity, tell them what we are doing, why we are doing it and then, again, we are going to have awards, certificates and prizes, and things like that at the end, so that will be very good for us, in terms of developing some very clear data. How obese are these kids? What kinds of intervention strategies work and if they do work, to what degree to they work?

Secondly, the other big program that we have, and neither Sue nor I can take credit for this, because it comes out of the Mayor’s office, and it is called “The Marathon.” As you may know, Manchester has recently been awarded a “marathon site,” which will occur next November, so it will be international. You will have Kenyans and Ethiopians and all the great runners from around the world coming into Manchester to participate, because their time will then count as a qualifying standard to go to the Boston Marathon or New York, which is a big deal. So, what the Mayor’s office has done has taken that idea and transformed it to our elementary and middle school students, such that they have to run a marathon too. And what we will do with them is we are probably going to do it in either ¼ mile loops or ½ mile loops, but each kid is going to have to go out and again chronicle their time and their distance. We are going to put all that together and when each reaches 26 miles, we will say that you have earned a marathon.

We are going to have t-shirts, similar to the ones that we saw down in Nashville, “Live It” t-shirts and we are going to have our kids design the t-shirts for us. We are going to have all the logos donated by local business and industry and we are going to have a huge culminating event in our Fisher-Cat Stadium, that is our semi-professional baseball team. The mayor will preside and, again, there will be all kinds of awards and certificates and whatnot.

Again, our position here is to draw the community in, so it is not just a school issue, but the parents are involved. Because we know if we can get the parents on our side, we are 90 percent of the way there. As you well know, many times what we do in school gets undone when the kid goes home. So, if we can grab these parents and get them in here with us, that will be helpful. One thing that we have done to sort of encourage the parent involvement is that we have a series of what is called, “Fun Nights” and they occur at various elementary and middle schools across the city, and again we are bringing parents in and we are trying to reach out to our ethnic populations, like the ones that I had mentioned to you earlier, getting the tribal leaders to come in and making a real community outreach effort to draw as much participation in this as possible. So, that is kind of in a nutshell the kinds of things that we are working on. The

last thing I want to say that I think is extremely important is that Sue and I are now on the Mayor's Wellness Committee. We have renamed it. I think it used to be, "Passport to Cardio Wellness." So, we have changed it because we told him that after coming back from the conference, it really needs to be more broad based and take into consideration the things that we talked about, which he most agreeably has taken. So, I think that is going to be huge in terms of, again, generating the right kind of notoriety and understanding throughout the community as who is behind this, why are we doing it and why should I pay attention to it? I think that kind of covers it.

*ANDREWS:* Fantastic. Thank you, Frank. Sue, could you give the city lens? Frank was sharing the work that has been happening in Manchester from the school district and started to talk a little bit about the role of what the city has done. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that for us?

*SHEEHY:* Sure. You know, so little time and so much information that we need to give here. So, let me go back. My position started about nine years ago. The school district and the city got together, realizing that they had an obesity issue, and applied for a grant, a teen nutrition grant. That was the start of my position. It was a four-month position with five schools piloted and it then turned into 21 schools and here I am nine years later. So, that itself, was a real collaboration, working together with the principals and then the health department people and the city people. So, that itself, brought the group together.

Initially, we pretty much just tried to get the biggest bang for our buck. You know, how can we get known in the schools? So we started off with little things like interactive classes, recipe contests and healthy lunch contests and pyramids; drawing contests and those kinds of things where each time we did a contest it was 1,200 students. So, then we moved to doing some more community roles. We involved the area hospitals, the dairy counsel and at this point, we are involving school board members, and we did that because, I, myself, do not have any funds. So, I exist through the help and the resources of these community partners.

One of our biggest events, because, again, we wanted to involve parents, was getting the parents to come into school and doing their cholesterol and their blood pressure. We did some seminars for them and the way we got them in was through something called, "Take your parents to lunch day" and we had 2,200 parents that we reached in a year. We thought that was pretty good. Pretty much you guilt the parents into coming in for lunch with the student. The kids that did not have someone there, we would feel really bad for, so certainly the following consecutive years that we ran the program, we had more and more parents, and we had their attention. They were a captive audience. So we would show five pounds of fat and we would show the sugar that was in soda and that was one of our very successful programs with parents.

