



RESEARCH BRIEF

Summary of Findings from the RENEW LA County Evaluation, FY 2011-12

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September 2012

During the 2011-12 school year, LAUP put the health and wellness of hundreds of preschool children at the forefront of their programming with RENEW LA County. RENEW LA County sought to teach preschool children about the benefits of good food choices and physical activity by offering professional development and information to those who influence the lives of children the most; teachers and parents. Our study of RENEW LA County found that preschool providers were very knowledgeable about nutrition and physical activity guidelines and policies. It also found that parents are generally making good food and drink choices at home, yet they can still benefit from numerous aspects of the RENEW program in order to increase their knowledge of nutrition and physical activity guidelines, thereby strengthening their preschool children's habits. In general, the following findings emerged:

- LAUP offered a solid support structure to participants to ensure that RENEW was implemented as intended
- Preschool providers were very knowledgeable about nutrition and physical activity guidelines but parents were not as knowledgeable
- Parents reported an increase in the level of physical activities among children after RENEW

Overview

Nearly one in every three children in the United States is overweight or obese (Ogden, Carroll, & Flegal, 2008). Obesity in children leads to higher incidents of diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions that will follow youngsters into adulthood (CDC, 2009). In May, 2010, LAUP set out to tackle the issue of childhood obesity by implementing Renew Environments for Nutrition, Exercise, and Wellness (RENEW) across 71 LAUP network providers. RENEW focused specifically on working with preschool providers to promote healthy choices for four-year-old children.

LAUP offered a solid support structure to participants to ensure that RENEW was implemented as intended.

RENEW offered the following training sessions: three trainings for administrators focused on health and wellness policy development; three trainings for teachers on policy implementation—specifically, on health and wellness practices in the classroom; a series of workshops for teachers with topics such as Using the Lakeshore™ 'Choosy Kit' In The Classroom, Starting A Preschool Garden, and Increasing Children's Physical Activity With An Obstacle Course; and various workshops for parents on the benefits of good food choices and physical activity for their children.

Teacher participants were given a toolkit containing a wealth of information and resources on the development of healthy behaviors in early childhood (e.g.: selecting nutritious foods, ideas for increasing physical activity, useful phone numbers and web sites). In addition, written material in the toolkit was provided in Spanish for copying and distribution to parents. Moreover, LAUP coaches and the LAUP coaching model helped participating teachers to establish and monitor RENEW related goals. Another layer of support was provided by the Health and Wellness Advisory Team, which was comprised of health professionals and early childhood education specialists. Their role was to inform and advise RENEW participants on various resources that were developed as part of this project.

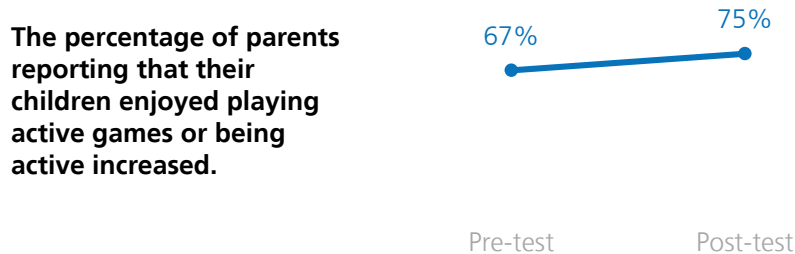
As a result of the support in place, results from the pre- and post-provider survey showed a 15% increase in providers with a formal health and wellness policy in place, with 83% of teachers reporting that their preschool had a formal health and wellness policy by the end of RENEW.

LAUP's health and fitness goals for children are that by the end of preschool children should:

- Have routines for hand washing before consuming food/beverages and after using the toilet and playing outdoors.
- Make healthy food choices that include fruits, vegetables, milk, and water consumption.
- Demonstrate self regulation for food and beverage intake; understand their bodily cues for hunger and satiety.
- Be physically active throughout the day and meet the developmental milestones in gross and fine motor development, body awareness, and spatial awareness.

Parents reported an increase in the level of physical activities among children.

