

## Overview

Texas has several ongoing initiatives, each involving a variety of stakeholders, to encourage physical activity, healthy eating, and overall wellness among children. The most all-encompassing of these is the 3E's for Healthy Living Initiative, which promotes Education, Exercise and Eating Right among Texas children of all ages. "Promoting Healthy Eating & Physical Activity for a Healthier Lifestyle" stemmed from this broader effort in order to target young children receiving child care services from providers who participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This initiative, also known as the CACFP Initiative, has resulted in recommended changes to the CACFP meal pattern, new training opportunities, and new educational materials, including two short films aimed at children and one for educators. The CACFP Initiative is in the process of implementation and evaluation. Another new initiative, the Early Childhood Health & Nutrition Interagency Council, also promises to benefit young children. The Council will focus on children under the ages of six, addressing both obesity and hunger through coordination, collaboration, and the promotion of existing programs, including child nutrition programs.

## Groups Involved

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) has been at the center of many statewide child health promotion and obesity prevention efforts. TDA, which administers CACFP and the federal school meal programs in Texas, is one of the three state agencies represented on the Interagency Obesity Council (IOC), along with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Created in 2007, the IOC was charged by the Texas Senate with guiding efforts to prevent obesity among children and adults. The 3E's for Healthy Living Initiative was a result of this interagency collaboration. 3E's aims to promote a healthy lifestyle among all children in Texas through Education, Exercise and Eating Right. The initiative is now administered by TDA.

Within TDA, the Food and Nutrition Division drafted a plan for the CACFP Initiative, "Promoting Healthy Eating & Physical Activity for a Healthier Lifestyle," as part of the broader 3E's campaign. The CACFP Initiative includes a CACFP Committee made up of representatives from child care centers that participate in CACFP without a sponsoring organization, sponsored child care centers, sponsoring organizations, Head Start centers, DSHS (which administers the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC), and other agencies and organizations relating to child care, child health, and nutrition. The Food and Nutrition Division has worked extensively with DSHS, specifically WIC, and AgriLife Extension Service in order to implement the CACFP Initiative.

The Early Childhood Health & Nutrition Interagency Council was created by the Texas Senate in 2009. TDA presides over the Council, which also includes representatives from the Health and Human Services Commission, DSHS (from both a health promotion/disease prevention program and WIC), the Texas Workforce Commission, TEA, the Department of Family & Protective Services Child Care Licensing Division, and AgriLife Extension Service. In addition, the Council invites stakeholders to its meetings at least twice a year. Among the stakeholders must be a child nutrition or activity specialist, such as a registered dietitian, a staff member at a child care center, a staff member at a family day care home, two child health care professionals, a representative of a nonprofit agency that provides family or wellness services, and representative from a community health education/outreach agency.

## **Promoting Healthy Eating & Physical Activity for a Healthier Lifestyle**

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### **The CACFP Committee**

In late 2007, a small group within the TDA Food and Nutrition Division drafted the initial plan for the CACFP Initiative. By October of 2008, the plan was approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture, and the CACFP Committee was formed soon afterward. The CACFP Committee was primarily involved in advising the creation of recommended modifications to the CACFP meal patterns.

### **Recommended Modifications to the CACFP Meal Patterns**

In order to improve the eating habits of children served by CACFP as well as their families and care providers, the CACFP Committee created a set of recommended nutrition standards to promote increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grains. The recommendations are also intended to decrease consumption of fat, saturated fat, and trans fat. Although the Committee and the Food and Nutrition Division considered mandatory nutrition standards, they ultimately decided to make recommendations due to the possibility of future federal regulations that would override the Texas standards. Staff within the Food and Nutrition Division conducted a cost analysis to help gauge the potential impact of the standards, so the Committee was also aware that the standards could create a financial burden for providers. In addition, there were concerns that providers in remote areas might have difficulty accessing items like fresh produce on a regular basis. With these considerations in mind, the Committee recommended that providers serve:

- Only non-fat (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk to children 2 years of age and older,
- Juice no more than once daily, at breakfast or snack only, and not from a bottle,
- At least one fresh or frozen fruit or vegetable each day,
- At least one vegetable at lunch/supper,
- A good source of vitamin C daily,

- A good source of vitamin A three times per week,
- One whole-grain product daily,
- Sweet-grain products\* no more than two times per week, at snack only, and
- Ready-to-eat cereals with no more than 10 grams of sugar per serving.

To help child care providers implement these recommendations, the Food and Nutrition Division also created a sample six-week cycle menu that demonstrates acceptable meals and snacks.