So, in addition to getting to the students, the city wanted to get to the parents and then we wanted to look at the school staff. How can we make them well, because if they are going to give that message, we want them to be well too. So, we did a staff wellness program where we took cholesterol, blood pressure, BMI. We gave them pedometers and a heart walking program and we partnered with CMC. We partnered with AMDUM, that is the thing about getting these big businesses involved. Once you have the mayor behind you, especially, you have someone who can recruit these businesses and having them behind us, not only do you have

the funding, you also have all these different resources. So, we did that through a staff wellness program. So, again, my position started off in five schools and we increased it to 21 schools and I have seen more and more community involvement as time has gone on. In 2000, we received the USDA best practices in community involvement award. So, we were really thrilled to get that and we were acknowledged.

Then after 2000, a group called Manchester Healthy Leadership Counsel, which began with the Millbank Memorial Fund, they started and got a group together. The mayor was on there and the ex-mayor was on there, who we worked with very closely, with “Get Moving Manchester.” They had United Way, they had the health department and the school district. A lot of leaders in the area, and they came up with this “Get Moving Manchester” program, but prior to “Get Moving Manchester,” we had a subcommittee off of this larger committee. We were the hands on people. The people that went out and did a lot of the work. We developed a physical activity guide that shows parents, students and the city of Manchester where they can go if they want to have activity; could they go dancing, what parks have trails, etc., so we published that and sent that out to all the students and parents. We would bring it to our “Take you parent to lunch day” and we would have them look at it there.

So, we made it very, very collaborative and as the years go on for me, the mayor just becomes more and more involved and that is interesting. Our ex-mayor was very big in health and nutrition and he is very supportive, but now again, it is the mayor that is currently becoming more and more involved. We found that a lot of committees in Manchester were doing a lot of the same things, but we wanted to not reinvent the wheel. We wanted to all get together and work towards one effort. So, that is where Frank and I are going right now with the mayor.

So, in terms of the conference, what we have learned, we really want to work on that safe route. So, we do have a couple of schools that are participating in the walking school bus. So, we want to take and look at funding to enhance those programs and the mayor was very interested in that. He was interested in the fact that eventually, you certainly can improve the air quality and less traffic. So, that is one thing that we definitely want to work on. As Frank said, we are part of a community wellness committee, so we looked at the current members and we said now who can we invite? What businesses can we invite to be a part of this and we did look at again, having our area athletic teams be a part of that, which would be a great influence for the children and just the conference was great to network. We want to partner with Savannah, GA. We have been in contact with them and we found that by looking at other school districts, even if we could get ideas that we could enhance, we thought that was a great opportunity. We have had “Get Moving Manchester” for the last five years. However, we loved looking at “Live It.” There was a lot of buy in, in the entire school district and it was a year long program, so we enjoyed looking at that. I think that is it for me for right now. I am sure I will think of something else.

*ANDREWS:* Thank you Sue. For our listening office, we wanted to just use this opportunity to say a couple of things. One, if you are looking to ask a question, you can send an e-mail to [Karpman@NLC.org](mailto:Karpman@NLC.org). I would also like to ask the operator at this moment, if you could come on at this moment and give some instructions to those who may want to ask a live question.

*OPERATOR:* If you would like to ask a question, you may press \*1 on your telephone keypad to be placed into the queue.

*ANDREWS:* So, \*1 on your keypad would allow you to ask your question and then we will be checking in with the operator to see if there are any questions in the queue. The other piece that comes to mind for me is also realizing that those that are in the listening audience do not necessarily have the full context of the leadership academy. The National League of Cities, again, in conjunction with the American Association of School Administrators hosted two weeks ago in Nashville, Tenn. We extended, in a competitive selection process, invitations to 14 city/school teams from around the country. Two of them are here on the call with us, that being Lincoln, Calif., and Manchester, N.H., but Nashville, Tenn., was also a city itself that was also extended an invitation, so many of the references that are being made are highlighting one of the sites that the participants attended in Nashville. Croft Middle School highlighted an example of how the school district had creatively addressed obesity issues by looking at nutrition as well as physical activity, but then the other aspect was the opportunity for city and schools to learn from each other and one mention was Savannah, Ga., which is one of the cities that was present.

But then the other aspect to that, that I think, Sue, you started to touch upon, that I wanted to toss out to both Jerry and to you, Sue, really from a city lens, and maybe even, Frank, from your experience as well, is the identification of the key people. Those key stakeholders or individuals within the city or in the school district that you felt needed to be a part of this process. If you were to kind of think about the work that happened in Lincoln and also in Manchester, could you talk a little bit about who those key individuals were that you felt, through the process. Jerry, did you want to go first?