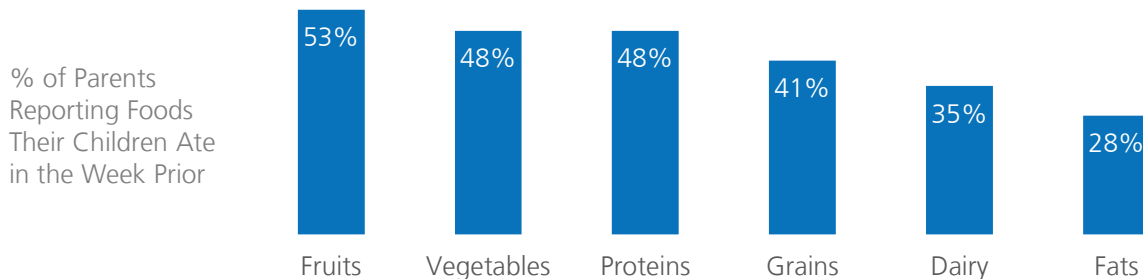
The post-RENEW survey asked parents to think back to the start of the RENEW program and report the frequency with which their child made various healthy choices. Choices ranged from Never to Always. The percent of parents who chose Always to the phrase "My child enjoys playing active games and/or being active" rose from 67% before RENEW to 75% after RENEW. This change was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



As promising as this change appears, parent survey results indicate that few parents are knowledgeable about the 120 minutes of physical activity a day recommended for school-age children and that some parents believe that physical activity limits growth and development and reduces a child's ability to focus. Exploring the root of these misconceptions and diffusing them in a culturally sensitive manner may pose a challenge for providers and should be an area in which LAUP program staff and advisors should offer additional support.

Baseline data was collected on children's food and beverage choices.

Parents at participating RENEW preschools were asked about the food and beverage choices that their children made at home during the week prior to the survey.



Overall, apples were the most consumed fruit, carrots were the most consumed vegetable, chicken was the most consumed protein, cereal/grits and white rice were the most consumed grains, cheese was the most consumed dairy product, and chips were the most consumed type of fats and sweets.

Overall, an average of 53% of parents surveyed reported that their child consumed some type(s) of fruit, 48% reported that their child consumed some type(s) of vegetable, 41% reported that their child consumed some type(s) of grain, 48% reported that their child consumed some type(s) of protein, 35% reported that their child

consumed some type(s) of dairy product (or substitute), and 28% reported that their child consumed some type(s) of sweets and fats in the week prior to the survey. Analysis of children's drink(s) of choice reveals that water is the most widely consumed (96%), followed by fruit juice (85%). The survey also revealed that fruit flavored drinks, Kool-Aid, and soft drinks are consumed more often than milk (including whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, non-fat, chocolate, soy, and flavored soy), 24% vs. 22%. These findings serve as a baseline with which to track change in children's food choices as we move forward with rolling out health and wellness programs across LAUP providers.

Recommendations

RENEW LA County has disseminated a sound policy and knowledge base regarding the benefits of good nutrition and physical activity for preschoolers to participating LAUP providers. The challenge for program staff now will be moving providers beyond policy adherence and knowledge towards practices that increase parent understanding about childhood obesity and the benefits of healthy nutrition and physical activity, as well as parent participation in their children's healthy choices.

Recommended action items are:

- Parents should monitor their children's food and beverage choices at home –offering more milk and limiting the consumption of sweet, bottled drinks.
- Providers should continue their efforts to educate parents about healthy food and physical activity.
- Fit by 5 LA should continue the efforts established by RENEW and address the findings highlighted in this study.

References

Ogden, C. L., Carroll, M.D., & Flegal, K.M. (2008). High Body Mass Index for Age Among U.S. Children and Adolescents, 2003-2006. *JAMA* 299:2401-2405.

Appendix

Methodology

The objectives of this evaluation were twofold: 1) to conduct a policy implementation analysis so that reasoned and data-driven decisions are made when the program is rolled out to more LAUP providers in the network; and 2) to measure changes in healthy behaviors from pre- to post-RENEW. A mixed methods approach was used to conduct our evaluation. Pre- and post-surveys with teachers (90), nutrition and physical activity checklists (42), and post-parent surveys (1, 642) informed our quantitative analysis. Meetings with key program staff and document analysis informed our qualitative analysis.

For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.