

# Preliminary Report

Shaping America's Youth® Town Meeting  
 January 21, 2006  
 Memphis, Tennessee



Nearly 1,000 residents of Memphis and the Mid-South Region gathered on January 21st at the Cook Convention Center in Memphis to identify what all sectors of the community can do to create healthier lifestyles for children. The purpose of the meeting was to develop and gather support for obesity prevention programs in the Memphis region as well as to gather input for a National Action Plan, a detailed plan that will provide unified direction to nationwide efforts to improve nutrition and increase physical activity among children.

The meeting was convened by Shaping America's Youth® (SAY) a unique public-private initiative of Shaping America's Health: Association for Weight Management and Obesity Prevention. SAY® was created in 2003 to bring together the efforts of many groups and programs working to combat physical inactivity and inadequate nutrition among children. SAY® seeks to identify community programs and solicit grassroots input in order to find effective ways to promote childhood exercise and healthy eating and how to put these into action. The meeting was hosted locally by Healthy Memphis Common Table, a Memphis based non-profit that seeks to significantly reduce the incidence of obesity and diabetes in the Mid-South region, particularly among children in 2006.



Participation in the meeting was free and open to all. Outreach was conducted through community organizations, events and print coverage, as well as extensive PSAs on radio and TV. In addition, SAY® organizers offered free childcare, transportation and language translation in order to encourage participation by a diverse cross-section of the Memphis community.

*Participants took an exercise break during the Shaping America's Youth® Town Meeting (Photo by Lisa Buser)*

## Who Attended the Shaping America's Youth® Town Meeting?

Shaping America's Youth sought to represent the diversity of the Memphis area. Participants' demographics are compared below to the make up of the city, according to 2000 U.S. Census Data.

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Jan. 21</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Jan. 21</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Female	72%	52%	African-American/Black	57%	62%
Male	28%	48%	Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	1%
<u>Age</u>			Caucasian	31%	32%
15-24	35%	15%	Hispanic/Latino	3%	4%
25-34	11%	16%	Native American	1%	<1%
35-44	18%	13%	Mixed Race	1%	<1%
45-54	21%	15%	Other	2%	1%
55-64	9%	9%	<u>Affiliations Represented**</u>		
65 and better	6%	10%	Youth	33%	
<u>Household Income*</u>			Parents/Guardians	43%	
Less than \$25,000	9%	37%	Educators/Schools	30%	
\$25,000 – 49,999	15%	33%	Community Leaders/ Service Providers	29%	
\$50,000 – 74,999	17%	16%	Business/Private Sector	16%	
\$75,000 – 99,999	15%	7%	Healthcare Community	22%	
\$100,000 and over	25%	7%	Legislators/Policymakers	3%	

\*19% Not sure of their household income

\*\*May total more than 100% due to multiple affiliations



## How Did the Meeting Work?

Shaping America's Youth®, which registered over 1,000 participants from throughout the Memphis area, enlisted the talent and technology of AmericaSpeaks, a national non-profit and nonpartisan group that developed a remarkably effective real-time process to generate information and ideas.

To increase participation and input, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting® divided the 1,000 participants into small groups of 10. A trained facilitator worked with each small group throughout the day to ensure each person had an opportunity to share their opinion. Throughout the day, the meeting's lead moderators presented discussion questions to the group. The ideas from each discussion were collected through networked computers stationed at each table. A team of data analysts reviewed the comments from all of the tables simultaneously and reported the common ideas back to the group almost immediately.

Then, using keypad polling devices, the participants reviewed and prioritized these ideas in order to develop a clear plan for action. The results from the polls were reported instantly to the group via large video screens. Polling was used both to gather demographic information and to give participants the opportunity to prioritize options.

Before their discussions began, participants had an opportunity to learn more about the issue. SAY® developed a comprehensive issue guide that provided information about the causes and prevalence of inactivity and poor nutrition among children in Memphis, the state of Tennessee, and the nation. Participants listened to a brief presentation about these issues, reviewed the issue guide, and discussed these issues in detail. In addition, local and national issue experts were available throughout the program to address specific, issue-related questions generated by the tables.

## Participation of Political & Community Leaders

Local, state and national leaders have strongly supported the SAY initiative and the Memphis Town Meeting. Town Meeting speakers included Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner Kenneth Robinson, M.D., and Assistant U.S. Surgeon General Woodie Kessel, M.D. In addition, Senators William Frist and Ron Wyden, and Congressman Harold Ford, Jr. addressed the group and expressed their support for the initiative via videotape.

At the end of the day, Shelby County Mayor A.C. Wharton thanked the participants for their time and work, and committed his office to working with Healthy Memphis Common Table and the public to improve the well-being of our children.

## Family Actions

Since families have the greatest single impact on a child's eating and activity habits, participants began their discussions by considering what actions could be taken within families to improve nutrition and increase activity among their children. Participants identified many actions specific to the following age ranges, and these were ranked as the highest priorities:

### Prenatal to 5 Years Old

- Plan healthy meals and food shopping
- Make healthy snacks available at home -"veggies and fruits always there"
- Breastfeed instead of bottle feed

### 6-11 Years Old

- Parents should set good examples for food and exercise
- Educate ourselves and our families about what is healthy
- Eat homemade meals together as a family

### 12-19 Years Old

- Educate ourselves and our families about what is healthy
- Provide healthy foods and snacks at home and school
- Families plan and do physical activities together
- Get involved in sports and community activities

