

School District Approaches to Responding to the Federal Wellness Policy Mandate: Analysis of the Nutrition Components of a Nationally-representative Sample of Local Wellness Policies

A. Sandoval, J. Chriqui, S. Hagin, L. Schneider, K. Ide, F. Chaloupka, Health Policy Center, Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

Background

P.L. 108-265 required school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program to adopt a wellness policy by the beginning of the '06-'07 school year. The Federal Wellness (FW) mandate requires that the wellness policies include: (1) goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities; (2) guidelines for reimbursable school meals; (3) nutrition guidelines for all foods available outside of the meal program; (4) implementation plans; and (5) involvement of key stakeholders.

Study Purpose

To examine the variability in the presence of and components of the wellness policies from a nationally representative sample (N=579) of school districts in the United States. The focus for this presentation will be on the nutrition-related components of the policies.

Methods

- Data Collection
 - Internet research with telephone and mail follow-up
 - Policies for SY 2007-2008 collected between Sept '07-May '08
- Coding
 - Wellness policy coding scheme adapted from tool developed by Healthy Eating Research grantees (Schwartz et al.)
 - Two coder, consensus methodology
- Analysis
 - Bivariate and descriptive statistics
 - Clustered by district group (sampling methodology)
 - Data presented by grade-level of policy applicability.

Results

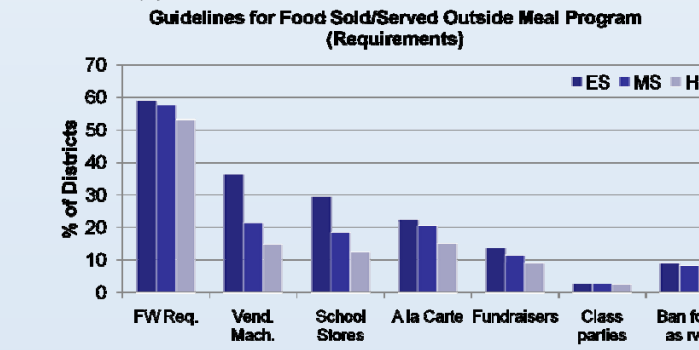
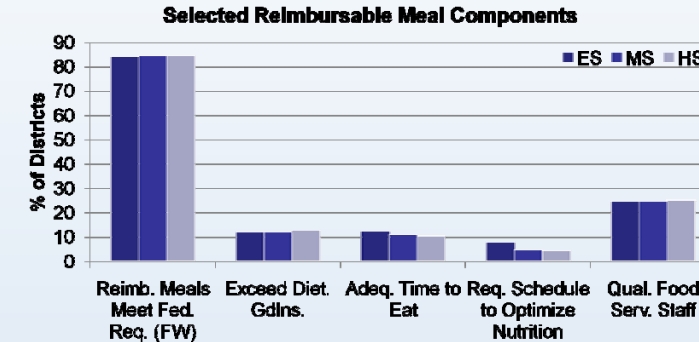
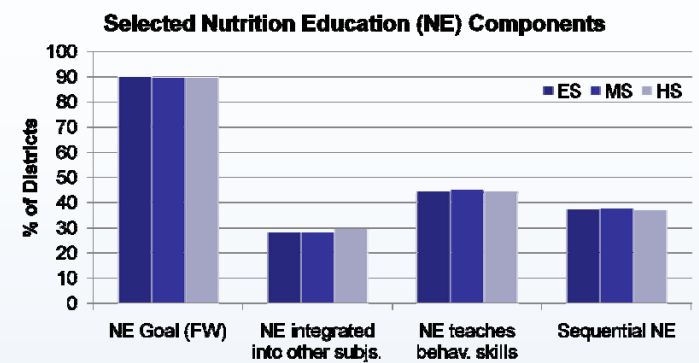
Sample Characteristics	% (N=579)
National School Lunch Participation (NSLP)	94.5%
Respondent	87.9%
Wellness policy	88.7%
Type of district	
Urban	27.4%
Large-/mid-size city	14.1%
Rural	44.9%
Region	
Northeast	22.2%
Midwest	36.6%
South	23.8%
West	17.4%
Charter school district	9.4%

Note: Preliminary weighted data

Districts with Policies	% (N=518)
Policy adopted by 1 st day of '06-'07 SY (requirement)	92.1%
National School Lunch Participation	97.6%
Source of Policy	
Internet only	44.9%
District only	52.3%
Internet and District	2.8%

Note: Preliminary weighted data

Results (unweighted data)



Discussion

- Wellness policies include the specific “goal” language included in the FW requirement.
 - Substantial variation in specifics associated with each FW provision.
- Policy provisions do not vary substantially by grade-level for nutrition education or reimbursable school meal provisions.
- Greatest grade-level variation seen regarding competitive foods.
 - Competitive food restrictions decline by grade-level.

Limitations

- Preliminary, unweighted data (for policy provisions)
- Cross-sectional data
- Have not controlled for district or state-level characteristics
- Analyses only reflect district policy requirements
 - State laws not embedded by reference or verbatim are not yet accounted for in the coding

Next Steps

- Weighted analyses controlling for district/state factors
- Additional year of data
- Examine variations by district-level characteristics
- Account for state requirements

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