Districts frequently report implementing stronger practices than are written into their policies.

Districts should revise wellness policies to reflect their practices.

Introduction

- School Wellness Policies are required by the federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004
- There are federal requirements about the written school wellness policy
- There may be variability in district practices to implement their written policies
- This study focuses on the written policies and practices in three wellness domains:
  1. How does the district handle unpaid meal debts without stigmatizing the students?
  2. Is free drinking water available all day to all students?
  3. Is fundraising during school hours required to meet Smart Snacks standards?

Methods

This inductive mixed methods study uses qualitative and quantitative data to describe district written policies and practices in the three domains.
- The WellSAT WSCC coding system was used to assess the strength of the language in written district wellness policies.
- Sample: 34 Connecticut districts
- Interviews were conducted in 4 districts with school personnel: Food service directors and principals, to assess the implementation of the target domains

Results

- Most districts have written language for each domain however it is more commonly weak language.
- Districts were most commonly had either weak or no language for handling unpaid meal balances.
- Of the three practice subject areas, practices were consistently weaker in policy language than in actual implementation.
- Practices for dealing with unpaid meal balances were either absent from the policy or written in a way that stigmatizes the students.
- District A's policy: “they will be offered an “alternate meal”…a cheese sandwich with fruit and milk…”

Discussion

- There was a gap found between the strength of scores for the district-led practices of water availability and unpaid meal balances.
- Meal shaming practices were found in two of the interviewed schools’ policies.
- Districts may need to be encouraged to update their wellness policies to enforce certain district-led practices that are consistently underrepresented.
- Limitations:
  - Interview bias is possible as we conducted standard question sessions with school personnel
  - This study was small in scope which means the results are not easily generalizable to other states or school districts.

My sincerest thanks to: Dr. Marlene Schwartz, Dr. Matthew Singer, Sarah McKee, Taylor Koriakin, Mr. Alan R. Bennett, Dr. Sandra Chafouleas