

SCHOOL HEALTH COORDINATORS MAKE AN IMPACT

Evaluation shows schools have improved nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco policies

Public Health Problem

- Many Maine students don't eat recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables daily or reach recommended levels for physical activity. About a quarter of high school students are obese or overweight and over twenty percent of them use tobacco.
- Promoting healthy eating, physical activity, and tobacco cessation through better school health policies and practices improves the outlook for prevention of chronic diseases caused by poor health habits.

Program

- Forty-two school health coordinators have been funded in Maine schools as part of a statewide network of community and schools coalitions known as Healthy Maine Partnerships. Coordinators are responsible for implementing the Maine Coordinated School Health Programs (CSHP) initiative, a joint collaboration between the Maine Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to improve school health programs, policies, and services.
- Researchers from the Maine-Harvard Prevention Research Center evaluated the changes in policies and individual health behaviors occurring in local education agencies comparing those with funded school health coordinators to those without coordinators.
- The evaluation was made possible through funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Adolescent and School Health and from Maine's Tobacco Settlement monies as part of CSHP collaboration with the Healthy Maine Partnerships.

Impact

Results from local education agencies *with* school health coordinators:

- Increased time for regular physical activity for K-8 students in more than seventy-five percent of local education agencies
- Increased walking and fitness programs for school staff and community members
- Implementation of policy changes that improved more than one aspect of school nutrition, such as eliminating soft drinks and other foods of minimal nutritional value from vending machines in all districts
- Passage of tobacco-free school campus policies in all districts
- Leveraging of additional resources for improving school health, including more than five million dollars for physical activity and nutrition programs
- Greater likelihood of having physical activity intramural offerings, improved nutrition offerings, and tobacco cessation programs
- Decreased soda consumption, decreased tobacco use, and less *inactivity*.

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