

SPECIAL TOPICS

ORIGINAL RESEARCH: FEATURED ABSTRACT FROM THE  
19TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

## Educating California School Board Members: Aligning Policies for Student Health and Achievement

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PEER REVIEWED

### **Track: Policy and Legal**

The objective of this project was to share the development, implementation, and outcomes of a three-year intervention aimed to educate California school board members about the important role school nutrition policies can play to increase the health and academic achievement of students.

California Project LEAN (CPL), the California School Boards Association (CSBA), the University of South Florida, The California Parent Teachers Association, and 10 regional collaboratives worked together to educate school board members across California. Special outreach efforts were directed toward school districts serving low-income children.

Formative research was conducted to understand the factors that influence policy decision making for California school board members and included a literature review, a media analysis, key informant interviews, and a statewide survey of California school board members and superintendents. The formative research served as the foundation for developing a social marketing plan and intervention

strategies. Research indicated that CSBA was highly respected by its members. The following activities were implemented jointly by CSBA and CPL: 1) the development of a *Healthy Food Policy Resource Guide (Guide)*; 2) placement of advertisements and articles published in CSBA communications, 3) training of more than 300 school board members across the state, and 4) local mobilization led by CPL regional coordinators.

The evaluation of this three-year project consisted of 1) surveys of school board members who received the guide and attended a training; 2) key informant interviews; and 3) a postsurvey of school board members and superintendents.

Evaluation findings suggested that the *Guide* was useful to school board members and that members who attended trainings planned to raise the issue of nutrition policy for discussion at a school board meeting. A number of California districts have established policies that support healthy eating. Postsurveys and postinterviews were analyzed, and final data was available by January 1, 2005. The impact of this project continues to be realized as more school districts request assistance for mobilizing to offer healthier foods for their students.

The nation is experiencing an unparalleled obesity epidemic. Many of the foods children eat at school are high in fat, sugar, and calories. These practices can contribute to inadequate diets and the development of poor dietary habits. Developing targeted campaigns with respected education partners can provide local policy makers with resources to help them establish policies to support healthy eating.

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