

Overview

In an effort to make nutrition as much a priority in child care settings as it has become in schools, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction allocated Child Care and Development Block Grant "quality" funds to improving child care nutrition services. This grew out of a long standing interagency CACFP working group that included representation from the child care, licensing and CACFP divisions, as well as, CACFP and children's advocates. This funding has been used for several purposes, including:



- Establishment of the Strategic Assessment of the Child Care Nutrition Environment Advisory
- Group, which has produced recommendations on improving nutrition and increasing physical activity in child care;
- Development of a website devoted to providing nutrition education for child care providers and other nutrition educators; and
- Creation of the "Food for Thought: Nutrition Across the Curriculum" educational materials for child care providers.

The California Department of Education (CDE), Nutrition Services Division, has developed Preschools shaping Healthy Impressions through Nutrition and Exercise (SHINE) recognition program.

Groups Involved

The effort to promote nutrition and health in California child care settings has involved a large number of stakeholders and partners from all sectors.

The Strategic Assessment of the Child Care Nutrition Environment Advisory Group was created by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency through a contract with the University of California, Davis. UC-Davis faculty and staff facilitated meetings and coordinated the assessment. Members of the Advisory Group included representatives

from California Department of Education (including the Child Development and Nutrition Services Divisions), Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Public Health Office of Obesity and Nutrition, First 5 California Commission, Head Start, WIC, county child care and education offices, child care licensing, and numerous non-profit organizations. In addition, Advisory Group meetings were open to the public and included time for public comment.

The website of nutrition education and training materials as well as the "Food for Thought" curriculum were developed in collaboration with the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP) in California.

Strategic Assessment of the Child Care Nutrition Environment Advisory Group

"Keeping Children Healthy in California's Child Care Environments" Report

In June 2009, the California Department of Education released an executive summary on behalf of the Advisory Group detailing recommendations to improve nutrition and increase physical activity in child care settings. This report was the product of almost two years of work. The Advisory Group drafted four goals that they recommend are incorporated into state efforts to promote health and wellness in child care settings:

- Strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Establish nutrition and physical activity requirements for child care programs
- Provided consistent messaging related to nutrition and physical activity
- Expand nutrition and physical activity training in child care programs

Under each goal are several specific recommendations. For the first goal to strengthen CACFP, the recommendations included:

- Establish California nutrition and physical activity standards for an improved CACFP
- Modify the federal CACFP meal pattern
- Streamline the CACFP compliance requirements to increase agency participation
- Collaborate on a CACFP marketing plan
- Evaluation nutrition and physical activity education during CACFP monitoring visits
- Require CACFP participation for state-funded providers

Recommendations for Child Care Nutrition Standards

In addition to producing the report, the California Department of Education convened the Child Care Nutrition and Activity Standards Advisory Workgroup in 2008 in order to develop specific recommendations for child care nutrition standards and child nutrition environment guidelines.

The workgroup consisted of the Department of Public Health, California Food Policy Advocates, the Child Care Food Program Roundtable, the California WIC Association, sponsors, and researchers. The Workgroup divided its nutrition standards recommendations into those that could be implemented with minimal cost to providers, those that could be implemented with a six-cent increase in the providers' reimbursement rates, and those that require further cost evaluation. The Workgroup structured its recommendations in this way due to concern that the new standards could be too difficult or expensive for providers to implement, which could cause some providers to leave the program rather than comply.

The minimal cost provisions were determined to carry little, if any, additional food costs for providers. The provisions could also be implemented with few changes in program administration or food preparation facilities, and they are simple enough that they would not require extensive education and outreach.

- Serve only 2% fat milk or less for children 2 years or older.
- Limit juice to 1 serving of 100% juice per day.
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable: One vegetable at lunch and supper.
- No deep fat frying on site.
- Limit sugar to 6 grams per serving for both hot and cold cereals.

The provisions that could be implemented with a six-cent increase in reimbursement rate are those that the Workgroup determined would carry additional food costs but few costs associated with administrative changes, training, or renovating facilities. The Workgroup used six cents as the reimbursement level because that state had already raised reimbursements to schools by six cents in order to implement improved nutrition standards.

