In the U.S., one in four children are overweight or obese before they reach kindergarten<sup>1</sup>. Early intervention encourages the development of positive behaviors, including healthy eating, that are necessary for young children's healthy growth, development and prevention from chronic diseases. This poster highlights a unique partnership in one Maryland county that aims to improve access to and consumption of healthy foods among local preschool families. The collaboration involves leveraging resources between Maryland SNAP-Ed and the following local community agencies:

- Howard County Public School System
- The Community Action Council of Howard County
- Head Start
- Howard County Food Bank
- Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program
- Local Farmers' Markets
- Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition

## Objective:

This model highlights an innovative community partnership model to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income preschool families. This goal is achieved through in-person nutrition education programs, community connections that support healthy food access, and changes to health-promoting policies, systems, and environments (PSE's) at collaborating sites.



Students making fruit kabobs as part of Maryland SNAP-Ed's Read For Health lesson at the Judy Center.



86% of collaborating sites linked Maryland SNAP-Ed's education to the garden. In this photo, students participated in a "garden in a glove" activity in Talbott Springs Elementary school.



tried in class that day.

# A Comprehensive Community Partnership Model for Improving Nutrition among SNAP-Eligible Families in Early Education Settings

Razan Sahuri, MPH, Erin Duru, MHS RD LDN, Nicole Walker, PHD, Maryland SNAP-Ed program, University of Maryland Extension



# Target Audience:

Low-income preschool children and their families in Howard County, Maryland.

### Methods:

This model highlights an innovative multi-level community partnership model to increase access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income preschool families. Children and families receive in-person nutrition education and educational resources. This partnership also influences the adoption of policy, systems, and physical environment changes such as giving adequate time for meal consumption and restricting the use of food as a reward in preschool sites. Furthermore, the multi-sector partnership connects collaborating sites with local farmers' markets throughout the market season utilizing farmers' market promotional materials, and promotes local produce throughout the academic year by providing tastings in the classroom or at parent events.

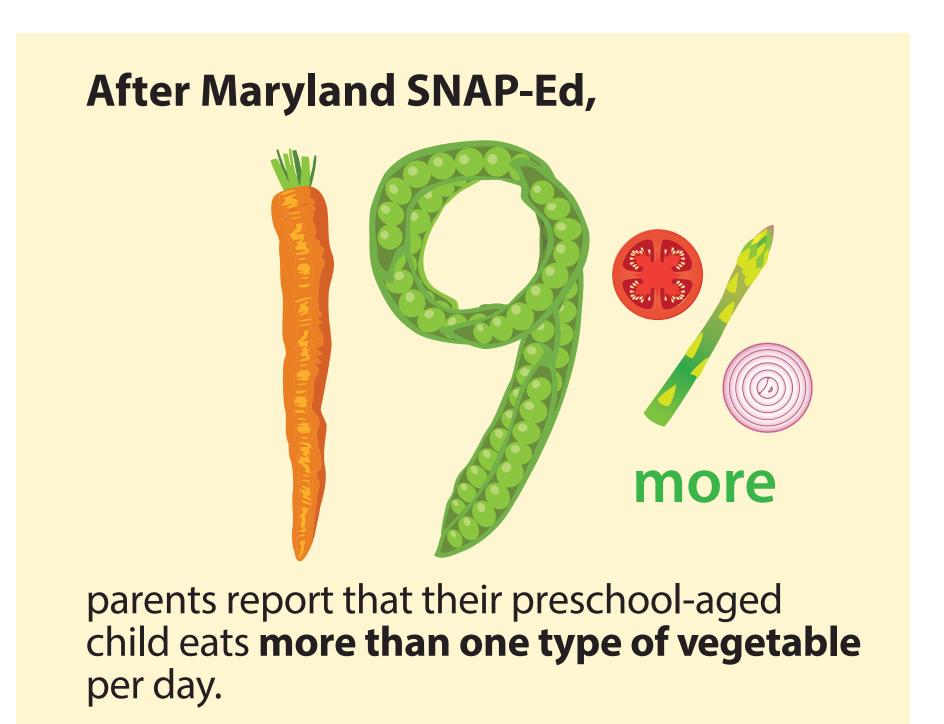
#### This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

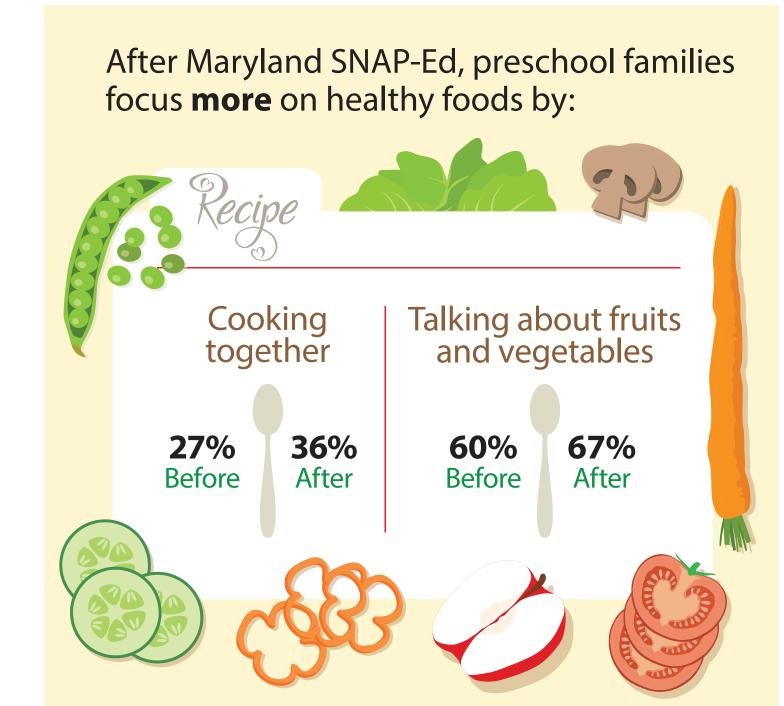
This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP in cooperation with Maryland's Department of Human Services and University of Maryland Extension. The University of Maryland Extension will not discriminate against any person because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry or national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, and gender identity or expression.



#### Results:

- In 2019, more than 3,300 preschool aged youth and their families were reached through this county-wide partnership.
- Health-promoting policies, systems, and environmental improvements were made by local early education centers participating in the multi-level partnership:
  - 57% of early education sites stopped using food as a method of rewarding students.
  - 57% of early education sites offered healthy classroom celebrations.
  - 71% of early education sites committed to offering adequate time for meal consumption.
  - 71% of early education sites offered healthier food options during the day and during family events.
  - 86% of early education sites reduced the amount of soda and sugary beverages offered to the students.
- Statewide, Maryland SNAP-Ed programming is associated with improved health behaviors among preschool families.





#### Conclusion:

Maryland SNAP-Ed's holistic approach with multiple county collaborators establishes a sustainable county-wide framework that increases access to fruits and vegetables for preschool families.



Produce from the Howard County Food Bank garden used in Maryland SNAP-Ed.