

Overview

The Child and Adult Care Food Program agency within the New York State Department of Health (NYCACFP) has developed a childhood obesity prevention initiative called Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care

Settings. Through Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings, preschool-aged children in child care and their parents receive nutrition and physical activity education. The initiative is primarily funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp Nutrition

Education Program¹ with State Obesity Prevention Funds to match the federal dollars. NY-CACFP also received two one-year USDA Team Nutrition grants in order to enhance Eat Well Play Hard, putting a greater focus on nutrition and environmental changes in child care settings through staff training. NY-CACFP also created the Healthy Child Meal Pattern for child care providers participating in CACFP. These updated nutrition requirements and recommendations help to ensure that all providers serve nutritious foods that exceed federal CACFP standards.



Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings

Core Strategies

All Eat Well Play Hard initiatives in New York State have the same core strategies, the first three strategies of which were the basis for Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings:

- Increase consumption of vegetables and fruit
- Increase consumption of low-fat or fat-free milk for children over age 2
- Increase developmentally appropriate physical activity
- Decrease exposure to television and other recreational screen time
- Increase the initiation and duration of exclusive breastfeeding

¹ The Food Stamp Program is now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program is now called SNAP-Education, or SNAP-Ed. curriculum for children and their parents to directly promote better nutrition and increased physical activity. The State Obesity Prevention Funds used as part of the state match are not limited in this way, though. Thus, this money could be used to support training for child care center staff and facilitate environmental changes in child care centers. In addition, NY-CACFP received one-year USDA Team Nutrition grants in the past that were used to develop the staff curriculum, conduct staff training at centers that had received the child and parent curriculum and training, and provide ongoing technical assistance to support environmental and policy changes.

Funding

The program is primarily funded through SNAP-Ed. In New York, the Office of Temporary Disability and Assistance administers both SNAP and SNAP-Ed. In order to obtain federal SNAP-Ed money, the state must match federal funding with money also being used for nutrition education in low-income populations. New York used State Obesity Prevention Funds as part of its match. State funding for WIC nutrition education as well as HMO foundation money were also counted toward the state match. Although these two sources of money were not used to fund Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings, they were eligible as matching funds because they were used for state public health and nutrition activities that shared the goals of Eat Well Play Hard. In essence, states can "point to" these types of funding to secure a larger federal match.

SNAP-Ed money can only be used to address behavioral changes in the target population, low-income families. Thus, SNAP-Ed money was used to support the development and implementation of a

Program Development

Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings is based on a curriculum for children and parents as well as child care center staff. The curriculum was originally developed by NY-CACFP staff Registered Dietitians (RDs) with input from parents of preschool-aged children and child care center directors. The curriculum was reviewed by an advisory panel of experts in preschool physical activity as well as nutritionists working in public health, community and Head Start settings. After the first year of implementation, the curriculum underwent an extensive planned review by the original advisory panel, the RDs who had implemented the program in the field, and additional experts. The curriculum was revised and finalized after this review, although minor changes are made periodically as a result of quarterly meetings with the RDs implementing the program.

Curriculum Content

The child and parent curriculum consists of ten lessons that focus on various nutrition topics and physical activity. Each lesson includes:

- A lesson plan
 - Outline identifying the audience (child/parent), goals, objectives, important points, activities, closing reminders and references
- Three activities
 - Step-by-step guides listing ingredients, supplies, preparation and implementation steps
 - At least one of these involves food preparation
- Handouts
 - Ready-to-distribute information, activity ideas, and healthy recipes
- Parent Pages
 - Newsletters for parents with tips for supporting lessons, a low-cost recipe, and a home activity for parent and child

The staff curriculum closely parallels the topics and format of the child and parent curriculum, although it includes a focus on making environmental and policy changes in the child care center.

Program Implementation and Evaluation

Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings originally employed a model that funded Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to hire Registered Dietitians (RDs) to implement the program. The program has since expanded to fund other community-based organizations, and it is also being implemented by the NY-CACFP staff RDs. The RD provides six lessons to preschool-aged children during the day and six lessons for parents at the child care site. In addition, the RD collects pre- and post-implementation surveys from parents. NY-CACFP found that inexpensive incentives that are related to the activities such as a pedometer can also motivate some parents to attend the sessions.

As part of the enhanced Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings initiative funded through Team Nutrition grants, the RD also conducts two training sessions for the center's staff. These trainings are aimed at promoting environmental changes in the center, such as serving more nutritious food or providing more nutrition education to the children. This component has been evaluated with an observational tool that investigates the center's menus, mealtime practices and environment, frequency and quality of nutrition and physical activity education, and the center's nutrition policies.