This process took approximately two months. By August 2009, a notice of the recommendations was sent out to child care centers and sponsoring organizations. Members of the CACFP Committee also promoted the recommendations.

## Training Sessions

In addition to the recommendations and sample cycle menus, the Food and Nutrition Division contracted with AgriLife Extension Service to offer free training sessions on menu planning and serving healthy snacks beginning in February 2010. Because AgriLife employs Extension agents in counties throughout Texas, the training sessions are more accessible to providers across the state than they would be if the smaller Food and Nutrition Division staff conducted all of the trainings. The impact is even greater because of the train-the-trainer model that they use: staff members from the 50 Texas sponsoring organizations attend the trainings, and then they in turn train the staff at sponsored centers and family day care homes. With approximately 9,000 family day care providers participating in CACFP, this model is necessary to reach all of the children who benefit from CACFP in Texas.

- Defined as products in Group C through Group G in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs. Items in these groups include cookies, cake, muffins, waffles, and granola bars.

## Educational Materials

Those who attend training sessions receive lots of educational materials to help reinforce the lessons learned and bring the information back to their facilities. Attendees receive a workbook with the sample cycle menus, lists of foods rich in vitamins A and C, and a seasonal produce chart. They are also given U.S. Department of Agriculture resources, including the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs. In addition to print resources, they get DVDs: the Adventures of Zobey to show to the children and an accompanying educator's DVD.

The Adventures of Zobey was originally created by Texas WIC with funding from DSHS. The first two films in the series were favorably reviewed by researchers at the University of Texas, who found that they increased physical activity and caused children to ask for healthy foods. After the Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture expressed interest in the films, Texas WIC gave TDA copies for distribution. TDA then funded two of its own Adventures of Zobey films using state administrative expense funds.

The Food and Nutrition Division contracted with Texas WIC to co-produce "Barn Dance Party" and "Jungle Jive." These short films make specific references to the foods in the new CACFP nutrition standards. The films were piloted by an expert on physical activity in childcare settings, Dr. Diane Kraft, and they were edited in response to her feedback. Texas WIC now uses these two films as well.

After "Barn Dance Party" and "Jungle Jive" were completed, DSHS provided funding for Texas WIC to produce an educator's DVD in collaboration with the Food and Nutrition Division. This DVD includes:

- In-depth information on the new nutrition standards,
- A discussion of why providers should follow the new recommendations,
- Information on how to shop for healthy foods on a budget,
- Recipes tested in the Texas WIC test kitchen, and
- Five exercises developed by Dr. Kraft, demonstrated by children in a variety of settings (small and large indoor spaces as well as outdoors).

## Evaluation

The training sessions are currently being evaluated by the attendees using a pre- and post-training survey. The surveys were developed by a graduate student from the UT School of Public Health. The surveys are administered at each training session by the AgriLife trainer.

Although a formal analysis of the CACFP Initiative has not yet been completed, initial feedback has been positive. There has been an overwhelming response to the training sessions and especially the DVDs. The response to the nutrition standards has been largely favorable. There have been some complaints about having to buy two types of milk (whole milk for children between the ages of one and two and low-fat milk for older children) and the expense of fresh produce. But many providers are grateful for the new recipes and cycle menus, which have helped them to break out of the rut of old menus that were too difficult to update on their own.

## Future Plans

The Food and Nutrition Division plans to add an additional resource to its training materials: "Snacks that Count," a recipe book of CACFP-creditable snacks. Although the Food and Nutrition Division has no plans to make the educational materials and other resources available outside of the training sessions – they want to encourage sponsors and providers to attend – they are considering offering the training via webinar to expand the reach.

Evaluation is a large part of the next phase of the CACFP Initiative. Over the course of summer and fall 2010, more UT School of Public Health graduate students will finalize the evaluation tools for the Adventures of Zobey films and begin to analyze the pre- and post-training survey data. In the fall of 2010, the CACFP Committee will reconvene for a review of the analysis and a qualitative evaluation of the recommendations and Initiative as a whole.

## The Early Childhood Health & Nutrition Interagency Council

The Early Childhood Health & Nutrition Interagency Council, formed through an act of the Texas Senate in 2009, is in the process of developing a six-year plan to address childhood obesity, hunger/food insecurity, and the utilization and quality of child nutrition programs. This plan will identify ways that agencies can share resources, collaborate on projects, and promote each others' work. The plan will also outline how the agencies will create consistent nutrition messaging across all programs for children under the age of six.