The Implementation of School Health Initiatives Linked to Healthy Schools Program Participation and Higher Employment Counties in Arizona

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Conclusion

Compare the implementation of school health initiatives among AZ Health Zone-supported schools in HSP versus non-HSP schools and low versus higher income counties.

Background

The AZ Health Zone supports SNAP-Ed school health initiatives at schools across Arizona where over 50% of students receive free-and-reduced-price lunch, including those in low employment counties.1

A subset of these schools also participate in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Healthy Schools Program (HSP), a national evidence-based initiative designed to create and sustain healthy school environments.

Objective

Compare the implementation of school health initiatives among AZ Health Zone-supported schools in HSP versus non-HSP schools and low versus higher income counties.

Methods

Data Collection. We used the HSP’s National Healthy Schools Award Checklist (NHSAC) to measure school health implementation in six areas (right). Ninety-three schools across 13 of Arizona’s 15 counties completed NHSACs.

Data Analysis. We calculated total and section scores as percents of the maximum achievable scores and generated mean and median scores for comparison across subgroups using the two-sample Wilcoxon rank sum test.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>School Health &amp; Safety Policies &amp; Environment</th>
<th>Health Education</th>
<th>PE &amp; Other Physical Activity Programs</th>
<th>Nutrition Services</th>
<th>Health Promotion for Staff</th>
<th>Health Promotion for School</th>
<th>Family &amp; Community Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low (n=36)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher (n=57)</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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<td>50%</td>
<td>83%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-HSP (n=41)</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<td>HSP (n=51)</td>
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Only these scores were equivalent for non-HSP & HSP schools.

Only these scores did not differ significantly between groups.

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Conclusion

Implementation of school health initiatives was associated with HSP participation and location in higher employment counties. Schools in low-employment counties may have less overall support for non-essential education activities, aside from nutrition services that are federally regulated. The HSP may incentivize schools to begin or grow school health initiatives, or it may provide recognition for schools already engaged in comprehensive school health.

Reference