In 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama launched the “Let’s Move!” campaign to address the childhood overweight and obesity epidemic. Assisting youth to get adequate Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA) is an essential component for achieving this objective.

According to the 2008 USDHHS, children and adolescents should attain at least 1 hour of physical activity 7 days per week. Research indicates that physical activity helps achieve or maintain a healthy body weight, improves cardiovascular fitness, builds lean muscle, reduces body fat, and promotes strong bone and joint development.

According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, only 25.3% of Michigan high school students achieve the recommended levels of physical activity; 14.2% are overweight, and 11.9% are obese. These findings indicate a need to intervene before high school. To increase physical activity, boys and girls need safe and convenient places where they can be active after school along with enjoyable opportunities to participate in sports, dance, or other exercise programs. They also need encouragement and support to keep them motivated to continue their physical activity.

Dr. Robbins is the principal investigator for a study called “Girls on the Move Intervention,” a 5-year (2011-2016) Group Randomized Trial funded by the NIH/NHLBI, R01 HL 109101, $3,657,706. She and her interdisciplinary team are evaluating the efficacy of a 17-week comprehensive, theory-based intervention in increasing 5th through 7th grade girls’ minutes of MVPA and improving cardiovascular fitness, body mass index, and percent body fat.

24 urban schools in Michigan will be involved over a 3-year period (2012-2015). The intervention involves three components: 1) two face-to-face motivational, individually tailored counseling sessions with a RN to personally encourage each girl to attain adequate physical activity; 2) an interactive Internet-based session during which each girl receives motivational, individually tailored feedback messages based on her responses to a computerized survey and delivered via an iPad; and 3) a 90-minute physical activity club offered after school 3 days per week followed by bus transportation home. If the intervention is successful, it can be implemented in additional schools and translated to other settings or modified for boys.