

PLAN STUDY: MAY 8, 2009 MEETING POLICY IMPLICATIONS –OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition hosted a meeting of key Washington State school nutrition policy stakeholders on May 8th, 2009. The purpose of the meeting was to share the results and discuss the policy implications of a three year study on the impact of Washington's school nutrition and physical activity policies. Support for this meeting was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Healthy Eating Research program. Forty-six people participated in the meeting, including representatives from the Washington State Department of Health, Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Board of Health, Washington State School Directors' Association, Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Washington Health Foundation, State PTA, School Board members, local wellness committee members, district food service directors, local health jurisdictions, and Washington State Senate staff.

Meeting Objectives

Participants would be able to:

- State the major findings of the PLAN study
- Discuss the policy implications of the findings
- Compare and contrast possible next steps for school wellness legislation in Washington
- List ways they can act to further improve school environments through policy

Donna Johnson started the meeting by presenting the preliminary results of the Policy Legislation and Nutrition Study (PLAN): What Works to Improve Student Health? The afternoon session was devoted to large and small group discussions of the policy implications of the study findings. Vic Colman provided background and context for the discussion, including a summary of the relevant school nutrition standard policies from the state and national perspectives. He also provided a summary of relevant budget and policy information from the most recent state legislative session. Participants then divided into groups to discuss possible policy gaps with school nutrition and physical activity. The observations and ideas noted below represent their collective thinking.

Summary of PLAN findings

Policy Development & Implementation

- Sample policy widely used (most common was Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) policy)
- District processes differed widely
- Little funding available for policy development

Concerns

- Fear of loss of revenue from food sales very common
- Confusion about food standards
- Complaints from students, parents & staff
- Existing food & beverage contracts
- Vending machine company compliance
- Unfunded governmental mandates

Policy Quality

- Considerable room for improvement compared to national recommendations and standards
- WSSDA sample policy not strong for competitive foods
- Few policies reflect goals of Washington SB 5093

Student Consumption

- On average, students have sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) almost daily at school
- On average, students have 1.5 unhealthy snacks per day at school
- Consumption at school as a percent of weekly consumption:
 - Milk: 33%
 - SSB: 26%
 - Fruits/vegetables: 28%
 - Unhealthy snacks: 29%
- In schools with no competitive foods, the trend is for students to eat fewer unhealthy snacks
- In schools with higher meal participation students drink more milk

Foods in Schools

- SSB other than sodas highly prevalent in schools (e.g. sports drinks, fruit drinks, flavored waters, iced tea)
- Healthier foods are more expensive for the calories they provide.
- Almost all competitive foods in the study schools do not meet Institute of Medicine (IOM) standards*
- Many low-fat chips, other salty snacks and low-fat frozen treats meet WA SB 5093 goals

Physical Education

- Barriers to implementing PE policies were primarily due to lack of institutional priority for physical activity and lack of space
- In comparing PE policies and practices to national standards, none of the schools met all national recommendations
- Almost two-thirds of PE teachers reported using a curriculum that meets the state requirements for PE; however, when asked specifically about the requirement for students to develop their own fitness plan, less than one-third of schools were in compliance
- Most schools (88%) met the current WA requirement of 100 minutes of PE per week (grades 1-8)
- Positive changes noted since the policies were implemented two years ago included curriculum development and use of fitness assessment; conversely, few changes were noted in physical education frequency or overall physical activity opportunities for students

Associations

- Policies about SSB associated with less SSB in school
- Policies about competitive foods not associated with fewer unhealthy snacks (as defined by strict IOM standards*) in schools
- Schools with fewer SSB for sale had fewer students consuming SSB
- Schools with fewer unhealthy snacks for sale had fewer students consuming unhealthy snacks.
- Males, non-whites and students eligible for free and reduced price meals report higher unhealthy snack consumption

* Institute of Medicine, Committee on Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way Toward Healthier Youth. The National Academies Press; 2007

POLICY DISCUSSION -- ROLL-UP

Overall Observations:

- Policy ideas stretched from the state to the federal level
- The groups went beyond brainstorming new policy ideas and also included aspects of policy and program implementation
- Loss of revenue from unhealthy competitive foods remains a real barrier to both policy change and full policy implementation

Ideas that came up multiple times are in ***RED ITALICS***.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POLICY IDEAS

STATE:

- Enforce physical education teacher certification requirements
- Use school transportation funding as a way to incentivize walking and biking to school

FEDERAL

- None

NUTRITION POLICY IDEAS

STATE:

- ***SB 5093 goals to become mandates***
 - could be phased in
 - include the need for annual implementation plan
- ***Tax unhealthy snacks and beverages and direct some of the revenue back to schools (to help replace lost revenue from sales of unhealthy snacks and beverages)***
- Repeal soda pop syrup tax relief
- Restrict food and soda advertising targeted at students
- No competitive foods allowed in schools
- Regulate vending machine contracts to collect sales and availability data
- Allow schools to fill their own vending machines
- Mandate that the schools adopt/create a defined curriculum that can be integrated across all subject areas

FEDERAL

- Commodity improvement – better quality of foods purchased in bulk

BROAD IDEAS (CAN ENCOMPASS BOTH NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY)

STATE

- Wean schools away from revenue generated by unhealthy foods and beverages by creating a new and different funding mechanism (i.e., 1% tax on professional entertainment, like sporting events)
- Create “healthy school zones”
- Require schools to report out on the health information that they now hold (resurrect HB 1632 from the 2009 legislative session)

FEDERAL

- Apply wellness policies to all school events

IMPLEMENTATION (“PRACTICE”) IDEAS

- *Highlight those schools that have developed and implemented strong nutrition and physical activity standards*
- *Incentivize schools to “do the right thing” (i.e., awards; funds to eliminate reduced lunch co-pay; reduced costs borne by schools for environmental health inspections)*
- *Greater accountability for adherence to current policies (both penalties and incentives)*
- Create certification process to ensure greater compliance
- Rewrite sample policy developed by WSSDA in 2005
- Vending
 - Develop a pricing structure that makes the healthy choice the easier choice
 - Better labeling of products
- Increase access to resources for implementation
- Better in-school communication (e.g., include information about nutrition policies in staff meetings for faculty and staff at beginning of each school year)
- Empower students (e.g., student wellness committees, student representation on district committees)

STRATEGIES

- Educate school administrators regarding the link between academic achievement and health
- Mobilize communities – improve implementation by greater engagement of the community
- Note possible window of opportunity with upcoming federal WIC reauthorization

RELATED (COMPANION POLICY IDEAS):

- Urban planning that encourages healthier practices (e.g., fast food zoning)