

### Parents Support Big Behavior

Indiana has finally made national headlines! After grueling years of dedication and hard work, Hoosiers have ranked themselves eighth among states... for their adult obesity rate. Woohoo! The adult obesity rate is currently 31.4%, slightly higher than last year (“Indiana still 8th most obese state in U.S., new study reports”).

Of course, as any state who won a top ten national ranking would, Indiana celebrated this award by conducting a BMI (body mass index – ratio based on height and mass) survey of third graders earlier this month to discover who, in about fifteen years, will be contributing to this growing competition. However, 40 of 99 elementary schools declined to take part in the survey because parents refused to allow their children’s height and weight to be measured for *privacy* reasons (“State Conducts Body Mass Index Study of Third-Graders”).

The American Medical Association currently defines obesity as a disease, so why is testing for it any different from testing for other ailments? Obesity is equally dangerous, if not more than, as other common child illnesses, such as whooping cough or even cancer. Obesity causes cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke; the list goes on and on! Parents are concerned when their children have even the slightest cold. So why aren’t they concerned with serious, life-threatening conditions, too?

Despite these threats, parents complain that sending these letters home, and the survey in general, could lead to, the dreaded “b-word,” bullying, a concern that’s obviously more substantial than the lives of their own children. Parents fear for their children and desire to protect them to the best of their abilities, and that’s sweet and all, but they won’t be able to do that forever. Take the new healthcare laws, for example. It allows health insurance companies to institute extra costs for obese people, or they are not required to provide full coverage to their overweight employees (“Your

Company Is About to Get a Lot More Interested in Your Waistline”). Unlike parents, who constantly worry about preserving their child’s image and protecting their feelings, insurance companies will be brutally honest about the obesity, and the kids will have to pay for it, whether that’s with money or their own life; it’s hard to say.

Perhaps the thing that parents dread most about these letters is not that their child is at risk of various life-threatening conditions or that they could face serious bullying, but that these letters are a poor, and simply embarrassing, reflection of the parents themselves. In essence, these letters are an attack against their parenting style and the way they raise their children.

Truly, though, whose fault is it? Parents teach their children healthy, or unhealthy, habits. They provide the child’s nourishment. There is no denying the fact that parents influence their child’s weight. Is it fair for parents to allow their child to grow up obese, when the condition will affect them for the rest of their lives?

When results from the survey are published, they will not be specific to any one school, so no one is embarrassed. Yet again, is it truly fair to preserve a school’s reputation when children’s well-being is at stake? Children are suffering because the inability of adults to stand up for their own actions. The survey is not just another number; it is an indicator of where Indiana will be in the national rankings in ten years, eighth or topping the charts at number one?

No one seems to want to be honest when it comes to obesity. But if we’re not honest, who will be? It’s not a matter of if they’ll find out, but when they find out, and who ends up telling them could make all the difference. If not the parents, it’ll be the kids at schools, the insurance companies, or maybe even the cardiovascular disease creeping silently upon its victims.