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Reversing an Epidemic: Schools' Battle with Obesity

Many of America's children struggle with eating disorders. Approximately 17% of children in the United States are now categorized as "obese" (Rush-Wilson 3). In South Carolina, the problem is severe. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control reports that nearly 32% of high school students are now obese or overweight. Obesity that begins in childhood can become a life-long problem. Today, over two-thirds of South Carolina's adults are obese or overweight (Simeon 2). According to Tiffany Rush-Wilson, a specialist in eating disorders, "we now have a generation of children with a projected life expectancy that is shorter than that of their parents" (3). These numbers will continue to climb if nothing is done to resolve the problem, which is why action needs to be taken to reduce these rates and to help citizens live longer, healthier lives. Because of their intricate social networks, schools are the prime place to begin a campaign of radical change toward reducing obesity rates. Starting a "healthy epidemic" in schools could spread through social networks and inspire a fit and healthier generation.

Government web source named in the text

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During his TED presentation, Nicholas A. Christakis, a social scientist at Harvard University, shows that social networks are powerful. They change constantly and are influenced by people interacting within a web of social connections. Christakis argues that obesity has become an epidemic sweeping across America, stating that "obesity can spread from person to person," and one's "friends' friends' friends" can cause the first connected person to gain weight. Giant networks can be drawn to illustrate social problems like obesity spreading through a school.

Speaker of an online lecture named in the text

Networks, however, can have the reverse effect and help to solve a problem. In *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell describes three elements that can begin

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