



# An Integrated Food, Activity, and Language Nutrition Curriculum for Early Childhood Educators

## Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta

### What is Food, Activity, and Language Nutrition?

In early childhood, food nutrition is the practice of providing healthy foods to infants and children that will help their bodies develop and grow. Activity nutrition is the physical activity within children's everyday lives that can set healthy patterns lasting into adulthood. Language nutrition is just as important. It is the practice of exposing children, from birth, to words that support brain development. The amount and the type of words, like healthy food, are critical to developing babies' brains.

Early exposure to language sets the foundation for cognitive ability, literacy, school readiness, and educational achievement. A child's vocabulary at the age of three years is a key predictor of school readiness at kindergarten and third grade reading comprehension. Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is an important indicator of future outcomes, from academic to health to economic. In Georgia, only 34 percent of fourth grade students scored at the proficient level or above for reading, and the state's low-income students fared worse at only 21 percent.

### What will *Eat. Move. Talk!* do?

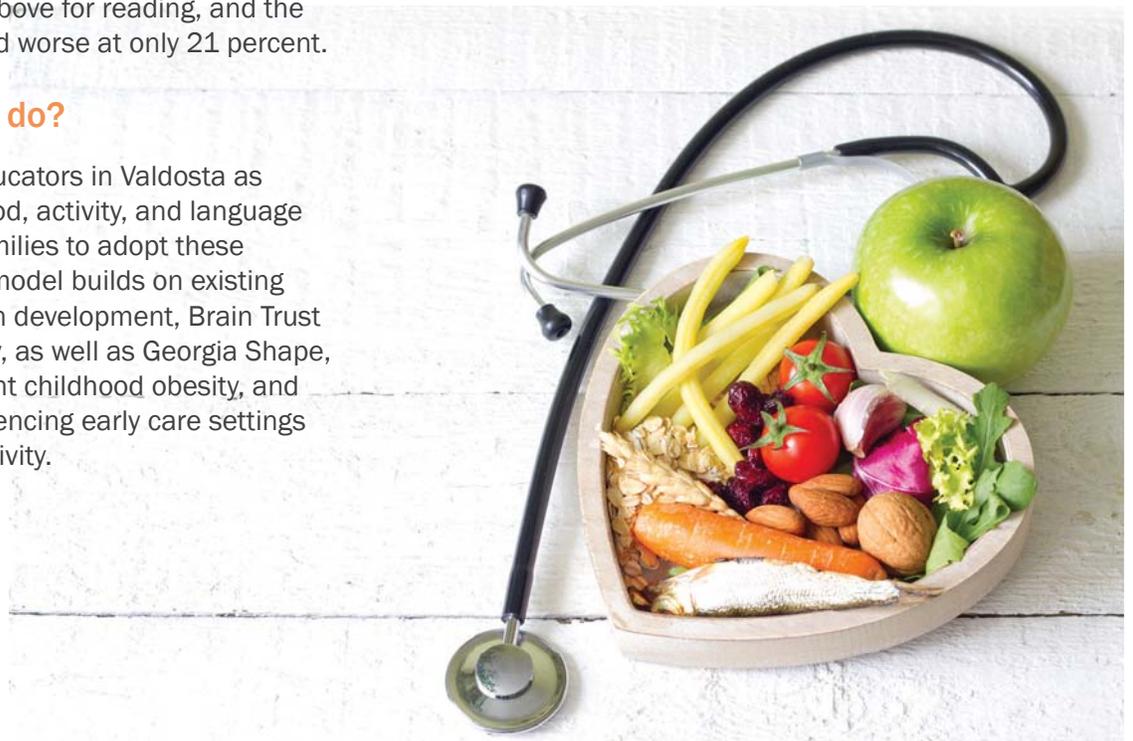
DPH will train early childhood educators in Valdosta as coaches, who will model good food, activity, and language nutrition practices, and teach families to adopt these healthy behaviors at home. The model builds on existing initiatives in early childhood brain development, Brain Trust for Babies and Talk with Me Baby, as well as Georgia Shape, the Governor's initiative to prevent childhood obesity, and the Growing Fit approach to influencing early care settings around nutrition and physical activity.

### Why Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta?

DPH is focusing on communities that have a high percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English in the home and/or a high percentage of racial and ethnic minorities. The City of Valdosta in Lowndes County has a higher percentage of Black or African American residents, 51.1 percent, compared to 31.5 percent at the state level. All other racial minorities account for less than 6 percent of the population. Hispanics and Latinos make up 5 percent of the Valdosta population.

### What are Lowndes County's and the City of Valdosta's baseline measures?

The goals of this program include increasing the number of fruits and vegetables children eat, increasing the quantity and quality of physical activity that children engage in, and increasing the quantity and quality of words spoken to children.





In Lowndes County, an estimated 57,458 or 74.8% of adults over the age of 18 are consuming less than five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Adults with children 0-5 years old who have inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption are less likely to provide adequate fruit and vegetables to their children

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, Georgia students participated in fitness assessments that have included measures of Body Mass Index (BMI) once a year. Students are assessed on whether they fall in the Healthy Fitness Zone, meaning they are at healthy BMI, neither overweight nor underweight. Data from the 2015-2016 school year shows that in City of Valdosta, 65.94% of third grade boys and 62.11% of third grade girls are in the Healthy Fitness Zone, neither overweight nor underweight. One of the long term outcomes of this project is to decrease childhood obesity and thereby increase the percentage of third graders in the Healthy Fitness Zone.

**Table 1: Percent adults with inadequate fruit/vegetable consumption in Lowndes County**

Region	Percent
U.S.	75.7%
Georgia	75.7%
Lowndes County	74.8%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Accessed via the Health Indicators Warehouse. US Department of Health & Human Services, Health Indicators Warehouse. 2005-09. Source geography: County

**Table 2: Percent of 3rd graders in the Healthy Fitness Zone for Body Mass Index in Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta, 2015-2016 School Year**

Region	Boys	Girls
Georgia	66.67%	63.87%
Lowndes County	73.63%	70.27%
City of Valdosta	65.94%	62.11%

Source: Georgia Department of Education, 2016

A child's vocabulary at the age of three is a key predictor of school readiness at kindergarten and third grade reading comprehension, which can be a powerful predictor for high school graduation and future health outcomes. Table 3 shows the four-year graduation rate for students in Georgia, Lowndes County and City of Valdosta. This project aims to increase language nutrition for young children, keeping them on track to third grade reading proficiency and high school graduation.

**Table 3: Four-Year graduation rate by race, ethnicity, and English-learner status in Lowndes County and City of Valdosta, 2015**

Region	Overall	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black/African American	White	Multiracial	English Learners
Georgia	79%	73.6%	88%	72%	75%	80%	No data	56%
Lowndes County	87%	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	88%	81%	89%	83.333	Too Few Students
City of Valdosta	78%	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	74%	90%	Too Few Students	Too Few Students

Source: Office of Student Achievement, 2015 Note: \*Too few students – any data for less than 10 students are not reported