## Barriers to Family Actions

Having addressed the actions that families could take to benefit their children's health, the participants then discussed barriers that can impede these actions. By identifying these barriers early in the day, participants were encouraged to address these barriers in the future discussions and to develop strategies to overcome them. (Please note that participants were not asked to rank barriers – all will be considered in detail by SAY® and Healthy Memphis Common Table in future planning and for inclusion in the National Action Plan.) Participants identified a variety of barriers for families with children of various ages, and the following examples appeared across multiple age ranges:

- Healthy foods are more expensive
  - Fast foods are easily accessible and marketed to children
  - Lack of access to safe places to play outside
  - Time constraints of working families
  - Parents don't recognize value of nutrition and exercise
  - Pressure to give in to kids' request for junk food
  - Accessibility and popularity of TV and video games
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## Supporting Families

Moving beyond families, participants turned their attention to the other members of the community with a stake in improving children's health. While families play a central role in impacting children's behaviors, families are strongly impacted by the social and cultural context around them. Participants were asked to identify specific ways that these stakeholder groups could support families in the priority actions identified earlier in the day. Following are recommended actions, in order of priority, for each of the stakeholders:

### Educators/Schools

- Require physical activity and health classes in schools
- Increase funding for health education & physical activity, and reduce family costs for activities
- Nutrition education for parents, students, and teachers

### Community Leaders/Service Providers

- Use community centers for nutrition education and physical activity
- Churches should play an active role in educating and providing healthy food and activities
- Create more parks & paths for walking and biking

### Legislators/Policy Makers

- Increase and mandate physical education, home economics, and health classes in schools (there was overwhelming support for this priority)

### Healthcare Community

- Increase emphasis on healthy diet and exercise by educating every person about their main health risks and help patients set personal health improvement goals
- Expand and promote incentive programs for healthy living by insurers, employers, and government
- Increase health promotion, including BMI and fitness programs, with more nurses and dietitians in schools

### Business/Private Sector

- Provide preventive health benefits and policies for employees (e.g., policies, incentives, exercise options, training, flex time)
  - Support organizations that promote good health (e.g., donations, public service advertising, school and neighborhood programs)
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## Creating Partnerships

Having identified actions of individual stakeholders, participants extended the discussion to consider actions that would require combined efforts among two or more stakeholders. SAY® and Healthy Memphis Common Table will examine all of the suggestions in detail after the meeting. Participants identified the following partnership suggestions:

- Food organizations could partner with businesses to sponsor camps for kids
- To provide more opportunities for physical activity, schools could commit to serve as community centers after school-time, corporations could absorb the operating costs, city park staff could agree to operate activities, and civic clubs offer to serve as volunteers.
- To provide PE in schools, policy-makers could pursue legislative requirements, businesses could sponsor park development and healthcare providers could assist with curriculum/physical assessments.
- Community businesses could have town meetings to get ideas to promote healthy lifestyles in community.
- Big businesses could provide grants and support to non-profits to improve nutrition and fitness, research and programs
- Healthcare providers, businesses and government could create competitions among schools for healthiest school environments.

## National Actions

Recognizing that local and regional efforts to promote change will benefit from commitment on a national level, participants considered what actions might be taken by national leaders and institutions to help improve nutrition and increase activity among children. The following actions were identified and ranked in order of their potential impact:

- Educators should collaborate with corporations and federal agencies to fund national initiatives for healthy lifestyles and after school programs (35%)
  - Support federal funding for physical education and President's physical fitness program (18%)
  - Media campaigns to promote good nutrition and exercise (10%)
  - National insurance carriers should take actions to promote and support good nutrition and preventive health (10%)
  - National PTA should promote expansion of physical education and nutrition (8%)
  - Create tax incentives for healthy food choices (6%)
  - Support federal policies to promote nutrition labeling and better nutrition in schools (5%)
  - National chains should implement consistent policies to promote healthy options in all stores (4%)
  - Create tax incentives for healthy food choices (3%)
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## Next Steps

In the final stage of the meeting, participants broke into "action planning" groups to discuss how to implement these ideas within the Memphis region. Shelby County Mayor AC Wharton was on hand during this section of the program to hear from participants and learn how to support their continued actions.

Following today's meeting; members of the community will be invited to participate in projects designed implement the recommendations generated during the day. The first follow-up meeting, sponsored by Healthy Memphis Common Table, is scheduled for February 18, 2006. Please visit [www.healthymemphis.org](http://www.healthymemphis.org) for details about this meeting. Healthy Memphis Common Table has pledged to coordinate new projects that emerge from the meeting over the next year.

The next Town Meeting is scheduled for Dallas, TX on April 22, 2006. Registration for the Dallas SAY®Town Meeting is available at <http://meetings.shapingamericasyouth.org>. Individuals interested in further information about SAY® and its activities should register on the SAY® Network at <http://www.shapingamericasyouth.org>. Program directors of community and national initiatives targeting physical activity and nutrition in children should register their programs and complete the SAY® survey at <http://www.shapingamericasyouth.org>.

In late 2006, recommendations from all the Shaping America's Youth® Town Meetings will be presented to national leaders representing Congress, governmental agencies, professional organizations and non-profits as a proposal for a National Action Plan to reverse the incidence of childhood overweight.

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## Participant Evaluations

Satisfaction with the meeting and its likely outcomes was very high. Using keypad polling devices, 71% said the meeting was "excellent" and another 23% said it was "good." When asked to rate the meeting's technological tools, 85% indicated they felt the meeting technology was "excellent" and 12% said it was "good."

Furthermore, when asked whether they were confident that something would happen as a result of the meeting, 69% of participants expressed that they were either "very confident" or "confident."

<p><u>Please Note:</u> Complete results from the Town Hall Meeting will be available in the coming weeks on the SAY® website: <a href="http://www.shapingamericasyouth.org">www.shapingamericasyouth.org</a></p>
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