Translating Research For Federal Food And Nutrition Policy: The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act

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What Researchers Do
(What I Do)

• Use evidence-based research to inform policies that improve health and wellbeing
• Run analyses from public-use datasets
• Provide estimates/statistics for infographics
• Evaluate the adequacy of studies that are being cited by other organizations
• Determine the validity of statements made from opposing stakeholders
What Policymakers Do

• Policymakers are individuals elected or appointed to office at some level of government
  - Includes executive branch chiefs of staff and staff assistants
• Sell, argue, and advocate for specific interest issues
  - Interests are often shorter term and keyed to election cycles
• Make decisions that are often the result of compromise

The Problem

Yes, how did you know?

Because what you told me is absolutely correct but completely useless.

You must be a researcher.

Yes, how did you know?

Because you don't know where you are, you don't know where you're going, and now you're blaming me.

Credit: Ross Brownson, Jonathan Lomas, former director, Health Services Research Foundation in Canada.
What is policy?

- Policies are “laws, regulations, formal and informal rules and understandings that are adopted on a collective basis to guide individual and collective behavior”

What do policy makers want/need from researchers?

• Policymakers want answers to the following questions:
  1. Is there a problem (what fuels it)?
  2. Do we know how to fix it (intervention)?
  3. How much will it cost (financially, politically)?
Translating Research to Policy: The Challenges

1. Poor timing
2. Ambiguous findings
3. Balancing objectivity and advocacy
4. Lack of relevant data
5. Mismatch of randomized thinking with nonrandom problems
Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

• To combat rising childhood obesity rates Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010
• HHFKA developed stronger school nutrition standards
• Was unanimously supported in the Senate and received bipartisan support in the House
## School Nutrition Standards Before and After HHFKA Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Standard</th>
<th>Before HHFKA</th>
<th>After HHFKA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruits and vegetables (F&amp;V)</strong></td>
<td>Minimum amount of F&amp;V required, but no specifications to what type served</td>
<td>Increase the amount and variety of F&amp;V served; students <strong>required</strong> to select ½ serving of F&amp;V in order for school to receive federal reimbursement for meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole-grain products</strong></td>
<td>No requirements; schools encouraged to serve whole-grain products</td>
<td>All grains served must be whole grain rich (50% whole grains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Milk</strong></td>
<td>No requirements for milk options</td>
<td>Milk must be lower-fat, such as fat-free or low-fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sodium limits</strong></td>
<td>No requirements</td>
<td>Lowered gradually in 3 phases over: Target 1, Target 2, and Target 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competitive foods</strong></td>
<td>No requirements, with the exception of “foods of minimal nutritional value”</td>
<td>Items must contain &gt;50% whole grains OR have them as the 1st ingredient OR have the 1st ingredient be fruits, vegetables, dairy or protein OR be a combination food that contains at least ¼ cup fruit and/or vegetable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After HHFKA Implementation...

NUTRITION

Why Some Schools Are Saying ‘No Thanks’ to the School-Lunch Program

By Alexandra Sifferlin @acsifferlin | Aug. 29, 2013 | 223 Comments

CONGRESS BLOG

THE HILL'S FORUM FOR LAWMAKERS AND POLICY PROFESSIONALS

September 17, 2015, 12:30 pm

Should Congress trash Michelle Obama’s lunch program?

By Michelle Minton

Brent smith @bhambrent - 18 Dec 2015

Eating lunch with my 1st grader...this is $4.50!!?!