- Limit fried potatoes to a maximum of one time per week.
- No fruit packed in heavy syrup.
- Limit sweet grains to no more than 2x per week served only at snacks (see Food Buying Guide Grains/Breads List, items with superscripts 3 and 4).

The items that require further cost evaluation carry unknown potential for increased food costs and might require training and education, changes in program administration, and facility renovations in order to implement.

- Increase the number of vegetables and fruits offered each day, particularly fresh. If serving canned fruits, serve unsweetened fruit packed in its own juice.
- Serve at least one whole grain per day.
- Limit serving hot dogs, SPAM, luncheon meats, and like-products to no more than 3x per week.
- Require ½ of all grain products be whole grain each week.
- Do not serve sugar-sweetened or artificially sweetened beverages.
- Do not serve processed meat.
- Require ½ of all grains be whole grain each day.
- Do not serve processed cheese.

Recommendations for Child Care Nutrition Environment Guidelines

The Workgroup defined the nutrition environment as the surroundings and practices that influence the nutrition status of the children and the adults who care for them. The Workgroup created three recommendations for improving the nutrition environment:

- Family-style eating with adult modeling at the table, children serving themselves and self-feeding with child-sized utensils
- Development of a child care wellness policy
- Professional development training for teachers

Next Steps

The recommendations for child care nutrition standards have not yet been finalized or implemented because it has not been possible to conduct the necessary cost evaluation of certain provisions. The California Department of Education (CDE) Nutrition Services Division, which administers CACFP, would like to pilot the recommendations in order to determine feasibility and costs. As part of the planned pilot study, called Linking Education, Environment, Activity and Food (LEEAF), a representative sample of eight child care centers and over one thousand family child care homes (under two sponsoring organizations) would receive a \$0.24 increase in meal reimbursements for 18 months. The higher reimbursement rate would enable providers to purchase the foods required in the standards, even if they are more expensive than what is currently served. Providers would also receive training and technical assistance. However, potential grant funders have been unwilling to pay for the increase in reimbursement rates since this would go toward food.

In the meantime, the Nutrition Services Division will incorporate general nutrition recommendations for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans into its CACFP trainings. The Nutrition Services Division is planning on applying for U.S. Department of Agriculture CACFP wellness grants in order to implement the child care nutrition environment guidelines.

Child Care Provider Nutrition Education Website

The Nutrition Services Division developed a website in collaboration with FSNEP in order to provide online nutrition education and training resources. The website, which will be launched in Spring 2010, will offer online programs that offer professional growth hours for child care providers. The primary audiences for the website are CACFP sponsors and participating providers in California, but it also targets FSNEP educators. The content is also free and available to child care providers and educators in other states.

“Food for Thought” Curriculum

The “Food for Thought” curriculum was designed to teach nutrition in child care settings. The curriculum incorporates nutrition into other key areas of early childhood education, such as literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum is currently available online at <http://www.healthypreschoolers.com>.

Resources

Preschools SHINE embodies ten elements to create healthy eating and active living environments in CACFP agencies. The elements include meal quality, mealtime environment, classroom nutrition education, edible gardens, physical activity, wellness policies, professional development, partnerships, and a leadership team. Each element contains criteria that CACFP agencies must meet to become a Preschools SHINE site, for example, agencies must meet enhanced meal quality standards for meals and snacks served. Agencies must complete required online training, attend Preschools SHINE Forums, conduct self-assessment of their environments, and develop policies and practices to SHINE. California is pilot testing a coaching model to assist CACFP agencies in becoming Preschool SHINE sites. These agencies will be the first Preschool SHINE graduates who will be recognized as models and mentors for other early care and development programs. Beginning July 2013, the CDE will establish Preschools SHINE coaches statewide in six regions paving the way for more CACFP agencies to become Preschools SHINE sites influencing California youngest citizens.

To access meeting agendas and the “Keeping Children Healthy in California’s Child Care Environments” Executive Summary Report, please see: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/cc/ccsa.asp>.