



Workshop Explores How to Evaluate the Impact of School Policies on Childhood Obesity

Workshop for experts on measuring school policies to prevent childhood obesity

SUMMARY

[Samuels & Associates](#), a research and evaluation firm based in Oakland, Calif., organized the National Evaluation and Measurement Meeting on School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies, held on May 6 and 7, 2004 in San Francisco.

The purpose of the meeting was to develop consensus regarding measures and tools to evaluate school-based interventions aimed at reducing childhood obesity.

Researchers, public officials, public health practitioners and policymakers explored best methods for evaluating the impact of school nutrition and physical activity policies on the school environment, student food consumption, physical activity patterns and obesity rates.

This program was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) national program *Information for Action: School Policies to Prevent Childhood Obesity* (see [Program Results Report](#).)

Key Results

Project staff prepared a report entitled *National Evaluation and Measurement Meeting on School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*, available [online](#). The report addresses:

- Categories of school nutrition and physical activity policies, who initiates them and how they are implemented.
- A model for evaluating school nutrition and physical activity policies.
- Three types of evaluation studies:
 - Studies that evaluate school-based policies.
 - Studies that examine how policies affect obesity.

- Studies that track and integrate individual and environmental outcomes.
- Individual, school and community characteristics to evaluate and measure.
- Evaluation methods and data sources relevant to each.
- Challenges that were unresolved by the meeting, For example:
 - Utilizing school or district data versus developing new data collection tools.
 - Measuring how changes in the nutrition and physical activity environments affect school performance.
 - Determining the role of the food and beverage industry in school policy.
- Recommendations for evaluators, policymakers, school officials and funders. These include:
 - Clearly articulate the purpose of the evaluation and ensure that the purpose drives the evaluation design.
 - Start by analyzing policies to understand their intent, how they are implemented, who is responsible for them and how they are monitored.
 - Identify external factors, such as family/social norms, demographic characteristics and availability of parks or services that influence outcomes.
 - Support efforts to disseminate best practices and facilitate communication among evaluators from different backgrounds.
 - Fund evaluation studies that:
 - Monitor policy implementation.
 - Survey trends in school environments and student behaviors and health.
 - Measure the impact of school policies on student health outcomes.

Funding

RWJF sponsored the meeting with a grant in the amount of \$100,763. The [California Endowment](#) was a co-sponsor.

Prepared by: Mary B. Geisz

Reviewed by: Mary Nakashian and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: C. Tracy Orleans

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Reports

Boyle M, Purciel M, Craypo L, Stone-Francisco S and Samuels SE. *National Evaluation & Measurement Meeting on School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies: Final Report—Meeting Proceedings*. Oakland, CA: Samuels & Associates, December 2004. Available [online](#).