
Issue Editors' Notes

PROVIDING CHILDREN WITH healthy food and ample opportunities for physical activity is central to many caregivers' concepts of good child rearing. In addition, science-based public health recommendations clearly articulate healthy eating and physical activity (HEPA) patterns that promote healthy growth and development and that foster immediate and long-term health.¹ Yet longstanding trends paint a worrisome picture. Few US children consume diets that meet expert recommendations.² Moreover, most school-age children and teens participate in levels of physical activity that fail to meet public health recommendations.³ The consequences of these trends are well known and include the high rates of obesity and overweight observed among US children and youth.

Many environmental, household, and individual factors explain the gap between public health recommendations and children's physical activity and dietary behavior. Narrowing this gap is essential if we are to reverse the obesity and chronic disease epidemics. Environmental approaches that improve the availability of healthy foods and appropriate physical activity in child-serving organizations offer great promise. While schools have rightfully received extensive attention in this regard, other venues for school-age children also offer rich opportunities.

In this volume of *New Directions for Youth Development* (NDYD), we focus on promoting healthy eating and physical activity in the out-of-school time (OST) setting, which includes before- and afterschool programs, school-year and summer youth development programs, and camps. OST programs engage millions of US children and youth each year in a range of activities at thousands of sites nationwide. At least ten million US children, for example,

participate in afterschool programs annually.⁴ Many OST programs have potential to provide children with a significant portion of the recommended types and amounts of physical activity. Snacks and meals, already built into most programs, can make meaningful contributions to energy and nutrient requirements if they are carefully selected and presented in appealing ways. Challenges certainly exist. While OST programs have more curricular flexibility than public schools, they are rarely obligated by licensing or regulation to include specific types or amounts of physical activity. While stringent nutrient requirements shape snacks and meals in OST programs that participate in the National School Lunch Program or the Child and Adult Care Food Program, many if not most programs obtain snacks without participating in these programs and are therefore not subject to these regulations. Further complicating efforts to raise OST nutrition and physical activity quality, state or district licensing and regulatory requirements vary greatly.

Systematic efforts to raise the bar on healthy eating and physical activity in OST are emerging, and there is broad-based interest throughout the field.⁵ Academically driven, research-based inquiry is increasing but remains limited, especially relative to research based in schools. Existing studies do show that OST programs vary widely in physical activity and snack quality and have room for improvement.⁶ Regardless of the research base, considerable practice-based inquiry has emerged, often at a very large scale, into ways of promoting healthy eating and physical activity in OST. For example, National AfterSchool Association (NAA), YMCA of the USA, and Alliance for a Healthier Generation have each undertaken activities or initiatives with national scope. As these trends continue, thoughtful consideration of future research, evaluation, and intervention work should build upon an integrated appreciation of research and practice as sources of knowledge.

In this special volume of NDYD, we wanted to lift up work that illustrates the range of research on healthy eating and physical activity in OST. We wanted to show diverse examples of policy, practice, and professional development interventions and initiatives in

real-world settings. Our vision was that this compilation would provide visibility for important projects and spark ideas for future community and researcher collaborations.

Our chapters range widely in terms of intervention type and focus, setting, outcome measurement, and research design. Interventions address organizational policies, state policies, professional development, curriculum, and youth behavior, with a strong focus on supporting environmental-level interventions through effective implementation of evidence-based interventions. The research designs largely reflect each project's context and setting, with an emphasis on single group designs and data collection at multiple time points. In addition, several chapters describe policy or service initiatives driven by OST organizations (Chapters 1, 2, and 3), while others are academically driven impact evaluations executed in partnership with an OST organization.

The volume opens with a description of a systematic process for identifying promising approaches to promoting healthy living within the national 4-H program (Downey et al., Chapter 1). In Chapter 2, Hohman and Mantinan also discuss a national organizational initiative. They describe the challenges in measuring local OST sites' progress toward achieving YMCA of the USA's healthy eating and physical activity standards. Several chapters address factors that affect implementation. Hinkle and Yoshida (Chapter 3) show that California state policy guidelines for healthy foods and beverages in afterschools led to improvements in some but not all of the intended outcomes and discuss the implications of this. Weaver et al. (Chapter 4) describe a promising competency-based approach to staff development and training that improved physical activity delivery in the YMCA camp setting. Lee et al.'s group-randomized trial in Chapter 5 improved children's water consumption in afterschool sites and showed that organizational factors affected the implementation and impact of this simple healthy eating guideline. Thaw et al. (Chapter 6) show that children in a non-evidence-based physical activity comparison condition actually engaged in more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity than those receiving an evidence-based intervention. Their findings present

further evidence that staff training and implementation fidelity are critical considerations in efforts to translate efficacious strategies into real-world afterschool settings. Finally, Bohnert et al. (Chapter 7) provide encouraging evidence that a summer camp intervention for urban girls can substantially increase physical activity.

We hope this volume of NDYD increases readers' understanding of national, statewide, and local-level research on healthy eating and physical activity in OST settings. Our intention and hope is that this compilation sparks ideas, collaborations, and progress.

This volume would not exist without the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, whose visionary involvement in promoting healthy eating and physical activity has shaped the field of childhood obesity prevention studies. In addition, this volume supports the National AfterSchool Association's (NAA's) efforts to promote healthful environments in OST. As Jossey-Bass's partner in producing this volume, the NAA has demonstrated energetic leadership in promoting healthy eating and physical activity in OST through its adoption, dissemination, and vigorous support of healthy eating and physical activity standards crafted in collaboration with the Healthy Out-of-School Time Coalition (HOST).⁷ We are grateful to NAA and HOST for providing consistent and strong leadership for building a healthy future for all children and youth.

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Notes

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