Project Title: Addressing Vermont Childhood Obesity Through Public Policy: Scoring Vermont Supervisory Union Wellness Policies Using the WellSAT Assessment Tool

Community Agency: American Heart Association

Abstract

Background: As of 2016 the state of Vermont has required all public school supervisory unions to have a wellness policy guiding nutritional and physical education, nutritional quality of food served and sold, and the implementation and modification of the policy in the future. We hypothesize that differences between these policies throughout the state of Vermont will lead to changes in health outcomes for the students that they impact.

Methods: We scored all publicly available wellness policies for Vermont supervisory unions and districts (49 out of 54 total) using a tool called WellSAT 3.0, which was developed for this purpose by the CDC and the University of Connecticut, and compared them to obesity data collected for Vermont children using the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Results: The policies were scored on comprehensiveness and strength, of which the statewide averages were 49 and 37 respectively out of 100 possible, with a wide range of scores (9-96 comprehensiveness, 6-90 strength). The specific scores and obesity data for each supervisory union are visualized using heatmaps. Of note, over 70% of the policies scored below the national average in both strength and comprehensiveness.

Conclusion: We determined that due to the recent implementation of these policies they are unlikely to have influenced the current obesity rates, but instead reflect the culture of the supervisory unions in their approach to addressing the current childhood obesity epidemic in Vermont. These data can hopefully be correlated with childhood health outcomes throughout Vermont in the future as these policies are implemented over many years.

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