

Evaluating School District Wellness Policies—Methodological Challenges and Results

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Bridging the Gap Project
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Overview

- Review Federal wellness policy mandate
- Overview of the Bridging the Gap/Food & Fitness Study Component
- Describe policy collection methodology
- Describe coding methodology
- Review preliminary results
- Implications and next steps

Federal Wellness Policy Mandate (P.L. 108-265)

- Wellness policy required by 1st day '06-'07 school year
 - If participating in Natl. School Lunch Program
- Required components:
 - Goals for nutrition education, physical activity, other school-based activities
 - Guidelines for all foods/sold served (i.e., competitive foods)
 - Assurance that reimbursable meal guidelines at least meet Federal regulations
 - Implementation plans
 - Involvement of key stakeholders in policy development

Bridging the Gap/Food & Fitness Study Overview

- Nationwide study of policy-practice relationships
- Components
 - State policies
 - LEA wellness and related policies
 - Surveys
 - Primary school principals (UIC)
 - Secondary school principals (University of Michigan, YES)

Wellness Policy Study Overview

- Nationally representative sample of LEAs
 - Approx. 579 LEAs/year
- Policies collected and coded for '06-'07 and **'07-'08 SY**
- Coding scheme adapted from the HER grantee-developed wellness policy coding tool (Schwartz et al.)

Methodology: Sample Design

- Nationally-representative sample of public local education agencies (LEAs)
 - By grade level (ES/MS/HS)
 - N=579 districts
- District groups
 - N=380 district groups

Methodology: Data Collection

- Mixed-methods:
 1. Internet searches
 2. Telephone/e-mail follow-up
 3. Mailed letter with AASA endorsement

Methodology: Policies Collected

- Policies collected
 - Wellness policies and associated regulations
 - Other LEA policies embedded by reference
 - State, model, national “policies” embedded by reference
 - E.g., State school board association models, AFHK, CSPI, NANA

Methodology: Coding Constructs

Construct	# of Items
Nutrition education	9
Reimbursable school meals	13
Guidelines for food sold/served outside meal program	29
Physical education	17
Physical activity	10
Communications and marketing	12
Evaluation and implementation	6
Total # Items	96

Wellness Policy Coding Scheme Adaptations

- Coding for grade-level distinctions
 - ES, MS, HS
 - Key for Competitive Food, selected PE/PA items
- Additional variables
 - Closed campus
 - Competitive food ban
 - Requirements that contracts meet nutrition standards
 - Farm-to-cafeteria/school provisions
 - BMI screening/reporting
 - Additional measures for implem./eval./reporting

Coding Scheme—Item Coding Example

Item: Food as a reward/punishment

Code	Description
0	No policy/not addressed/only discourages unhealthy foods
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Discourage using food as reward•Only prohibits food as punishment (not add. reward)•Only allows healthy food as a reward
2	Prohibits food as a reward

Coding Scheme: Scoring

- **Comprehensiveness (# with 1 or 2)**
 - **Construct:** (Presence ea. item in construct/# items in construct) *100
 - **NE Construct:** $(6/9) * 100 = 66.7$
 - **Total:** Average compreh. construct scores
- **Strength (# with 2)**
 - **Construct:** ($\#$ items in construct=2/# items in construct)*100
 - **NE Construct:** $(3/9)*100 = 33.3$
 - **Total:** Average strength construct scores

Methodology: Analyses

- Preliminary data for 07-08 SY data
 - Sample characteristics, policy presence, response status on full sample (N=579)
 - Analyses of policy provisions on partial sample (471/579 LEAs)
- Bivariate and OLS regressions
 - Clustered by district group based on sampling methodology)
 - Selected data presented by grade-level of policy applicability

LEA Characteristics--1

Characteristic	%
Type of district	
Urban	27.4%
Large-/mid-size city	14.1%
Rural	44.9%
Town	13.6%
Region	
Northeast	22.2%
Midwest	36.6%
South	23.8%
West	17.4%
Charter school district (only)	9.4%

Note: Weighted data; N=579, District Groups=380

LEA Characteristics--2

LEA Characteristics	Mean	Range
# Schools	7	1-808
# Teachers	200	8.5-34,029
# Students	3593	103-986,967
Prop. White	.73	0-1
Prop. African American	.11	0-1
Prop. Hispanic	.12	0-1
Prop. Free/Red Lunch Eligible	.38	0-1
Median family income (\$)	49,396	18,372-169,378
Per capita income (\$)	20,164	7284-88,308
Title I Revenue/pupil (\$)	200	0-1310
Instructional expend./pupil (\$)	5417	741-97,614

