“Connecting all the dots”: Exposure, access, and school culture in SNAP-Ed nutrition education programs

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**BACKGROUND**

- Schools are key spaces for promoting healthy behaviors vital for student achievement (Basch, 2011).
- School-community partnerships can deliver needed resources, but are hindered by challenges to organizational integration.
- This study examines collaborative efforts by seven SNAP-Ed nutrition education community partners working within a large, urban school district.
- The overall study provides an in-depth understanding of how SNAP-Ed partners collaborate with schools to address complex health problems.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To understand what program components participants believe are most important to program success.
- To explore how participants understand program components that might be included in shared measurement systems to achieve collective impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

**METHODS**

- Case study methods in 19 urban public schools.
- 120 interviews with program and school staff, 7 focus groups with students, 91 school observations, and document analysis.
- Qualitative data was coded in Dedoose using a coding scheme informed by the taxonomy of implementation outcomes (Proctor et al., 2010).
- Results were mapped onto the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that before behavior can change, three factors must shift (attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms).

**FINDINGS**

**Figure 1. Findings mapped onto the Theory of Planned Behavior**

![Diagram showing the Theory of Planned Behavior with nodes for exposure, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavior.]

**What is the most important aspect of the work that Eat Right Philly does in your school?**

"I think exposure because that way a child will say ‘oh I remember starfruit at school.’ I didn’t taste it then, but just the fact that you are aware that it does exist. Just awareness." (School Staff)

"I would say the backpack program is the most important… It is kind of a worry with some teachers, if the students are eating enough." (Partnership Coordinator)

"Direct education is important, but if they don’t have access to the resources to make that happen, if they read about an apple, but they don’t eat an apple, they’re not going to grow the seed." (Program Staff)

"...when you can change mindset and culture, then you can get some things done." (School Staff)

- Participants indicated that the most important aspects of SNAP-Ed programs in their schools were:
  - Programming that provides “exposure” to new foods
    - Taste tests, cooking lessons
  - Programming that increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables
    - Produce stands, breakfast-in-the-classroom, backpack programs
  - Programming that shifts school culture around health
    - Wellness councils, policy changes, events

**CONCLUSIONS**

- We propose creating a new conceptual model for evaluating SNAP-Ed programming in schools, particularly for Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) work, that aligns with participants’ own understandings of program impacts.
- This model would capture changes in attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms earlier in implementation.
- We believe these are vital to sustained behavior change, but often overlooked when measuring nutrition interventions.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

- Funded by the Pennsylvania (PA) Department of Human Services through PA Nutrition Education Tracks, a part of USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).