*JOHNSON:* I will. The Youth Task Force, as I said, is a broad representative of the community. We have representatives from the school district. We have youth that were nominated by the school superintendent and his staff. We have service clubs represented. We have the mayor who is on the task force himself. There is another council person, myself, and the school superintendent also sits on the task force. We have the business community representatives. The Chamber is on the board. So, like I said. It is a broad cross section with the community leadership and I agree. It is really important to have that top level involvement and commitment.

*BASS:* Can I just cut in for a minute?

*JOHNSON:* Yeah, Absolutely.

*BASS:* I think that, as Jerry was saying, obviously, you have to have consensus builders on this project and you have to get a wide cross section of people to jump on it if it is going to happen, but before that is going to take place, you have to have the lightning rods that are going to say, "this is a great thing" and have to go out and sell it. And that is where Sue comes into play, because Sue, representing the health department, you know, mobilized her people and that includes the director of nurses and the director of the health department; the pediatrician who was in charge of all of our kids, getting those people to become intricately involved. And they came over to the school side and said, "Look, here is what we are finding and here is what we are

seeing, can you help us out?” Then, we became active participants and once we became involved, then it was a lot easier for us to kind of let the dominos start falling on the school side and then again, once you get the school behind this, now it is out to the community and it is a lot easier to pull it through, once you have all those other dominos set up.

**ANDREWS:** Good point. Sue, any thoughts on your part, in terms of key people that you felt were critical to the work that the city took in Manchester?

**SHEEHY:** Yes, I mean I think initially we looked at the smaller committees and we were kind of doing the same things and if we did not talk to each other and realize that we were doing these things. You know, I think it is important to kind of focus on what we are looking to do here. You know, having a school board member on our school health advisory committee is a big help. She gives us that insight. You know, having a media person or a media smart person on our school healthy advisory committee, they give you a different outlook on it completely, the making it happen coalition and certainly the area hospitals are very key. They help community leaders too and community outreach people, so it is great to have them on these committees. But, you know, the big business portion of it – we have a Verizon Center. It is an indoor arena and it is great to have someone on that committee. You know, that is what we are looking at doing and they can certainly... you know, we are in New England, so we have snow, so it is great to be able to have the kids be able to go somewhere and exercise.

**ANDREWS:** So, a question for the panel is how do you avoid potential “turf issues” between city and the school district?

**BASS:** Well, I think again, my knee-jerk reaction would be to make sure that the mayor is involved. If the mayor is involved, it is easy, because he is going to take all the credit and take all the heat and everyone else just kind falls under him or her, and it makes it a lot easier. Going back to my original point, you have to have a certain amount of synergy, and that is Sue and I, I mean, we work very well together and that cross between school and health department, I think, has been very significant in terms of our ability to generate other individuals and groups to want to play ball. So, “turf” has never really been an issue for us, only because both Sue and I are both so excited about the program and the opportunity and I think it bears mentioning to you listeners, Leon, that this obesity thing is not just, “Okay, kids are just a little bit overweight.” I mean this is a national phenomenon that the CDC (Center for Disease Control) is now tracking and it only becomes a pre-cursor to a whole host of other issues, whether it is diabetes, high blood pressure, or something else, and the list goes on and on. And, if you allow this to continue, you are going to tax the healthcare system like there is no tomorrow. So this is a huge issue and Sue and I are firm believers that this is a program that has to happen and if it doesn’t, we are going to pay for it down the road.

**JOHNSON:** Yeah. Let me address the issue just from the point of shared facilities, because sometimes you do have turf issues there. What we have done to address that is that we have a master joint use agreement, which spells out the policy of both the board of education and the city council that this is what we expect and then for each individual school/park, we have a separate joint use agreement that speaks specifically to that facility and who is responsible for

programming, who is responsible for maintenance, who is responsible for utilities and that sort of thing. In spite of our best efforts, it is absolutely critical that the principal be on board in backing the joint use concept and that has been made easier by the full commitment of the school superintendent and the marching orders that he provides.

