Dear Parents,

As always, your child’s health screening will include vision, hearing, dental health, blood pressure, height, and weight. Beginning this year, the Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services also requires the calculation of body mass index (BMI) with a percentile ranking. For the elementary, BMI’s will be shared with parents on students’ hgt/wgt slips and sent home with report cards. On the back of each slip, there is an explanation called titled the “BMI” report card. **BMI-for-age percentile** shows how your child’s weight compares to that of other children of the same age and sex. For example, a BMI-for-age percentile of 65% means that the child’s weight is greater than that of 65% of other children of the same age and sex. The BMI-for-age should be checked annually, or more often if recommended by the child’s healthcare provider. Tracking growth patterns over time can help you make sure your child is achieving or maintaining a healthy weight. A single BMI-for-age calculation is not enough to evaluate long-term weight status because height and weight change with growth. If your child has significant weight loss or gain he or she should be referred to and guided by a health professional.

Please keep in mind that the BMI calculation is not meant to serve as a source of clinical guidance and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Since BMI is based on weight and height, it is only an indicator of body fatness. Individuals with the same BMI may have different amounts of body fat. There are some cases in which BMI might be misleading. Athletic kids, in particular, may fall into the overweight category when they are actually muscular.

For some children, the topic of weight can be uncomfortable; please remember to be sensitive if your child is self-conscious about this. Remember, your child's BMI is important, but it is only a piece of the picture. If a BMI percentile indicates that your child is not within the healthy range, you are encouraged to have him/her evaluated by your healthcare provider.

**Tips for a BMI Percentile in Healthy Range**

Experts recommend that kids of all ages and all weight categories follow these healthy guidelines to help keep weight in check. It's easy to remember them as 5-2-1-0 every day.

* **5:** Everyone in your family needs five servings of vegetables and fruits. Keep serving them even if kids don't eat them. Familiarity increases the likelihood that they'll eventually try a food. Give a fruit or vegetable with every snack or meal.
* **2:** Limit TV-watching to no more than two hours a day. Family members who use other "screens" -- video games or computers, for instance -- get less TV time.  Experts also recommend not having TVs in bedrooms.
* **1:** Get one hour of physical activity. Add up the minutes each family member is moving -- it should be 60 minutes or more. Start small and keep adding if necessary. The goal is to have all those minutes be at least moderate activity, sweating after about 10 minutes.
* **0:** That's how many sugar-sweetened beverages you should have a day. Juice drinks such as lemonade and fruit punch, sodas, tea, and coffee can all have added sugar. Stick to water and reduced-fat milk instead.

Here are some other expert-recommended eating guidelines.

* Start each day with breakfast.
* Avoid eating fast food, and the temptations from eating out in general.
* Eat together as a family -- regularly.
* Check portion sizes, and serve your family accordingly.

Please call me at school if you have any questions. Healthy kids are better learners!

Beth Ramold, RN, ESU #8 School Nurse