



Shaping Healthy Choices Program improves children's health

The Issue

Simply offering healthy options is not enough to motivate children to make healthy choices. Moreover, imposing restrictions rather than providing children with options to make healthy choices has long-term negative implications. With recent estimates of childhood obesity showing that approximately 32 percent of children are overweight or obese, it is clear a program that addresses multiple, obesity-related factors is necessary to successfully target this complex issue.

What has ANR done?

The Shaping Healthy Choices Program (SHCP) is a multi-component, school-based intervention composed of five components: 1) nutrition education and promotion, 2) family and community partnerships, 3) integration of regional agriculture, 4) foods available on the school campus, and 5) school wellness policies. Using pre- and post-test measurements, we determined if schools utilizing the program have improved student outcomes compared to controls.

As part of the program, a UC Davis and UC Cooperative Extension team provided 1) a standards-based curriculum with interactive classroom nutrition, garden, and physical activity education for fourth-grade students, 2) healthy cooking activities that link agriculture, food preparation and nutrition, 3) experiential nutrition and health-related activities at school events, 4) school garden technical support, 5) local grower and distributor connections to encourage regional sourcing, 6) support for increased fresh produce in the school cafeteria, and 7) the implementation of committees to integrate SHCP program activities into the school wellness initiatives.



Two students planting in a Shaping Healthy Choices Program garden.

The Payoff

School-based nutrition education program results in fewer overweight and obese children

Results provided a base for state and national dissemination of a school-based multi-component program to prevent childhood obesity. Preliminary analyses show that children classified as overweight or obese dropped from 56 percent to 38 percent during the one year SHCP was implemented in Sacramento County.

Using school sites for the SHCP components allows students, families, school personnel, health partners, and community members to cultivate excitement and acceptance of nutrition and health behaviors that positively impact the school environment and the community. The success of the SHCP to promote health and prevent obesity enabled participating schools to sustain lasting improvements for the school community.

Clientele Testimonial

"My students shared things they learned about safe food handling and safety in cooking ... parents said their children want to help in preparing meals at home." SHCP teacher

"Parents shared with me that their children are voicing input on meals, and asking if they can add fruit to their salads." SHCP teacher

"I tried zucchini and yellow squash when I was little and didn't like it, but now I tried it and I love it!" SHCP student, age 9

"My daughter is more interested in trying new foods and eating more fruits and vegetables. She often surprises the family by making a 'surprise salad snack' for everyone." SHCP parent

Contact

Supporting Unit:

Youth, Families & Communities - 4-H

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