

# Implementing Nutrition Policies in High-Need Schools

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## INTRODUCTION

- This project was funded by the US CDC State Public Health Actions 1305 Cooperative Agreement.<sup>1</sup>
- Partnerships For Health is the independent Evaluator for Maine's 1305 Cooperative Agreement.
- Maine's state health department partnered with state and local agencies to provide technical assistance, support and guidance to school districts developing and implementing nutrition and physical activity action plans.
- Eight school districts throughout Maine who have high poverty rates and low academic performance were identified as 'Enhanced LEAs' to work with.
- The 8 school districts serve approximately 20,295 students.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- What critical factors or activities influenced the successful implementation of nutrition policy and nutrition practice at Enhanced LEAs?
- To what extent has implementation of nutrition policies and nutrition practices increased access to healthier food and beverages at Enhanced LEAs?

## METHODS

- Mixed methods with quantitative priority using a convergent parallel design.
- Interviews with local coordinators and food service directors.
- Data analysis of the 2014 School Health Profiles as baseline.

## REFERENCES

1. The State Public Health Actions to Prevention and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health – FOA – DP13-1305.

## RESULTS

### Implementation Facilitators

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Staff Engagement and Support</b>                 | <i>"There are certain schools that have done it better... It's been having a strong administrative leadership, and more importantly, I think, a strong advocate with the staff. Teachers, and other school staff – I find this to be important..."</i>   |
| <b>Parental Engagement and Support</b>              | <i>"...engage parents and families to help support the message and reinforce the healthy eating and activity changes we're trying to create in the environment."</i>   |
| <b>Finding and Utilizing Champions</b>              | <i>"We set up a network of what we call school champions. So each school has a person that is our go-to person to disseminate information, to get reports back from and kind of the person we sort of filter everything through. So if we're trying to get a bunch of teachers on board with a particular initiative, we contact that person."</i> |
| <b>Open and Continued Communication for Success</b> | <i>"I think a good 75 percent of it is just keeping the conversation going. Like, you can't put policy on the shelf and then never talk about wellness again. It needs to be part of every staff training. It needs to be part of every in-service day, and it needs to be part of every meeting."</i>   |

### Nutrition Environment (prior to intervention)

| Indicator   | Targeted Schools | Maine  |
|---|------------------|--------|
| School district prices nutritious foods and beverages at a lower cost while increasing the price of less nutritious foods and beverages.                  | 20.00%           | 13.20% |
| School districts provide information to students or families on nutrition, caloric and sodium content of food available.                                  | 57.10%           | 58.90% |
| School district places fruits and vegetables near the cafeteria cashier, where they are easy to access.   | 93.30%           | 80.80% |
| School district offers fruit or non-fried vegetables when foods or beverages are offered at school celebrations.  | 53.30%           | 57.30% |
| School district allows students to purchase fruits and vegetables from vending machines or at the school store, canteen, snack bar, or as la carte items. | 33.30%           | 16.60% |
| School district does not sell less healthy foods and beverages.   | 33.30%           | 53.30% |

Indicator results will be collected in 2016/2017 to assess changes in Targeted Schools' environments.

### Implementation Barriers

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Constraints on Staff</b>               | <i>"Well, the biggest thing I found is that if you ask somebody who works in a school what is a good time of year to do something, there is – you can ask every month, every week, and they'll say right now is not a good time."</i>   |
| <b>Monitoring Policy Implementation</b>   | <i>"... often in this work, you're being told what you want to hear. I think what we need to do better... is really asking individual teachers in an anonymous way like, what are you really doing? Instead of just having one person answer for them, an administrator or a school champion teacher that can say 'yeah, I'm doing this in my school. We're not using food as a reward. We're providing physical activity breaks. We're not allowing sugar-sweetened beverages'..."</i> |
| <b>School Culture and Norms</b>           | <i>"...the biggest hurdle as far as nutrition rules in most districts...[is the] perception of a resistance among parents to kind of change the culture around celebrations and - you know, sending in cupcakes and cakes and that kind of thing."</i>  |
| <b>Environmental and Resource Factors</b> | <i>"We have four schools that we satellite to, which means that we make them [meals] in our middle school and then we send them out to the schools because they don't have kitchens. That's a big problem."</i>   |
| <b>Policy-specific Funding</b>            | <i>"If there's a way for us coordinators to get a little bit more funding for our programs to cover our costs, cover our time, I think that would be helpful as well."</i>  |

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Work with schools to promote a culture change.
- Provide suggestions for healthier food options at school events.
- Use teams to develop and disseminate materials to teachers and school staff.
- Provide ongoing support to teachers including trainings and professional development devoted to the content of the policy and ways teachers can incorporate the policy into their classrooms.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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