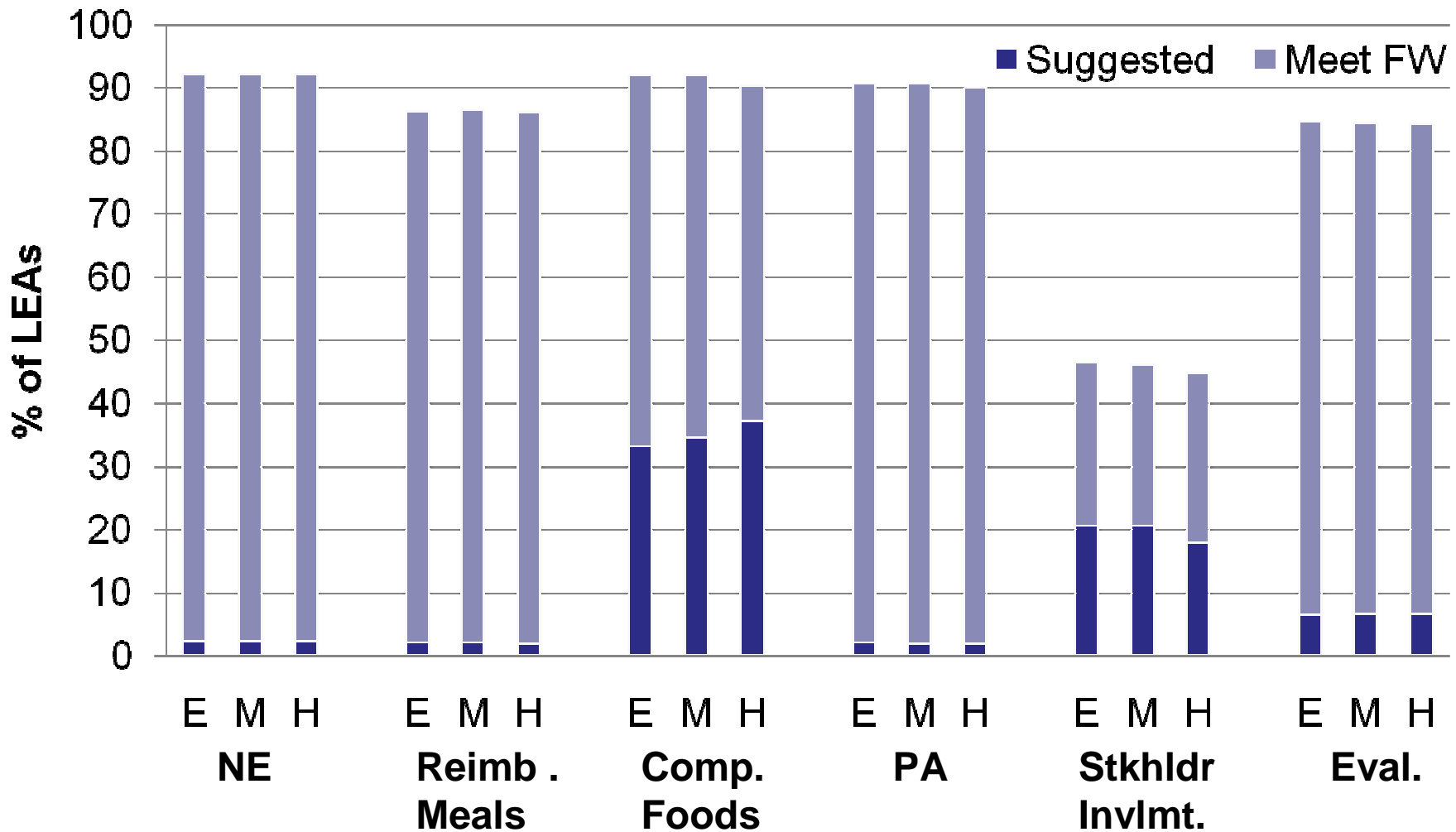
Note: Weighted data; N=579, District Groups=380

Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	%
Respondent	87.9%
% Responders – Wellness policy	88.7%
% Responders – No wellness policy	11.3%
Policy Source	
Internet only	39.8%
District only	46.4%
Both (Internet & District)	2.5%
National School Lunch Participation (overall)	94.5%
% NSLP – With Wellness Policy	90.5%
% NSLP – No Wellness Policy	9.6%

