

Evaluating the Impact of the Mississippi Healthy Students Act on Childhood Obesity

November 2008

■ National Grant Program

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) awarded the Center for Mississippi Health Policy a five-year, \$2 million grant to study the impact of the Mississippi Healthy Students Act on childhood obesity. The Center, which will direct the project in collaboration with three Mississippi universities, will use the RWJF grant in conjunction with a Bower Foundation grant to evaluate the effectiveness of state policies aimed at preventing childhood obesity. It also will coordinate with similar projects in the five other states to receive funding under a RWJF initiative to evaluate childhood obesity prevention policies: Arkansas, West Virginia, Delaware, Texas and New York.

■ State Policies Evaluated

In 2007, the Mississippi Legislature enacted the Healthy Students Act to address the state's high rates of childhood obesity by improving nutrition, physical activity and health education in public schools. The act's provisions:

- mandate minimum requirements for health education and physical education;
- require local school wellness plans to promote increased physical activity, healthy eating habits and abstinence from tobacco and illegal drugs;
- require a physical activity coordinator at the State Department of Education;
- make local school health councils mandatory rather than optional;
- direct the State Board of Education to adopt regulations that address healthy food and beverage choices; marketing of healthy food choices to students and staff; healthy food preparation; food preparation ingredients and products; minimum and maximum time allotments for lunch and breakfast periods; the availability of food items during lunch and breakfast periods; and methods to increase participation in the Child Nutrition School Breakfast and Lunch Programs; and
- specify the appointment of a committee to advise the State Board of Education in developing these regulations.

In 2008, the State Board of Education adopted regulations defining nutrition standards and physical education and health education requirements. All regulations are in effect as of the 2008-2009 school year. The Office of Healthy Schools in the State Department of Education is working closely with local schools to implement the new policies through its coordinated school health program.

■ Comprehensive Evaluation Project

This evaluation project is directed by the Center for Mississippi Health Policy in collaboration with researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and the University of Mississippi. The principal investigators at these universities who will oversee the various studies comprising the evaluation project are as follows:

<u>Principal Investigator</u>	<u>Studies</u>
Jerome R. Kolbo, Ph.D., A.C.S.W. Professor College of Health University of Southern Mississippi	Child and Youth Prevalence of Obesity Survey* School Wellness Policy Principal Survey* Committed to Move Evaluation*
Linda Southward, Ph.D., A.C.S.W. Research Professor Social Science Research Center Mississippi State University	Survey of Local and State Policymakers** Parent Survey**
Teresa Carithers, Ph.D., R.D., L.D. Chair, Department of Family & Consumer Sciences University of Mississippi	School Nutrition Environmental Assessments**

**Funded by the Bower Foundation*

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■ Component Studies

Child and Youth Prevalence of Overweight Survey (CAYPOS)

The purpose of the Child and Youth Prevalence of Overweight Survey is to estimate the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children in Mississippi using height and weight measures. It is conducted every two years by researchers from the College of Health at the University of Southern Mississippi.

School Wellness Policy Principal Survey

Principals of all public schools in Mississippi are surveyed to gauge the implementation of the federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and the Mississippi Healthy Students Act of 2007. The survey assesses the degree to which schools have established school wellness policies and implemented requirements of the federal and state laws and associated regulations. This survey is conducted every two years by researchers from the College of Health at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Committed to Move Evaluation

The 25 schools selected to participate in the Committed to Move Quality Physical Education Program offer the Physical Best Curriculum and electronically document fitness (muscle strength and endurance, flexibility, aerobic capacity) and body mass index (BMI) data on all students through the FITNESSGRAM. Data are being collected on individual students over five periods – spring 2008, fall 2008, spring 2009, fall 2009 and spring 2010 – by researchers from the College of Health at the University of Southern Mississippi. Data will be matched with academic performance records to study the relationship between fitness and academic performance.

Survey of Local and State-level Policy-makers

The goal of this survey is to assess state and local policy-makers' knowledge and opinions of the Mississippi Healthy Students legislation and their support for it. The study considers state and local policy-makers to include state legislators, members of the State Board of Health and State Board of Education, local school board members, school district superintendents and local health officials. Assessing the attitudes of local policy-makers is critical in ensuring that the intent of state-level childhood overweight and obesity school health policies is understood and implemented in ways that maximize the potential of primary prevention. Policy-maker surveys are conducted by researchers from the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University.

