



UCCE Alameda helps develop preschool obesity prevention policies

The Issue

The early years of life are critical times in the physical and mental growth and development of the young child. Children are often exposed to many unhealthy choices at an early age while they are forming lifestyle habits (involving eating and physical activity, for instance) that may last a lifetime. Head Start and state pre-K child development centers in Alameda County serving over 12,000 children are not affiliated with schools with federal mandates requiring nutrition and wellness policies. The Alameda County 2014 SNAP-Ed Profile shows that 33.4% of 2-to-4-year-olds are overweight/obese and 17.4% are obese. The alarming rates of obesity and the associated high risk of negative consequences establish the research basis for Policy, Systems, Environment (PSE) work—focusing on nutrition and physical activity—in early childhood (EC) development sites in Alameda County.



Preschool children in the classroom

What Has ANR Done?

UCCE Alameda partnered with Alameda County Public Health Department's Nutrition Services to offer teacher education/training; develop policies for 14 low-income state preschools and Head Start sites that had no previous wellness policies; and to promote PSE strategies for early childhood obesity prevention. The goal was to facilitate healthy nutrition and physical activities in the classroom and playground, and to promote PSE changes at EC sites/centers and in the home. Interventions included a PSE assessment from 27 teachers, teacher trainings on the Let's Move curriculum, and nutrition and physical activity policy development with administrators and teachers at the 14 sites in Fremont, Hayward, and Emeryville, California. The results from the Contra Costa Child Care Council's assessment tool—Creating Healthy Opportunities in Child Care Environments (CHOICE)—was used to identify preschool priorities and needs.

The Payoff

Fourteen preschool sites launch obesity prevention policies

UCCE Alameda and the Alameda County Health Department drafted policies for 14 sites that are being implemented during the 2015/16 school year. Preliminary outcomes during the policy development phase are positive, as evidenced by the actions taken by administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Fremont administrators have increased the purchasing of fresh fruits and vegetables from monthly to weekly; all teachers promote healthy eating and physical activity in the classroom and the playground; parents promote healthy food at home; and children encourage parents to

reduce the intake of sugary drinks. After policies have been in place for 1 year, UCCE will evaluate outcomes/impacts in 2016.

Clientele Testimonial

State Preschool Teacher – “At the end of the school year celebration, the children requested healthy foods and water.”

Head Start Teacher - "I make flavored (SPA) water for the children in the classroom and for my family. I taught my family how to count sugar, and we no longer serve soda at home.”

Contact

Supporting Unit:

Alameda County

MaryAnn Lagura, Program Manager,(510) 639-1339, malagura@ucanr.edu