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**October 15**

September 4, 2010

# City's Efforts Fail to Dent Child Obesity

By **ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS**

New York City schoolchildren are as heavy, or perhaps even heavier, than the national average, despite the [Bloomberg administration's](#) dogged efforts to improve the health of city residents, according to new data from the city's health department.

Two out of five, or 40 percent, of the nearly 637,000 children in kindergarten through the eighth grade were found to be overweight or obese in the 2008-9 school year. Those rates were the same as in the previous year, according to a survey of both school years that is to be released on Sunday.

That compares with 35.5 percent of 6- to 11-year-olds nationally, according to data from the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Among New York City children who were overweight, 22 percent were obese, compared with 19.6 percent nationally.

"I'm sorry to say it's in line with the nation, but we're certainly working hard to get it down from here," said Cathy Nonas, the director of physical activity and nutrition for the city's [Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#).

The numbers were broken down by ZIP code and showed that less-affluent neighborhoods had the most severe problems. In the 2008-9 school year, the highest rates were found in Corona, Queens, where 51 percent of schoolchildren were overweight or obese. That was followed by parts of Harlem, with 48 to 49 percent, and Washington Heights, with 47 percent.

In contrast, some of the city's wealthiest areas had the healthiest children. The West 60s near the Hudson River in Manhattan had the smallest share of overweight or obese children (11.7

percent), followed by part of TriBeCa (15 percent), SoHo (17.7 percent) and the East 50s, including Turtle Bay and Sutton Place (18.3 percent).

In the 2007-8 school year, Hunts Point in the Bronx had the highest rates. Other areas with overweight and obesity rates of 45 percent or higher included East Harlem, parts of Bushwick and Williamsburg in Brooklyn, and Astoria Heights and part of Jackson Heights in Queens.

Ms. Nonas suggested that the lack of change from 2007 to 2009 could signal the beginning of a decline. The numbers were also down slightly from 2003, when 19 percent of city schoolchildren were overweight and 24 percent were obese.

Yet she said it would be naïve to think that measures like banning [trans fats](#) and posting the calories of foods served in restaurants would be enough to bring about a decline in childhood obesity.

She added that the city would use the data to decide where to concentrate its exercise and nutrition programs. Since the data was collected, she said, the city had substituted milk that is 1 percent fat for regular milk, or skim for chocolate milk, and had banned sugar-sweetened beverages from school vending machines. The school system has also restricted bake sales to once a month.

She said the health department and the school system were introducing a pilot project to train 3,000 teachers, from kindergarten through the third grade, in exercises that children can do during classroom breaks. One routine has children pretending they are cabdrivers who have to bend down to go through a tunnel and jump to get over a pothole.

The data was collected through the city's [Fitnessgram](#) program, in which children in kindergarten through eighth grade had their height and weight measured and converted into body mass index. The individual results, including the results of a physical fitness test, were sent to parents.