



Students at P.S. 100 Isaac Clason in the Bronx participate in the Healthy Living initiative. (Credit: EmblemHealth)

9

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1

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# How 4 NYC organizations are bringing nutrition and fitness education to the classroom

By MEREDITH DELISO February 22, 2015

Healthy living is in session at NYC schools.

According to the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, one in five kindergarten students and one in four Head Start children are obese. Several organizations are looking to erase that statistic by bringing nutrition education and fitness programs to the classroom.

"It's a vicious cycle, and we have to break that cycle," said Robert L. Oliver, founder of FAN4Kids, which provides fitness and nutrition education in NYC schools. "All other things being equal, a healthy child will be able to sit in a chair longer, will be able to focus longer, will be able to participate in physical activity more willingly."

From cooking classes to school gardens to tennis lessons, here are four organizations that are helping students make smart, healthy choices and combat the obesity epidemic.

## HEALTHY LIVING

Eighteen public elementary and middle schools throughout the city and counting are participating in a new initiative from EmblemHealth and New York Junior Tennis and Learning to help students live a healthier lifestyle. Launched earlier this month, the after-school program provides nutritious snacks, lessons on the food groups, exercise, such as tennis, and the importance of healthy decision making. It also gives students a "Bodega Buddy," a card that can be clipped to backpacks to remind students to make healthy food choices.



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### GREEN BRONX MACHINE

What started as an after-school program where high school students could learn how to grow food using low-cost, portable technology has turned into a nonprofit that's installed more than 100 gardens at New York City schools. The educational initiative has drawn attention from the likes of the Disney Channel, Progressive and Office Depot, and the school was recognized by the NYC Strategic Alliance for Health as a Citywide School of Excellence. Founder Stephen Ritz, a teacher at P.S. 55 in the South Bronx, is also one of 10 finalists in the Varkey Foundation's \$1 million Global Teacher Prize, with the winner to be announced next month. wins, Ritz says he will use the money toward transforming the school's library into a health and wellness center that will feature commercial and teaching farms, a teaching kitchen and resource center.



### FAN4KIDS

The "FAN" in this nonprofit's name stands for "fitness and nutrition." Founded in 2004, it looks to combat poor eating habits by educating students on how to eat healthy and lead an active lifestyle using a program developed in part with the Center for Obesity Research and Intervention. "Our first-graders know which cereals are better choices based on the number of grams of sugar," Oliver said. The in-school program provides fitness and nutrition classes throughout the school year at nearly a dozen NYC elementary schools, including P.S. 224 in Flushing, aka The Active Learning Elementary School, which FAN4Kids helped found in 2008. Focused on nutrition and physical education, it was also the first school in the city to serve an all-vegetarian lunch menu.

### COOKSHOP

Founded more than 20 years ago, this Food Bank For New York City initiative reaches more than 40,000 students and parents in nearly 2,000 elementary school classrooms across the city. CookShop aims to combat obesity, childhood hunger and diet-related disease through a variety of nutrition education programs that work with students of all ages, teaching them how to make informed decisions about what they eat. There are also workshops geared toward parents and guardians that focus on reading food labels, planning meals, portion sizes and more.



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