Future Plans

Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings has been positively evaluated and chosen by the SNAP-Ed of USDA as a best practice model. NY-CACFP plans on continuing expansion of the effective initiative into more centers and homes.

Healthy Child Meal Pattern

Development of Updated Nutrition Standards

NY-CACFP wanted to implement updated nutrition standards for the food served through CACFP that went above and beyond federal requirements without placing such a burden on providers that they might leave the program. NY-CACFP staff examined efforts to update nutrition standards in schools and child care settings across the country as well as Head Start performance standards. They also analyzed a database of menus collected from providers participating in CACFP to determine areas for improvement and feasible changes. And although New York State does not have extensive nutrition standards as part of the child care licensing regulations, New York City's licensing requirements were considered. Finally, taking into account the Eat Well Play Hard strategies, they created the Healthy Child Meal Pattern, which consists of both requirements and recommendations.

Required Meal Pattern Changes

- Milk
 - Children ages 1-5 must be served only unflavored milk.
 - For children 1-2 years of age, the milk must be whole.
 - For children ages 2-18 years of age, the milk must be fat-free or low-fat (1%).
 - The menu must specify the type of milk served.
- Vegetables/Fruits
 - No more than one serving of juice may be served per day.
- Grains/Breads
 - Sweet grain products and sweet cereals may not be served at lunch or supper.
 - No more than two servings of sweet grain products and/or sweet cereals may be served per week.
 - Sweet grain products are specified in the Grains/Breads section of the Crediting Foods in CACFP under groups D, E, F, and G. They include doughnuts, pastries, Pop-Tarts®, toaster pastries, granola bars, breakfast bars, muffins, cookies, cakes, and brownies.
 - Sweet cereals are those that contain more than 6 grams of sugar per adult serving (consistent with the new WIC food package).

- Meat/Meat Alternates
 - Yogurt must be fat-free or low-fat and prepared without artificial sweeteners.
- Other
 - Water must be served with snack if neither of the two required components is a beverage. Water is not counted as a snack component.
 - The menu must specify when water is served at snack.

Recommended Meal Pattern Changes

- Milk
 - Unflavored fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk is recommended for school-aged children.
- Vegetables/Fruits
 - Vegetables and fruits should be fresh, frozen, or canned and prepared with no added sugar, salt, or fat.
 - At least one of the two servings of vegetable/fruit required at lunch and supper should be a vegetable.
 - One or more servings of vegetable/fruit per day should be high in vitamin C.
 - Three or more servings of vegetable/fruit per week should be high in vitamin A.
 - Three or more servings of vegetable/fruit per day should be fresh.
- Grains/Breads
 - All breads and cereals should be whole grain. To be considered whole grain, the first ingredient listed on the nutrition label should be whole grain, not enriched.
- Meat/Meat Alternates
 - Meat and meat alternates (chicken, turkey, beef, pork, lamb, fish, and/or vegetable proteins) should be lean or low-fat.
 - Meat and meat alternates should be prepared without adding extra fat.
 - No more than one serving of processed or high-fat meat should be served per week. This includes hot dogs, chicken nuggets, fish sticks, fried chicken, Vienna sausages, corn dogs and/or cold cuts.
 - No more than one serving of cheese should be served per week, unless the cheese is low-fat.

Implementation

As of October 1, 2009, all providers participating in CACFP were expected to comply with the new requirements. To prepare providers for the change, the new guidelines were released in May 2009, and the information was incorporated into training sessions at the same time. NY-CACFP developed a DVD explaining the new requirements for sponsors and providers who experience staff turnover in between trainings. Menu reporting forms also remind providers of the requirements.

Oversight

According to NY-CACFP staff, menus are reviewed at least once every two years but usually once per year. In addition to monitoring for compliance with the existing federal regulations and the updated requirements, staff offer feedback to help providers meet the recommendations as well.

Feedback

The reaction to the new standards has been overwhelmingly positive. According to NY-CACFP staff, people have actually thanked them; cooks, for example, say the requirements give them the leverage they need to get more money for food at their center. Overall, compliance has not been an issue since the requirements were crafted to produce minimal cost burden and require little education. Several requirements, like those for milk, had already been recommended for years. However, staff have noted trouble with the sweet grain products provision. Providers and cooks try to push the limits, saying that certain products are healthy and should not be restricted.

Resources

You can find the Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings child/parent curriculum at:
http://www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/nutrition/cacfp/ewphccs_curriculum/index.htm

The Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings staff curriculum is available at:
http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/nutrition/cacfp/ewphccs_staff_curriculum/index.htm

SNAP-Ed nutrition education money is handled by different agencies in different states. You can find out more by going to: <http://snap.nal.usda.gov/>