*SHEEHY:* You know, I think with the wellness policy, for example, we really need to support of the superintendent. Of course, they have been a great help to us in passing student wellness policies before the board, but now that we want to get a little stricter and start to evaluate this policy, because, let's face it, the kids spend 60 percent of their day in school, so 60 percent of their intake is in school, between breakfast and lunch, snack time and for some after school programs. You know, we said to the mayor that we would like to have your backing on this also and I think this would help. Because sometimes school board members will work, obviously, from an academic standpoint and sometimes, more frequently, from a financial standpoint. So, we want to get that point across that the health and academics are very closely related.

*ANDREWS:* Another question has come in from Lake Charles, La. What are some specific incentives that can be used to get children to participate in an obesity prevention program in a summer recreation program?

*SHEEHY:* Can I go?

*ANDREWS:* Absolutely.

*SHEEHY:* Okay. Over the years, I can give you "Get Moving Manchester," as an example and we have tried all these different programs, some with great success, and others with a lot of learning curves, and I think that we have tried, you know, the give-aways that we have given, I cannot even begin to tell you how Indian Head Athletics, the sports store in Manchester, what they have given the kids. I mean, each school receives hats, bats, volleyballs and tennis racquets. I mean I just could not believe the things that I was dividing up into 18 schools, but in the end, the health teachers have told us that the fitness certificates or the fitness patch from the mayor means so much more to these kids than their stickers and their freebees and raffle tickets and all that, than all of those free gifts. So, I found that to be very interesting. So, sometimes it is more of a recognition type of thing, rather than what type of give always you want to give them.

*JOHNSON:* Yeah. That pretty much parallels my experiences as well. The certificates are very much appreciated.

*OPERATOR:* We have a question on the line from Audrey Lord-Houseman.

*ANDREWS:* Hi, Audrey.

*LORD-HOUSEMAN:* Hi.

**CUTTLES:** Hi. I am also here. I am Jean Cuttles. I am with the Alvin Unified School District, working with wellness implementation and I have a question for Frank and Susan. We have a very similar make-up, if you will, even though we do not have our refugee location task that you do. We have 84 different languages here in the district and I am just curious, you talked about a lot of community engagement. What were some of the specific strategies and resources that you were able to garner in order to communicate across differences?

**BASS:** Well, I think, to answer your question, it is a large one. We had to first find out where are the leaders of these various groups coming from. What is their position? How do they respond to communication issues? How well are their language skills in terms of English? Do we need to have interpreters to help us out? And so, slowly, over time, we began to learn who the players were within these various ethnic centers that have taken up residence here in Manchester and once we got to them, then it was a lot easier to get the parents to come out, because basically, they did it for us. And if we could gain their trust and understanding and friendship, if you will, it was a lot easier to have the parents buy into whatever it was that we wanted to have them do. We are now using that, obviously, to go well beyond obesity and look at issues of why their kids might not be coming to school, how to respond to disciplinary issues. What kinds of collegiate opportunities might be available?

So, we have opened up a whole new channel in terms of communicating to them about choices that their kids can make and choices that they can make as parents, in terms of how best to interface with the schools. As I am sure you have experienced, many of these cultures are very fearful about coming into the schools or responding to the school in any direct manner, so we have had to bridge some of those culture gaps, if you will. But once we got them into a position of listening to us, it was a lot easier to get these fun nights and other organizational activities off the ground and then again, as I think we have said 100 times today, and I think it bears repeating, getting the mayor to play ball with us is huge.

**SHEEHY:** I have a couple of things. Obviously, we have had to adjust our materials to meet these different groups of people and I think, for one, we have translated different educational materials for them. That is one thing. We also used a lot of visuals in our materials and a group called – you might have to help me on this, Frank – Way Home. It is a peer group that actually goes into their homes and educates them in whatever particular topic that it might need to be. The health department and the city use them quite a bit. They have been a great help to us. I am trying to think of something else. I had one more thing, but I am sure that I will think of it as we talk. It is not coming to me.

**ANDREWS:** So, for both Lincoln and Manchester, is there a challenge that you face in trying to show the connection between the work you do and the outcomes of the work, in terms of the impact that it is having on children that you are serving.