Note: Weighted data; N=579, District Groups=380

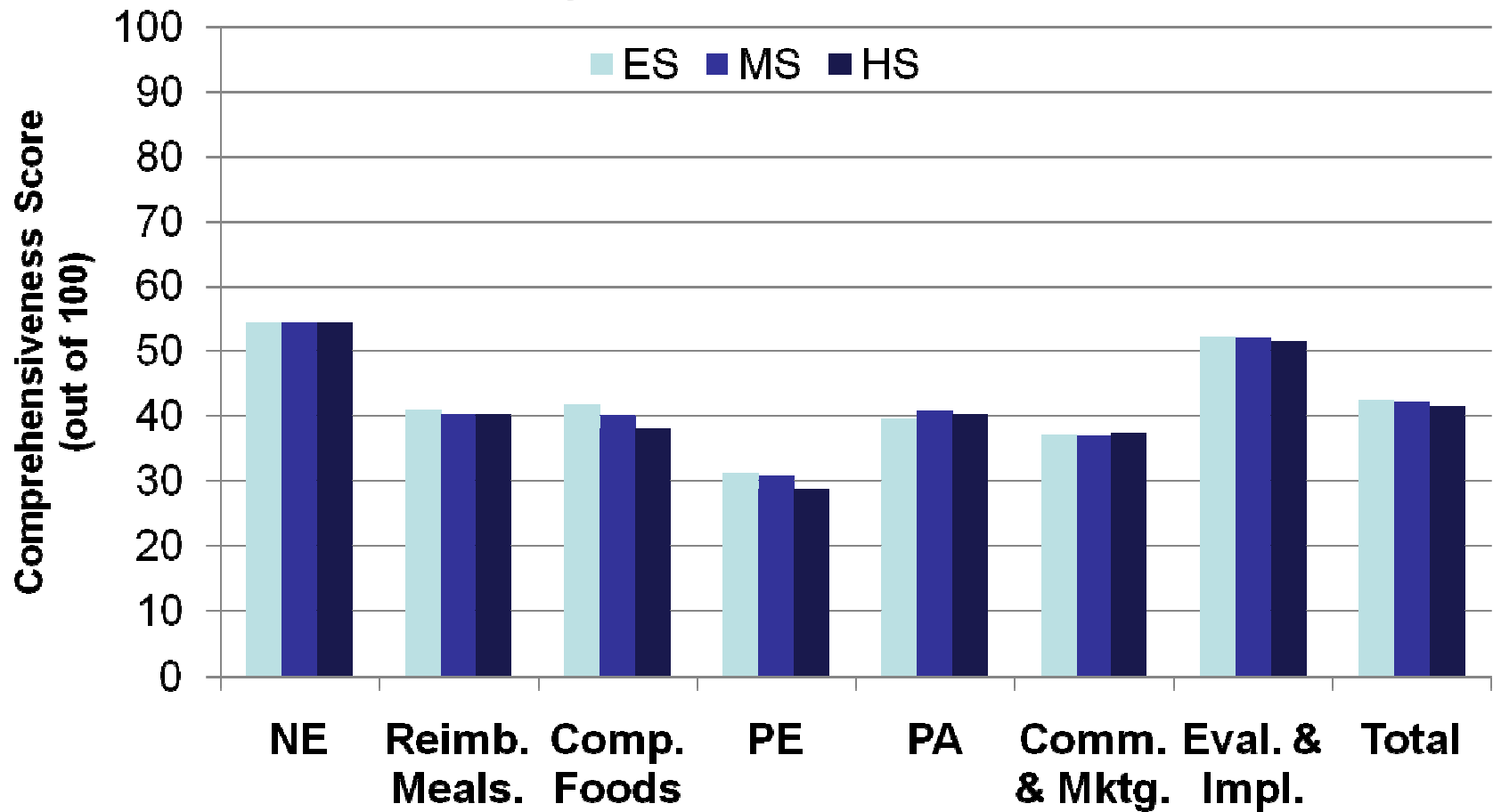
Most Communities Have Addressed the Federal Wellness Goals...



