

# IMPACT

University of Idaho  
Extension

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## Ironman supports childhood obesity prevention in North Idaho

### The Situation

Today, our children in North Idaho are part of the national trend of overweight and obesity. During the 2008-2009 school year, Idaho's State Department of Education conducted a Body Mass Index (BMI) assessment of public school students in grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Overall, 29% of students were classified as overweight or obese. If these current trends continue, our children may have shorter life expectancies than we do. Schools present a key battleground in the fight for a healthier generation and it will take a unified effort to effect lasting change.

### Our Response

For the last decade, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho has hosted the Ironman-World Triathlon Competition. This competition has brought with it unparalleled excitement and energy to the Coeur d'Alene community and produces tangible role models for all residents of North Idaho, especially our youth. Each year, Ironman teams with the City of Coeur d'Alene and the Coeur d'Alene Area Chamber of Commerce to offer funding from the Ironman Grant Foundation for grass roots youth sports programs with an emphasis on healthy lifestyles.

In 2013, University of Idaho Extension and the Hayden Meadows Elementary PTA applied and received Ironman Grant Foundation funds to offer the Run/Walk for Fun Pedometer Fitness Challenge.

Five-hundred and eight students wore a pedometer all day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for 5 consecutive weeks in May & April 2013. Each child's pedometer steps were tracked and children were incentivized with colored tokens and bracelets. Additionally, Hayden Meadows' students were incentivized with "theme based" tokens when being active



Over 20 Ironman Finishers came to help pedometer wearing youth at Hayden Meadows Elementary be active. Photo: Shelly Johnson

with their teacher, principal, family members, and with Ironman Finishers, who were invited to the school on Ironman Day during lunch recess hours to "be active" with students. Classrooms competed weekly within their grade level for the most steps and were rewarded with an additional PE class.

### Program Outcomes

At the end of our 5-week challenge, an all-school assembly was held where a large banner revealing the number of steps taken by the 508 participating Hayden Meadows students was revealed, an astounding 72,753,908 steps. On average the youth at Hayden Meadows took 10,019 steps during their 6.5-hour school day. Average daily steps increased from Week 1: 9,087 steps to Week 5: 11,874 steps, an increase of 2,787 steps. In 2004, Catrine Tudor-Locke, Ph.D. and associates published in "Preventive Medicine" that 6-12 year old girls needed 12,000 steps per day and boys needed 15,000 steps per day to stay in a BMI.

Teachers reported:

“My children are more attentive and listen better while in class.” ~ 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

“My students are calmer and sit still longer since we’ve been wearing pedometers. Even one of my children who often complains through out the day hasn’t disrupted class once since we started. I know it is because she more active.” ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher

“This program has given us an opportunity to talk more about what it means to be healthy.” ~ PE Teacher

“I love this program and it has been very easy to implement. The children have been so excited everyday to wear their pedometers! ~ 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher

Students reported:

“I love pedometer days. This is so awesome!” ~ 5<sup>th</sup> grade boy

“All my steps count, no matter what I do, I don’t have to be a runner to be healthy!” ~ 4<sup>th</sup> grade girl

“I love competing against the other classrooms and with my friends!” ~ 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy

“My best friend and I set a goal everyday to run during our lunch recess around the big field! During our last week we ran 8 laps – that’s 4 miles!” ~ 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl

“Look at my pedometer, look how many steps I have! I have sooo many!” ~ 1<sup>st</sup> grade boy

Letter from a Hayden Meadows parent:

“My second grade daughter recently participated in the Run/Walk for Fun Pedometer Fitness Challenge at Hayden Meadows Elementary. It was a life changing experience for her. She learned that being active is not only important for a healthy lifestyle, but that it is also fun! She loved wearing the pedometer and seeing for herself her progress each day. Each week she set a personal goal to beat her steps from the week before, and at the end of the program she ran four miles during her lunch recess! The self-confidence she gained from this program has ignited an interest in running and being active that will continue in her life. This morning we ran together side by side! At the end of the program, she received a medal with her number of steps engraved on it. This medal will always remind her of her accomplishment.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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