

WATCH YOUR MOUTH

Making the Grade for Children's Oral Health

As principals of elementary schools in Boston, we see the promise of our future every day. We can also see clearly the responsibility that adults have to guide the next generation toward healthy and prosperous futures. So, when something is getting in the way of learning that can be easily solved, we want to do something about it. That is why our schools have joined the efforts to prevent childhood dental decay in Massachusetts.

Dental disease is the single most common, chronic disease of childhood and it is one of the most frequently reported reasons that children miss school. Caused by a bacterial infection in the mouth, this disease affects nearly half of Massachusetts' children by the time they reach the third grade. Untreated dental disease can impact a child's ability to eat, sleep, and pay attention in school. The absences that occur as a result of dental disease translate into lost learning time and lost opportunities.

Fortunately, we have solutions to this widespread problem and we know that they work. Our state's schools provide a unique opportunity to ensure that all children have access to the preventive care that they need to stay healthy. At our schools we work with a mobile dental program to offer our students access to dental screenings and important preventive measures like dental sealants and fluoride rinses or varnishes. When combined, these two simple interventions (sealants and fluoride) can prevent up to 90% of childhood tooth decay. If more schools in the Commonwealth were to offer such services, we could have a tremendous impact on the rate of childhood dental disease in our state and help to secure the health and educational progress of our children.

February is Children's Dental Health Month and organizations all across the country are helping to raise awareness of this preventable disease. We know that when communities work together to make oral health care available to all children, we can make a difference. Please join us in speaking up for children's oral health. Together, we can do our part to ensure the healthy futures of our children.

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