**BASS:** Well, the challenge for us is going to be continuation. You know, how do you sustain the momentum that we have started to generate here? I think it is easy to get people excited about new opportunities. You know, soon that excitement is going to wear off and how do you keep this thing going? That is going to be the challenge. It is great for us, you know, because we have this new marathon coming up next year, so that will be an easy catch for us to

bring a lot of people into the fold, but that is going to pass and then you have to figure out something else to do. So, the challenge for Sue and I, as well as the others that we interface with is going to be to create some sort of sustaining program. I think as we had mentioned, Leon, you have to draw a thread through all of this. Something has to connect it all up. You can't just keep coming up with, "Well, let's do the Presidential Range. Let's do Walking to the Moon." You can't keep doing that. You have to have a general thread that connects the whole thing together, so that is the challenge that lies before us, I think.

*ANDREWS:* Excellently said.

*JOHNSON:* Yeah.

*SHEEHY:* And over the years, I have tried very hard to collect data. It is very difficult with nutrition or showing the decreasing of the BMI. Initially, we looked at our menu percentages and that was phenomenal. When I first started, we changed the menu. Maybe it needed the USDA suggestions on sodium, fat and fiber. Back then, they were our only strong recommendations and we saw a big increase in meal participation. So, that was huge.

Then over the years, we looked at BMI. BMI has pretty much been maintained in Manchester, and then we tried looking at behavioral types of things; having parents fill out surveys and doing interviews and those are great, but you want some hard facts, so that where with our group, we had Tammy Martin come with us. She is involved in the Physical Best program and that is what we planned on doing when Frank had discussed that we were trying to partner into a pilot in two of our schools. We will be using not only just the BMI, but we will also be looking at using this Physical Best, which is almost like the President's Physical Fitness Challenge test. So, that will be great to have that information too. And it motivates kids. They are not always thinking about their weight or their BMI. We do not want them looking at that. We want them thinking in terms of health and what they can do from a physical activity standpoint.

*ANDREWS:* Yeah. And so, the big 800 pound gorilla question in the room here is the question around funding. So, many of the overall questions that the listening audience would be very much interested in hearing is how does funding change or re-prioritize in the city's efforts both in Lincoln and Manchester, really to focus your attention on these issues. I mean, does it require a change in how funding is prioritized or is looking at what you are currently doing and it is just more of a readjusting programming and priorities in what you are currently funding?

*JOHNSON:* I tried to address that in Lincoln by actually changing the name of the recreation department to recreation and wellness just to bring it to a focus and trying to establish that sustainability that Frank is after and I am hoping that by putting it up front, it will have some lasting benefit.

*BASS:* I think, Leon, the problem is that it is easy at this point to get local businesses or the hospitals to help us out and put up the necessary monies and resources to have these programs take off, but again, back to the issue of sustainability. You cannot keep going back to these people year after year. You are going to have to now parlay that support and that interest

into a reprioritizing of your budgetary monies that are available to you. So, back to Jerry's point, I think, you have to do that. Does that mean that the district hires a full time K-12 physical education wellness coordinator, or something along those lines, like Savannah, Ga., has? Does it mean that the mayor's office changes their priorities, in terms of you know, where funding goes towards these kinds of issues? You know, I think that we have to get to that point, relatively soon, because the veneer is going to wear off here after a while, and the businesses are going to say, "Hey, I helped you guys out for the last two years, so, come on now." Leon, I mean this falls right into your bailiwick, because you guys will put out grants and you will say, "Okay, look city or school system, we want to help you out." So, you give us monies for let's say a year or two or you give us technical support. The idea behind that is that once you get it going, you are going to find a way to sustain that through your own funding mechanisms, and I think that is the challenge before us. How do we convince our funding fathers, if you will, how to reprioritize issues so that these things are covered and we do not have to rely on the largesse of our business industry or goodwill.

*JOHNSON:* I would just add for the other listeners here, that the federal government is putting out money this year in much larger quantities than was available before, in the Safer House and School Program, which will allow many more communities to participate in that program, which we found very valuable in Lincoln. Actually, the state of California funded Safer House and Schools and I suppose was the model for the federal legislation that has since been adopted.

*ANDREWS:* Yeah. That is a good plug. Several questions are coming in. I am not sure that we will get to them all, given our time frame, but I wanted to start focusing on these questions. Here from Fairfax County, Va., what role has your local parks and recreations department played in efforts to increase activity in your community? And then the other part of that question is, what suggestions can you give parks and recreations departments to become seen and strong and key resources in combating youth obesity?

*JOHNSON:* I think that is central to the mission of the recreation department and I am trying to make sure that that is the focus of or recreation department.

