

**Information to be Used in the Development of Tools to
Assist in Communicating with Teachers,
Administrators, and Community Groups to Enhance
the School Nutrition Environment**



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Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

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PURPOSE

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

MISSION

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

VISION

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

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The prevalence of overweight among children and youth in the United States has reached epidemic proportions. Since 1980, obesity rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents. Of children aged 6-11 years, 15% (approximately 9 million) are considered overweight (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). Measured height and weight data from the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicate the prevalence of overweight among 12-to 19-year olds to be 15.5% compared to a prevalence of 10.5% for this age group in the 1988-1994 NHANES survey. Additionally, the overweight prevalence among 6-to 11-year olds and 2-to 5-year olds was 15.3% and 10.4% respectively for the 1999-2000 NHANES (Ogden, Flegal, Carroll, & Johnson, 2002). All three age groups of children experienced prevalence increases of approximately 3-5% between the two survey periods.

Because children spend from 1/3 to 1/2 of their day, five days a week for approximately 180 days a year in school, the nutrition environment of schools has a great influence on their health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) describes a healthy school nutrition environment (HSNE) as one in which

- The classroom, the school dining room, and school activities provide clear and consistent messages that explain and reinforce healthy eating and physical activity habits.
- Students learn to make healthy lifestyle choices not only in the classroom and the school dining room, but also at class parties, sports events, and wherever they are throughout the school day.
- Students have many opportunities to practice healthy habits. They can choose from an array of healthy food options, eat in relaxed and comfortable surroundings, and enjoy daily physical activity (USDA, 2000).

To assess the nutrition environments of schools nationwide, the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) Applied Research Division (ARD) completed a two-phase research study. Components of and barriers to HSNE were identified through focus groups and validated with a mail survey (Meyer et al., 2000; Rainville, Choi, & Brown, 2003). To increase awareness of the importance of the school nutrition environment and severity of the obesity epidemic among children and youth, CNP professionals must champion the cause. In the survey conducted by NFSMI, only 68% of the school foodservice personnel and 39% of the other school personnel placed high priority on the HSNE. To champion this effort, CNP professionals need tools to help them increase the awareness of school administrators, teachers, community leaders, and parents about the importance of a healthful school nutrition environment. Tools developed for this purpose

by NFSMI should include the following information from the NFSMI report *Healthy School Nutrition Environment: Results of a Nationwide Survey of School Personnel*.

- Approximately 73% of the participants responded their school was providing a healthy nutrition environment.
- Of the participants, 76% indicated nutrition was included in school curriculums, but only 55% of those involved the school foodservice personnel in that education.
- Behavior-focused nutrition education and adequate funds provided by local, state, and federal sources were identified as the most important components of a HSNE.
- The two most important barriers to an HSNE were identified as funding for school foodservice and competitive foods.
- Approximately 55% stated teachers and administrators used food as rewards.
- Fundraisers were used by 99% of the respondents with candy and baked goods most frequently sold.
- Approximately 30% of schools had stores that sold candy, chips, soft drinks, and other snacks.
- Only 55% of the schools reported that the school board had a policy for vending contracts.
- Vending machines (either beverage or snack or a combination) were reported in 72% of the schools represented in the survey.
- Participants ranked healthy snacks in vending machines, snack bars, and school stores as tenth in a list of thirteen important components of healthy school nutrition environments.
- Family education was identified as the number one strategy needed to increase awareness of a healthy school nutrition environment. Foodservice personnel identified teachers and administrators serving as role models as the second most important strategy for a healthy school nutrition environment.

It is recommended that these data become part of tools developed to assist school foodservice personnel in working with school administrators, teachers, community leaders, and parents to improve the nutrition environment in schools. It is also recommended that the development of these tools become part of the 2005 proposed project to develop a resource guide for implementing a local wellness policy.

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