Note: Preliminary unweighted (clustered) data

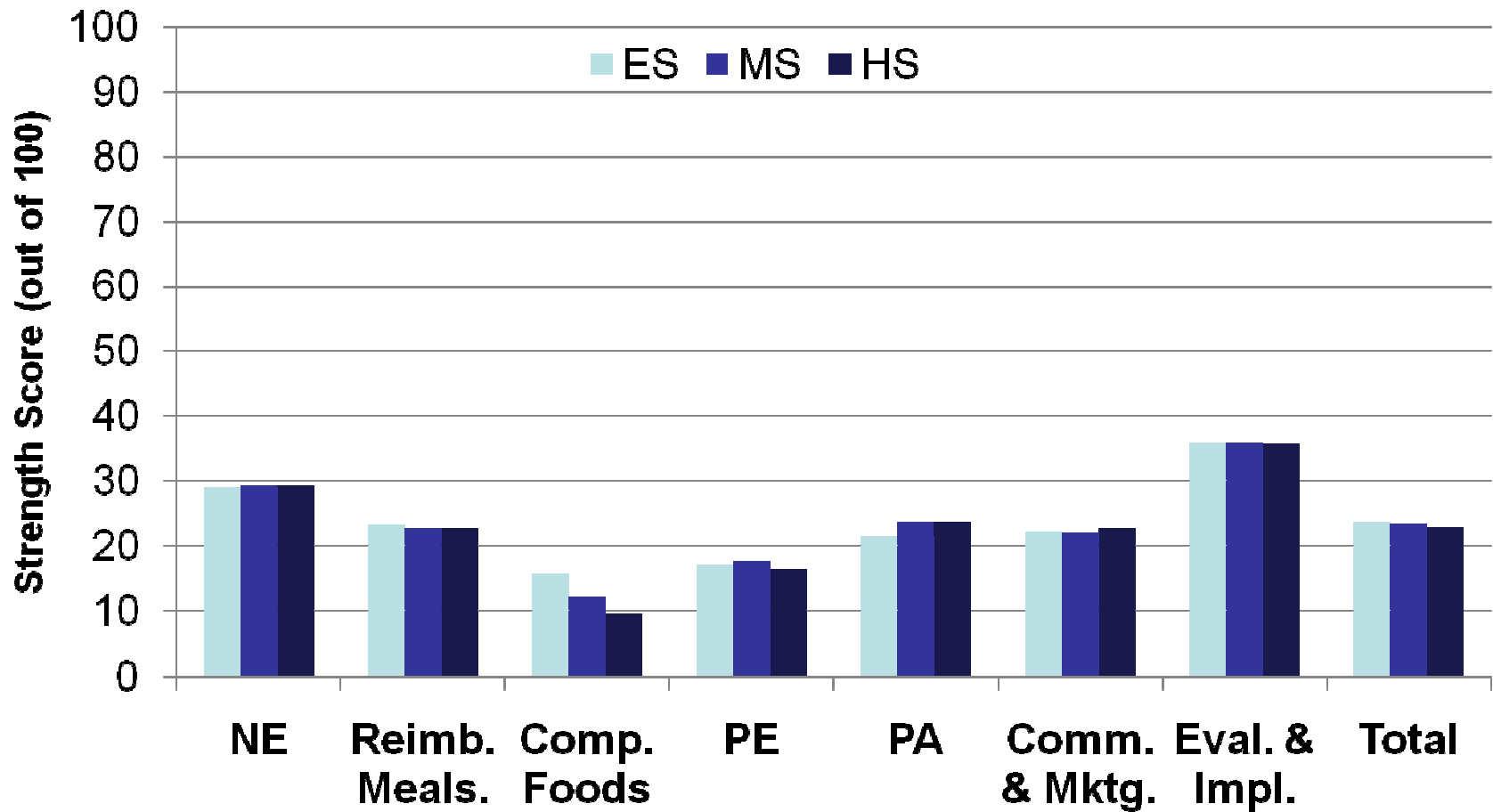
Grade Level (E=Elem, M=Middle, H=High)

..But, On Average, the Policies are Not Very Comprehensive...



Note: Preliminary, unweighted (clustered) data BEFORE state laws applied

...and they are Relatively Weak



Note: Preliminary, unweighted (clustered) data BEFORE state laws applied

Factors Associated with Policy Comprehensiveness

- ↓ Instruction \$/pupil
- ↑ Title I \$/pupil
- ↓ Hispanic students
- Northeast (compared to the South)

Notes: Preliminary, unweighted (clustered) OLS regressions before state law applied
All items significant at $p < .05$ or lower

Factors Associated with Policy Strength

- ↓ Instruction \$/pupil
- ↑ Title I \$/pupil
- ↓ Hispanic students
- Northeast (compared to the South) (ES/MS)
- West (compared to the South) (HS)

Notes: Preliminary, unweighted OLS regressions BEFORE state laws applied
All items significant at $p < .05$ or lower

Summary

- In most cases, LEAs have adopted relatively weak policies
 - Evaluation/implementation provisions stronger than nutrition/physical activity items – evaluating/implementing weak policies
- Wellness policies stronger in communities with less resources

Limitations

- Preliminary, unweighted data
- Cross-sectional
- Does not measure policy implementation
- Not linked with student behaviors/attitudes

Next Steps

- Finalize data
- Conducted weighted analyses
- Examine changes from 2006 to 2007 school years
- Link to state statutes/regulations to see if state oversight/standards influence strength/comprehensiveness of district policies
- Link with surveys of school principals to examine policy-to-practice relationships

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