*SHEEHY:* There is a program through our city called the "Weed and Seed" program and they are looking at revitalizing, believe it or not, a cemetery, in Manchester for people to walk through, to use as almost as a park, in a sense. The kids cannot play ball, but there is an area where they can walk through it and it can be very charming from how they are describing it and that project has been in the works for the last couple of years. You know, I think it is challenging. I think you need to get the parks and recreation department involved and that is actually one on our list and I think through that safe routes, that would be a great opportunity to have them involved with the sidewalk areas, keeping those fit for walking.

*BASS:* Yeah, and I think what Jerry said is right on the money. Parks and Recreation has to be a driving force in this. This is part of their mantra. This is who they are. They need to step up and be a significant player here, as opposed to, "Okay, schools and city, you come up with some sort of creative spin." They should be doing the lion's share of the work here and I

think we just have to, again, present that in a way that makes it more palatable to them, if that is possible.

*ANDREWS:* And also to the listener that asked the question, there were actually four or five recommendations that we captured in the work we did over the last year, looking at how cities are utilizing parks and recreation. That includes sponsoring free and low cost programs that encourage physical activity; expanding parks and recreation facilities in undeserved neighborhoods and a third being kind of able to build bridges to other agencies and community groups, as well as insuring that the city recreation program serves within the programs that the parks and recreation focus on. Their programs may be serving more nutritious foods, as another way of utilizing it and several of these are examples that we found around the country on how cities are using their parks and recreations to do that. Before I ask another question, these questions are coming by e-mail, I wanted to stop and ask the operator if there are any other calls in the queue?

*OPERATOR:* We have Eileen Rathburton on the line.

*ANDREWS:* Okay. Sure. Hi, Eileen.

*RATHBURTON:* Hi. My question is in regards to the “Get Moving Manchester.” Do we have access to that program online or something so that we can see what that is about?

*SHEEHY:* Yes. It is on our Web site, the description of it. I also believe that it is updated and if it is not, it is on its way to be updated this month. This is updated monthly. We also share the “Get Moving Manchester” materials with other districts, so we have had meetings where districts across the state have come to look at our materials. So, I would be more than happy to share those materials with you.

*ANDREWS:* Do you want to share the Web site with the listening audience?

*SHEEHY:* Sure. It is [www.mansd.org](http://www.mansd.org) and you choose, Departments, Food Service and then Teen Nutrition.

*ANDREWS:* So, it is [www.mansd.org](http://www.mansd.org) ?

*SHEEHY:* Yes. It is short for Manchester school district.

*ANDREWS:* Great. So, let’s ask another question here. We are towards the end and I know time is short and it is fun when we are all together, but I know that it is only an hour, so we will probably pose one more question and do closing thoughts. Does that sound good to you guys?

*SHEEHY:* Yes, that sounds great.

*ANDREWS:* So, here is a question from Lexington, Neb. Has anyone found issues between the targeted population, that being obese children and already fit children? So, in other words, are

some problem children reluctant to participate in activities where they will essentially be shown out by other athletes? Are there strategies to overcome this?

*BASS:* Well, in Manchester, and let's go back to Sue's program, "Get Moving Manchester," we have avoided that, because it does not really favor the athlete or the kid who is trim and fit or any of those things. It is something that anyone can participate in and I think as we do this program that I mentioned earlier, this pilot in the spring, it will be the same type of approach so that no one is going to feel that they are out of place and I think it is also incumbent upon us to try and reward not only the kid who has the biggest reduction, in terms of their BMI index, but also to reward the kid who is on the other end of the scale, because we do want to promote and acknowledge physically fit kids and healthy kids. So, that is very different than the athlete. I am not talking about athletic ability, I am just talking about overall fitness and you know, BMI levels.

*SHEEHY:* I agree with Frank. Most of our parameters tend to be for all the children so we avoid a lot of that, but we have had parents say that, "My kid is thin, there is no problem with my child," and we will say, you know, you have to be healthy from the inside out, so we do try to approach it from that standpoint. We did have a program called Healthy Hearts, a couple of years ago, where we targeted the obese children and what we found in the end was that we ended up having their brothers and sisters, siblings, attend and it ended up being a mixture of kids and that actually was very good. That went a lot better because some of the children that are obese may not want to exercise and it almost motivated them and made them feel like it wasn't a program for just the obese kids. That actually happened accidentally and it worked out well.

