

Monitoring the Implementation of Local Wellness Policies: Successes, Challenges, and the Way Forward



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PURPOSE

The USDA's Team Nutrition Local Wellness Demonstration Project documented implementation of Local Wellness Policies (LWP) by school districts and schools within those districts by describing implementation successes, barriers, and outcomes and identifying technical assistance needs.

METHOD

- A total of 31 districts and 84 schools from California, Iowa, and Pennsylvania participated in the project.
- In Fall 2007 and Spring 2009, online surveys and onsite interviews were completed at district and school levels.
- All districts were combined into a single cohort for trend analysis, and all schools were combined into a single cohort for trend analysis.
- Statistical analyses were by chi square with significance set at $p=0.1$.

RESULTS

- Schools and districts were equally likely to indicate that they have taken steps toward implementation of LWP goals for nutrition education, physical activity/physical education, assurances for meeting federal nutrition standards in reimbursable meals, nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages both sold and offered, other school-based wellness activities, and assigning operational responsibility.
- Districts and schools reported a culture change as result of LWP implementation. Examples of reported comments include:
 - *Everyone thinks about wellness.*
 - *We are modeling good behavior.*
 - *It is becoming part of our culture.*
 - *We are moving beyond awareness to actual action.*
 - *LWP started out as my worst enemy. Now it's my best friend.*
- Over half of districts and schools reported that measuring implementation was "very challenging" or that they had made no attempts to measure implementation of their LWP.
- Fewer than one-third of districts reported having plans for measuring LWP implementation, and only 3% of districts reported conducting professional development in this area.
- Few districts had comprehensive plans for measuring implementation, and districts did not communicate plans for monitoring well to schools.
- Districts and schools have reported efforts to ensure sustainability, including:
 - ongoing communication
 - maintaining active wellness committees
 - having processes for policy revision
 - partnerships with community agencies/organizations
- Frequently cited impediments to sustainability included:
 - changes in leadership
 - lack of resources, especially funding and time
 - curricular change

APPLICATION OF RESULTS

Districts and schools may not be prepared to monitor LWP implementation; therefore, resources are needed to assist districts and schools monitor progress and report change. Continued leadership, communication with stakeholders, and technical assistance are critical to LWP progress and sustainability.

STEPS TAKEN TOWARD ESTABLISHING A PLAN FOR MEASURING IMPLEMENTATION OF LWP REPORTED BY DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS, SPRING 2009

STEPS REPORTED	DISTRICTS (%)	SCHOOLS (%)
Taken no steps	23	46*
Key stakeholders made aware of LWP goal	42	33
Objectives under goal have been prioritized	10	8
Implementation/action plans developed	32	8*
Professional development/training conducted	3	1
Key personnel identified	45	31
Communication plan developed	19	10
Consequences for violating goal area established	13	6

Note 1. There are 31 districts and 84 schools in the sample.

* $p < 0.1$, based on chi square analysis comparing district and school responses on steps taken to establish a plan for measuring implementation of LWP.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEWS ON MONITORING LWP IMPLEMENTATION

Staff reported that they want simplified tools to measure implementation and to learn:

- how to measure implementation
- what to measure
- how to make measurements
- how to analyze what is measured
- how to use results to inform stakeholders and make on-going progress