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Linking Education, Activity and Food (LEAF) Report on Participant Assessment of the Adequacy of SB 19 Executive Summary

BACKGROUND: *In response to the child obesity epidemic the California legislature passed Senate Bills 19 and 56, titled the Pupil Nutrition, Health and Achievement Act of 2001. In accordance with the legislation, 16 middle and high schools were provided grants to pilot test the implementation of SB 19/56 as well as to promote the consumption of California grown fresh produce. A multi-component evaluation of this pilot project, Linking Education, Activity, and Food (LEAF), was conducted by the Center for Weight and Health (CWH) at the University of California, Berkeley. The component of the evaluation designed to assess the LEAF teams' perceptions of the adequacy of the SB 19 legislation is described in this report.*

METHODOLOGY: Given that the LEAF teams were charged with leading the implementation of LEAF at the participating school districts, they gained valuable insight into the appropriateness and feasibility of implementing the SB 19 requirements. In order to capitalize on these experiences, LEAF team members were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to evaluate the adequacy of each component of SB 19. The questionnaire was administered to 47 team members from the 9 LEAF districts at a LEAF networking meeting held on May 20, 2004. These team members included: 8 LEAF project coordinators, 8 LEAF evaluators, 7 school administrators, 6 district food service directors or supervisors, 6 physical education instructors or coaches and 12 other LEAF school personnel such as other teachers, nutrition specialists or school nurses.

FINDINGS

- **In most cases, 78% (7 of 9) or more of the districts reported compliance with the various components¹ of the legislation. Those components most likely to be implemented in their entirety included:**
 - Formation of the Child Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee (CNPAAC) (100%)
 - Composition of the CNPAAC (89%)
 - Nutrient Standards for competitive **beverages** (89%)
 - Limits on the size of à la carte entrees and side dishes (89%)
 - Meal planning method (89%)
 - Prohibition on the sale of non-compliant items during the school day (78%)

¹ The parts of the SB 19 legislation which applied to the LEAF schools were broken down into 13 distinct components for the purposes of this analysis. Only 11 components however could be implemented by the schools or districts themselves the other 2 could only be implemented by the State. Therefore they were able to state an opinion with regard to all 13 components but could only assess their compliance with 11 of them.

- **Those components that were more likely to have been implemented only in part or not at all included:**
 - Having a designated person to determine compliance with nutrient standards
 - Posting the policy
 - Nutrient standards for competitive *foods*
 - Fruits and vegetables provided at every venue

- **Overall, respondents tended to be very supportive of the various components of the legislation.**
 - Although from 4 to 67 percent of total respondents recommended changes to the various components, many of these recommended modifications were to strengthen or clarify the language; fewer recommendations were made to weaken the wording.
 - For 6 of the 13 components, a small minority of total respondents, 2 to 10 percent, recommended that the component not be included at all in future legislation.

- **Only two components were definitely opposed by over 10 percent of total respondents:**
 - The requirement that fruits and vegetables be provided at all venues (20% opposed)
 - The requirement that statewide implementation of nutrition standards be contingent on funding to the state for technical assistance (38% opposed)

- **Food Service Directors' and Project Coordinators' responses (combined) also tended to be supportive of many components, but did differ somewhat from the group as a whole.**
 - Many more recommended modifications to the required meal reimbursement increase compared to the group as a whole (43% vs. 23%).
 - More than 10% of the food service directors + project coordinators opposed the following components:
 - Posting a summary of nutrition and physical activity laws and regulations as well as the district's nutrition and physical activity policies in public view (17% opposed)
 - Requiring the CNPAAC to hold at least one public hearing (17% opposed)
 - Requiring that serving sizes of entrée items and side dishes be no larger than the portions of foods served as part of the federal school meal program (11% opposed)
 - Requiring the provision of fruits and vegetables at all venues (29% opposed)
 - Having statewide implementation of nutrition standards contingent on funding to the state for technical assistance (36% opposed).

- **The majority (86%) of total respondents felt that increased meal reimbursement contingency should remain in future legislation (the other 14% were unsure) however they were divided as to whether they could implement SB 19 in the absence of additional funding:**
 - One third thought they could, one-third was unsure and one-third thought they could not.
 - Food service directors + project coordinators were almost twice as likely to recommend modifications to the meal reimbursement provision, slightly less likely to recommend the provision remain as is, and slightly more likely to indicate that they could not implement SB 19 without increased meal reimbursement.

- The main concerns expressed were:
 - That providing healthier foods and beverages is more expensive
 - The need for strong commitment and support from stakeholders especially if additional funding is not provided.

- **Of the 16 elements² that the legislation required be included in the LEAF district board policies, the following 8 were included in 89% or more of the LEAF districts' policies according to self-reports;**
 - Implement SB 19 nutrition standards
 - Encourage healthy/discourage unhealthy fundraisers
 - Ensure no pupil is hungry
 - Improve nutrition standards
 - Increase availability of fruits and vegetables
 - Encourage participation in lunch program by eligible students
 - Integrate nutrition and physical activity into overall curriculum
 - Enforce existing PE requirements

- **According to self-reports the following eight elements were included in 67% or less of the districts' policies:**
 - Ensure to the extent possible that foods served are fresh (67%)
 - Ensure students have a minimum of 30 minutes to eat lunch and 20 minutes to eat breakfast (67%)
 - Improve the quality of PE and increase training of PE teachers (67%)
 - Alter economic structures to reduce the dependency on sale of less healthy foods ((56%)
 - Ensure professional development for food service staff (45%)
 - Collaborate with farmers markets (45%)
 - Develop a financing plan to implement the policies (34%)
 - Increase the availability of organic produce and school gardens (33%)

- **The respondents tended to be supportive of the policy content requirements even when their district had not successfully incorporated them into their policy. From 59-99% of respondents supporting keeping the requirement for a specific element in future legislation. Only 4 required policy elements were supported by less than 83% of respondents:**
 - Alter economic structures to reduce the dependency on sale of less healthy foods (75%)
 - Increase the availability of organic produce and school gardens (70%)
 - Collaborate with farmers markets (63%)
 - Develop a financing plan to implement the policies (59%)

Food service directors + project coordinators tended to be less supportive of these elements than the group as a whole.

²In addition to the 13 components referred to above, SB 19 required that the LEAF *district board policies include* 18 distinct elements. However, only 16 of these elements were analyzed for the purposes of this report.

- **Respondents comments suggested the following areas of controversy:**
 - How specific the legislation should be. The majority recommended more specificity and clarity; but several wanted less specificity and more flexibility.
 - Whether the elements of the legislation should be required or recommended.
 - Strictness of the legislation: many wanted stricter requirements whereas others preferred more general language.

- **Three overarching themes emerged:**
 - Nearly unanimous agreement regarding the importance and benefit of all the measures to the health and well-being of the students.
 - Concern about keeping focused on priority issues and not getting bogged down on what many perceived as secondary issues such a organic produce, school gardens and farmers markets.
 - The need to “do more” in all of the areas.

- **Respondents recommended a variety of specific policies and actions that would incentivize or help accomplish the following:**
 - Impose additional limits on competitive foods and beverages
 - Increase access to reimbursable meals
 - Improve variety and quality of school meals
 - Expand nutrition education
 - Increase the involvement of stakeholders
 - Increase institutional support for improved nutrition

- **Respondents identified the following priority needs in order of most frequently identified:**
 - A comprehensive approach that does not increase the administrative burden on the schools and is supported by adequate resources
 - Monitoring, enforcement, and incentives
 - Increase in the scope of the legislation
 - Increase in the flexibility of the legislation
 - Technical assistance