*JOHNSON:* One of the things that we ran into – we are not exactly on point, but when we were having these programs encouraging people to walk to school and we had incentives that were being provided for those that did exercise regularly and had so many steps per day, that the kids that were a little bit further out and did have to take a school bus to school, they were inadvertently being omitted from the program, and so the principals took great effort to involve them by providing an opportunity for them to walk on the school track and to have some alternative ways of getting their steps in for the day.

*ANDREWS:* Great. Operator, are there any calls in queue before we close the line?

*OPERATOR:* No, there are no questions in queue.

*ANDREWS:* Okay. Great. Thank you very much. So, I wanted to give each of the panelists an opportunity to kind of share closing remarks, last reflections, or some parting words for our listening audience. I will randomly start with Frank and then maybe we can go from Frank, to Sue to Jerry. How does that sound?

*SHEEHY:* That sounds good.

*BASS:* Thank you, Leon. It was a pleasure to be a part of this. It is always interesting and fascinating to find out what other people think about this issue and how they are responding

to it. I think the two or three things that really jump out at me that are most important, are again, as Sue mentioned earlier, is the sharing. It is the opportunity to understand what other districts are doing and the pit falls and problems that they have had to encounter and you know, how they have experienced that. It is so exciting to, for example, team up with Savannah, Ga., and look at the prospect of going down there and visiting their schools and their city and finding out what programs that they have in place. How does that help us to see our own school in our own city? I think as you had said, Leon, it is looking at the world through those differing lenses and I think that that is really helpful in terms of the kinds of programs and opportunities that we are trying to generate on behalf of the kids and the other big thing is that it is nice to know that there are other cities and school districts out there that are experiencing the same kinds of problems and I think with all of us being in it together, so to speak, there is a certain camaraderie that comes out of that that is really helpful, in terms of trying to put something forward that is going to have a lasting impact on our schools and our cities.

*ANDREWS:* Great. Thank you, Frank for your advocacy, your passion and energy and for joining us on this call.

*BASS:* Thank you. My pleasure.

*ANDREWS:* Sue, any departing words?

*SHEEHY:* A lot of what Frank said, I really agree with; you know, being partners and partnering with the community. I think in terms of funding, the funds are out there, you just have to be a part of these groups and make the puzzles and always look for new ideas. I mean my nutrition interns really help with those new ideas and I am on the Axis of Healthy Kids Committee, the state group and they come up with different ideas. So, always be open to new ideas, because someone may have thought of a different way of doing it and it could be your success.

*ANDREWS:* Thank you, Sue. Again, also thank you for your participation on behalf of the city of Manchester and also the commitment that you are making to make this an issue within the city.

*SHEEHY:* Great. You are welcome.

*ANDREWS:* Jerry, you have the final thoughts. You are the one leaving everyone excited and energized about what they can do in their city. You have the huge charge of setting the standard.

*JOHNSON:* I will leave that to you. But, I, like so many experiences like this, I tend to go away with more ideas, certainly, that I started with and one such idea that I am coming away with was that “Get Moving Manchester” program and I am certainly going to go back and visit that Web site and steal what I can from our friends in Manchester.

*ANDREWS:* I would like to thank you Jerry, also for your participation. I mean I was extremely excited to see the work that is happening in Lincoln, California, the many steps that

you guys have already take towards making this a priority in your city and also thanks for joining us on the call.

*JOHNSON:* You are quite welcome.

*ANDREWS:* As for our listening audience, I want to remind you that there is a recent publication that has been released by the National League of Cities. It is called “Combating Childhood Obesity.” It is in our series of action kits, that highlights some practical steps that cities can take to combat childhood obesity, looking at several of these issues that we talked about on the phone, looking at forging partnerships and looking at promoting activity and nutritious foods and utilizing parks and recreations and in some cases, reshaping the environment, as it relates to side walks and other types of strategies from an environmental standpoint, so if you are interested in ordering a copy of the Action Kit, you can either visit our Web site at [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef) or e-mail at [iyef@nlc.org](mailto:iyef@nlc.org). If you are interested in just general more information about the work, at the National League of Cities around combating childhood obesity, you can contact me directly. My name is Leon Andrews. I am program director for youth development here and my number is 202-626-3039 or you can e-mail me at [Andrews@nlc.org](mailto:Andrews@nlc.org). Thanks, everyone for joining us on the listening audience and thank you for my panel. You all have a great day.