

Sustainability of School Wellness Policy Initiatives



Jane M. Osowski, PhD, RD
Mary Frances Nettles, PhD, RD
National Food Service Management Institute
Applied Research Division
The University of Southern Mississippi

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to:

- explore strategies utilized by school nutrition (SN) directors and other administrators to sustain school wellness policies; and
- identify monitoring/evaluation practices used for measuring progress.

METHOD

Phase I

An expert panel of school nutrition professionals:

- explored successful strategies and practices to sustain local wellness policy (LWP) initiatives;
- described monitoring and evaluation practices of LWP; and
- identified types of training and resources for sustaining LWP.

Phase II

- The expert panel results directed the development of a survey to explore successful strategies for monitoring, evaluating and sustaining LWP initiatives.
- A review panel of SN professionals evaluated the survey and related documents.
- The survey was mailed to a random sample of 700 SN directors representing the seven USDA regions.

RESULTS

- A total of 225 (32%) surveys were returned.
- A majority of SN directors reported that LWP programs/activities were communicated to teachers (56.5%), administration staff (52.7%), and students (51.6%).
- LWP accomplishments were reported to school boards (50.9%) and LWP obstacles were communicated to school administration staff (51.8%).
- A majority of SN directors reported sole leadership in the implementation of school meal assurances (91.9%) and guidelines for competitive foods sold (57.2%).
- Additional staff that exhibited leadership roles for implementing LWP components included the district's school nurse (51.4%); school administrative staff such as principals (46.8%); district level wellness committee (45.5%); and district administration staff (42.8%).
- Respondents indicated that the LWP components most often monitored at the district level were SN program related.
- The majority of the respondents (42.5 – 46.5%) indicated that they did not know the details of monitoring and analyzing LWP data.
- Respondents reported that sustainability of the LWP initiatives involved maintaining a wellness committee at the school district level (69.0%).

APPLICATIONS

Continued leadership, communication with stakeholders, and technical assistance are critical to LWP progress and sustainability as districts may not be prepared to monitor LWP implementation. Information gained from this study will be used to guide the development of a resource for monitoring/evaluating LWP objectives and activities at the district and school site levels.

TOP PRACTICES FOR LWP SUSTAINABILITY

- The wellness committee has been maintained by the school district (69.0%)
- A wellness coordinator is in place/will be appointed (39.0%)
- The LWP is integrated with other school health initiatives (31.0%)
- Wellness activities are reviewed and revised, if needed (31.0%)
- Communication channels between schools and district administration has been established (27.8%)
- Partnerships have been established with other agencies/organizations (25.7%)
- The LWP is reviewed and updated regularly (25.1%)
- Barriers are identified (18.7%)
- Leadership for LWP implementation has been identified (16.0%)
- The LWP is incorporated into the district strategic plan (14.4%)

TRAINING AND RESOURCES IDENTIFIED TO EFFECTIVELY SUSTAIN LWP INITIATIVES

- Ideas for implementing nutrition education activities (61.9%)
- Ideas for non-food rewards and fundraising (56.3%)
- Strategies to monitor and evaluate the LWP activities (54.8%)
- Ideas for incorporating physical activities within the school day (48.7%)
- Strategies for revising the LWP (48.7%)
- Checklist to monitor progress or observe activities related to the LWP (47.7%)
- Presentation template for orientation of teachers and school staff (47.2%)
- Presentation templates for stakeholders, such as School Board, parent and community organizations, and student assemblies (47.2%)
- Professional development/training module on LWP monitoring and evaluation (41.6%)
- Strategies for reporting results to the School Board, media, community (37.6%)

