

## **Complementary District Wellness Policies Address Variables Which May Affect the Quality of Consumption in NSBP And NSLP**

*Aims:* Research indicates participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs positively affects students' quality of life. Assuming all districts participating meet minimum nutrient requirements for a reimbursable meal, environmental factors surrounding these programs affect the quality of meal consumption by students. While impossible to pinpoint all variables affecting quality of consumption, this study was designed to determine whether school districts participating in these federal meal programs have complementary district-level policies directly affecting the eating environment. These policies include: strategies to increase participation in school meal programs; recess before lunch; providing adequate time to eat; marketing/promoting healthy choices, and restrictions on marketing of unhealthy items. *Methods:* District policies were compiled by the Bridging the Gap Program at UIC as part of the largest, annual nationwide evaluation of congressionally-mandated school wellness policies. For purposes of this analysis, focus was on wellness policies collected and analysed for three school years beginning with 2006-07. Approximately 1800 districts were included in the total sample and all data were weighted to reflect public elementary districts nationwide. For each item, policies were coded to assess the presence and strength of policy language. *Findings:* Over time, three of five variables showing a significant increase in strong policy language or decrease in no policy/provision included: strategies to increase participation (strong language 15.63% to 17.12%; no policy/provision 61.04% to 46.68%), providing adequate time to eat (strong 12.15% to 13.79%; no policy 52.36% to 36.95%), and marketing/promoting healthy choices (strong 5.15% to 7.79%; no policy/provision 76.14% to 67.69%). Restrictions on marketing of unhealthy items showed no significant change over the three-year analysis. The recess before lunch variable was coded beginning in the third year of collection so could show no change over time. *Conclusion:* Elementary school district wellness policies are increasingly addressing factors in the meal environment, which may affect the quality of meal consumption.