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

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

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.

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

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.
  ▪ 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.

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.