#thanksMichelleObama

Loves Healthy Foods
Arguments for & against HHFKA

Arguments for HHFKA
- Better food = better health
- “Smart Lunchroom Design” = increased revenue
- NSLP participation increases
- Plate waste was an issue before HHFKA

Arguments Against HHFKA
- Loss of revenue
- NSLP participation decreases
- Plate waste
Using Research to Guide Policy: Lessons from the Lunchroom

- Dietary habits of kids enrolled in free & reduced price (FRP) meal programs vs. those not enrolled
- 5th grade FRP-meal participants consumed F&Vs 3 more times/week than non-participants
- 8th grade FRP-meal participants consumed F&V 1.5 more times/week than non-participants
- FRP-meal participants consumed sugary beverages & fast food more often than non-participants—on average, 1 more time/week than non-FRP participants
- FRP participants more likely to be overweight than non-FRP participants
Lessons from the Lunchroom: Policy Recommendations

• Protect gains made in 2010
• Increase the federal meal reimbursement rate
• Improve nutrition education
• Finance school cafeteria kitchen equipment
• Prioritize fruits and vegetables
• Not allow politics to trump science
Lessons from the Lunchroom: Challenges

• Lack of relevant data
  o Used data from 2004–2007 (before HHFKA implementation)

• Ambiguous findings
  o Mixed results on eating patterns for children enrolled in FRP compared to non FRP-meal participants

• Poor timing
  o Report released in February 2015 with the expectation that bill would be reauthorized before September 30, 2015 deadline
Students receiving free or reduced price (FRP) school meals in 2004-2007 ate more fruits and vegetables than non-FRP students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Times More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>1.6x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>3.3x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Childhood obesity nearly tripled between 1970 and 2000.

Stronger nutrition standards in the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 increased fruit and vegetable consumption at school.

FRP students eat more healthy foods in school. They also eat more unhealthy foods everywhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Times Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugary beverages</td>
<td>10.6x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food</td>
<td>13.2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food</td>
<td>2.6x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food</td>
<td>3.6x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increasing consumption of sugary beverages by +23% and fast food by +16% from 2011 to 2012.
Researcher Turned Blogger?

School Lunch: Food Waste or Clean Plates?
March 9, 2015 4:50 PM EDT
If you give kids more fruits and vegetables, does it make sense to be talking about food initiatives for children. A new study from the University of Connecticut suggests the answer is yes.

School Lunch Costs: What the Kiwi Are They Talking About?
April 21, 2015 11:30 AM EDT
Last week, Congress hosted the first of several hearings about the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization act. This act includes the National School Lunch Program, which is reauthorized every five years. In 2010, a bipartisan Congress passed the Healthy Hunger-Free (FHA)—which brought nutrition standards for schools in line with federal dietary guidelines. As implemented by the Secretary of Agriculture (USDA), the law also requires students to eat at least 1/2 cup of fruits and vegetables. Read more>

School Lunch: Have Healthier Standards Driven Up Food Costs?
July 10, 2015 3:53 PM EDT
Yesterday, my colleague Karen Perry Stillerman debuted our blog series on the School Nutrition Association’s campaign for why Congress needs to roll back healthier school food standards.

School Lunch: The Half Truth about Whole Grains
May 7, 2015 9:51 AM EDT
The debate over school lunch nutrition standards continues in May. I’ve heard a number of claims that don’t ring true. Today I’ll argue that I’ve been hearing about the challenge of getting more whole grains into children’s lunches. Read more>

National School Lunch Program: Glass Half Empty or Half Full?
March 19, 2015 5:44 PM EDT
A March 13 article in U.S. News & World Report on the federal school nutrition standards barely gets a passing grade. Beyond misinterpreting the law, the article offers a narrow, glass-half-empty perspective for readers. For an increasingly politicized debate involving our nation’s children, it’s necessary to look at all the evidence. Read more>
Update: Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2015

- Senate Agriculture Committee will vote tomorrow on Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) Act
- The new bill is called “Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016”
- Generally, nutrition standards from 2010 remain intact, except for the following:
  - HFFKA rules requiring all grains be 100% whole grain rich has been scaled back to 80% whole grain rich HHFKKA rules required all grains served to be “whole grain rich”
  - Schools get more time to implement sodium Target 2 limits, and there is a hold on the final sodium target limits until further research
- Public health advocates will likely call CNR a win!
Questions?