



## Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Your Success Story and Lessons Learned

### Title

*Strategies To Increase The Consumption of Healthy Breakfast Among Elementary School Students and Improve the Retail Environment in West Contra Costa County*

### Intervention Summary

In Contra Costa County, the prevalence of obesity among school aged children is a major public health problem. According to the SNAP-Ed County Profiles for 2014, in Contra Costa County 41.6% low-income children ages 5 to 19 are considered to be overweight or obese and 23.8% of this population is considered to be obese. These figures indicate that school aged youth could benefit from targeted nutrition education and environmental changes that support consuming a healthy diet. Interventions to promote healthy eating within the school setting have been recognized as one of the key strategies to address the issue of obesity. In addition, Contra Costa Health Services (LHD) is very aware that the availability of healthy foods and the nutrition environment in the retail setting also plays a role in the food and drink choices that young people make. Therefore, the LHD prioritized deepening and expanding their relationships with schools and local retailers as part of its evaluation efforts this year.

There were two primary goals for the evaluation. The first was to work with school staff, students, and parents within West Contra Costa to promote eating a healthy breakfast, an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption, and a decrease in sugar sweetened beverage consumption. The second goal was to explore strategies for working with retail owners and managers to increase the sales of fruits and vegetables, and the sales of beverages that were not sugar sweetened in convenience stores frequented by elementary students who use active transport to get to school. Intensifying partnerships with the schools and retail owners allowed the LHD to examine what resources would be needed to create environmental changes in the school and retail setting to support consuming a healthy diet.

The LHD utilized the results from the CX3 assessment, and data collected through previous PSE activities (i.e., results from the FFY 2014 nutrition and transit behavior survey, recommendations from youth participants and members of the community) to help inform the evaluation process. Based on this data, the LHD selected four West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) elementary schools that qualify for the Free and Reduced Meal Program as sites for the intervention (Coronado, King, Nystrom and Stege Elementary Schools). At these schools a student survey was conducted assessing the number of students who ate breakfast in the morning, whether or not they consumed breakfast in the school setting, and the types of foods consumed for breakfast. The selected schools are in close proximity to convenience stores frequented by students who use active transport to go to school. In-store observations were made to assess the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, and the placement of products in the store. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with store owners and managers to determine current sales, customer preferences and perception of healthy foods, and marketing and promotion of healthy foods. The Healthy Bodegas Initiative Post Intervention Store Owner/Manager Survey was used as a model for the interviews.

The LHD subcontracted with the YMCA Kennedy Wellness Center, which provides youth with the skills needed to be health advocates in their community. The Wellness Center is housed at Kennedy High School, which is the high school that several of the elementary school intervention sites will feed into. In an effort to build effective leadership skills among the youth, the YMCA and LHD recruited 15 youth advocates to assist with the data collection. The youth were trained in basic nutrition education, community-based participatory research methodology, and how to collect and interpret data. The youth advocates also provided input for the survey and observational tools that were used for the project.

The YMCA youth and LHD staff conducted 188 surveys of fifth grade students across 4 elementary school sites. The survey results showed that 66% of the students had something to eat the morning of the survey, 73% responded that they usually eat something in the morning, and overall roughly 30% stated that they'd purchased unhealthy foods (i.e., potato or other chips, candy, and sugar sweetened beverages) while walking to school that day. When asked if they eat breakfast at school, 61% did not eat the school breakfast that day. Finally, when the question was posed to the elementary school students as to what changes could be made in the cafeteria to improve school breakfast, 75% stated better tasting food, 55% stated having more food options, and 38% stated that giving students more time to eat would be helpful. Prior to beginning the evaluation the LHD was informed by YMCA staff that one of the four schools, Coronado Elementary, had recently instituted a Second Chance Breakfast Program where the schedule of classes includes a school-wide mid-morning break to allow students the opportunity to eat. When the data was compared by school site, it showed that Coronado had the highest combined number of students who responded that they'd eaten breakfast that day and that they'd eaten at school. As the LHD continues to develop strategies for environmental changes in the school that support eating a healthy breakfast, we will partner with Coronado and use it as a model for other sites within the district.

The results of the retail observations revealed that 50% of the stores observed sold fresh produce, but there was more produce that was considered by the observer as being of poor quality than good quality, which was defined as no molding, rotting, or discoloration. With regards to product placement, 56.35% of the youth observers reported seeing unhealthy foods placed at the checkout counter and 72.9% reported seeing sugar sweetened beverages placed near the checkout counter, while only 12.5% reported seeing fresh produce or healthy foods placed near the counter.

Conducting key informant interviews with four store managers and owners provided the LHD with crucial insight as to the challenges that they face in their efforts to make a profit from their store and provide quality items for their customers. While over half the store managers and owners reported that they sell healthy food options such as fresh produce, 100% juice, 1% milk, and whole grain products; three out of the four state that their top selling items are sugar sweetened beverages and food items such as candy, chips, and pastries. In addition, all four store managers and owners stated they have tried to promote healthier food purchases by reducing prices, advertising various products, and placing healthy items in a more visible location within the store. However, only one store owner and manager reports success in these attempts and all four feel they could benefit from having more nutrition education information available for their customers as this could help them to sell healthier food items. The LHD will partner with the store owner and manager that reported success in increasing sales of healthier foods and use their strategies as a model for other retailers.

The findings from the survey and key informant interviews are being used to finalize and complete an intervention plan for improving school and retail environments to promote and encourage the consumption of a healthy breakfast. The intervention plan will be implemented in the subsequent project year.

## **Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions**

There were two major challenges that the LHD and YMCA faced while conducting the evaluation. The first was regarding the participation of the students that had been trained by the LHD. While 15 students were trained to conduct student surveys, in-store observations and key informant interviews, only half of the students were able to participate in the retail portion of the evaluation. As the project and school year drew close to an end, several of the student's availability was limited as we moved closer to summer vacation. Internal staff changes at the YMCA also impacted the retail portion of the evaluation. The YMCA staff member with established relationships with the retailers was reassigned to another site before the project could be completed. As a result additional time was needed to gain the trust of the store owners and managers before the in-store observations and key informant interviews could be conducted. These two factors impacted the LHD's ability to complete the retail intervention plan, but they have also given us the opportunity to develop our own relationships with the store owners and managers which we are continuing to cultivate.

## Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Our short term goals are based on the findings from the surveys, in-store observations, key informant interviews, and recommendations from the YMCA staff and youth health advocates:

- Increase awareness and option for sugar sweetened beverages by parents, students and WCCUSD staff.
- Continue to educate parents, students and staff about the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and how it can aid in improving the academic performance of students.
- Increase awareness of students, parents and WCCUSD staff about the impact that the food environment in both the school and retail setting has on students.
- Provide NEOP approved nutrition education materials to store owners and managers that promote the consumption of healthy foods.
- Complete and finalize an intervention plan to improve the school and retail nutrition environment and present to key stakeholders within the school district and community.

Our long-term goals include the following:

- Improved school and retail nutrition environment resulting in an increased awareness about the importance of eating a healthy breakfast among WCCUSD staff and students at targeted schools and with targeted retail owners and managers.
- Partner with targeted retail owners and managers to increase the purchases of healthy foods by WCCUSD students who frequent their stores.
- Partner with WCCUSD administrators, staff and food services department towards the development and implementation of programs and strategies that encourage and offer WCCUSD students the opportunity to consume a healthy breakfast after the school day has begun (i.e., Second Chance Breakfast, Grab'n Go Breakfast, etc.) at a minimum of one school site that currently does not have such a program.

## Contact information about this Narrative

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