Parent Survey

The annual Parent Survey evaluates parental attitudes, changes in family environments and changes in children's health behaviors throughout the evaluation period. The purpose is to better understand how parents feel about school health policies, how they influence those policies and to what extent family knowledge, attitudes, practices and constraints influence children's health and health behaviors. Documenting nutrition and physical activity patterns in the home environment is important in determining the degree to which health status changes, or a lack thereof, are due to nutrition and physical activity patterns or to alterations in the home environment. Parent surveys are conducted by researchers from the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University.

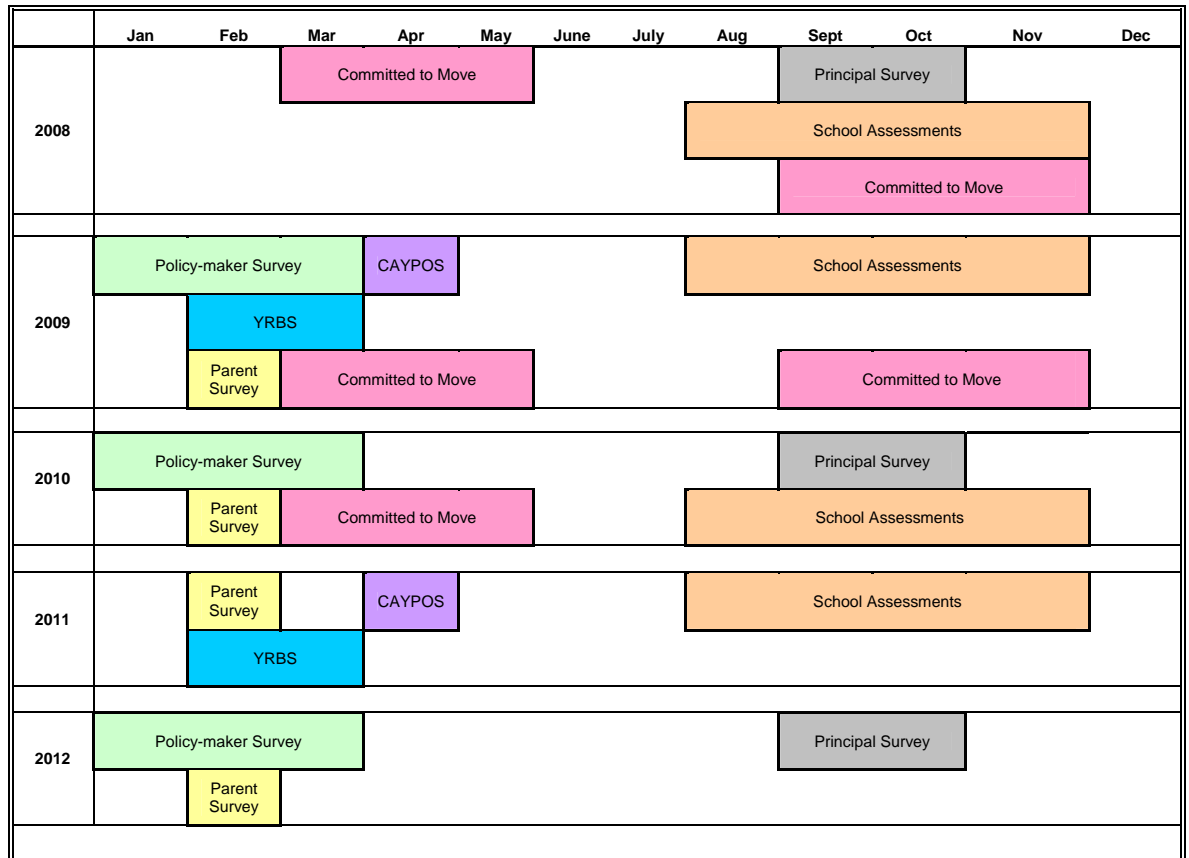
Mississippi School Nutrition Environmental Assessment

To obtain an independent assessment of statewide progress implementing school nutrition policies, staff at the University of Mississippi conduct onsite evaluations of school nutrition environments at a representative sample of schools statewide. Their survey tool assesses the level of nutrition policy implementation at each school, provides a comparison between schools with different demographics and, through repeated measurement, shows nutrition-related environmental changes over time.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is not funded through this evaluation project, but its results will supplement the information collected. The YRBS includes national, state and local school-based surveys of representative samples of ninth- through 12th-grade students. These surveys take place every two years, usually during the spring semester. The national survey, conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides data representative of students in public and private high schools in the United States. The state and local surveys, conducted by departments of health and education, provide data representative of public high school students in each state or local school district.

■ Project Time Line



■ For More Information

For additional information on Mississippi initiatives to address childhood obesity, please visit

- <http://www.mshealthpolicy.com/ChildObesityIntiatives.htm>
- <http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/>

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