

Nutrition Education Survey Results

In April 2015, the California Department of Education in partnership with the UC Davis Cal-Pro-NET Center surveyed school districts on nutrition education practices. Little research exists on the extent to which school cafeterias or meal programs participate in nutrition education of students, and whether they are able to coordinate with classroom education. An evidence-based position paper by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association) on the effectiveness of interventions for pediatric overweight finds that school-based, multi-component, coordinated interventions have the potential to be the most effective.¹ It is important that consistent messaging exists throughout the school, including in the school lunchroom.² The purpose of this survey was to determine the extent to which school meal programs provide nutrition education, and if they coordinate with classroom nutrition education.

A web link to the Nutrition Education Survey was sent to all subscribers to the SNP listserv maintained by the California Department of Education. The first survey notice was sent to the listserv on April 7, 2015, and reminder emails were sent on April 14 and April 21. Nearly 800 respondents initiated the online survey (n=790). Of these, 21 did not meet inclusion criteria, and 157 did not continue past the first two questions. Therefore, the maximum possible number of respondents is 612. The email sent on April 7 was received by 2,572 listserv subscribers, of which 1,218 are sponsors. This resulted in a response rate of 50.3 percent if only sponsors are considered eligible for the survey. However, if the response rate is calculated based on all listserv subscribers, the response rate drops to 23.8 percent. Most questions have fewer respondents than 612, due to skipped questions (either intentionally or unintentionally), skip logic, or participants discontinuing the questionnaire before completion.

The average respondent was a school nutrition director in a district with less than 2,500 students and a free and reduced price eligibility of 75 to 100 percent (Table 1).

Table 1: Job title and district characteristics of respondents.

	%
Job Title (n=550)	
Director or Assistant Director	60.9
Other	39.1
District Enrollment (n=533)	
Less than 2,500 students	57.4
2,500 – 9,999 students	23.1
10,000 – 39,999 students	17.1
40,000 or more students	2.4
School Types in District (n=518)	
Elementary	88.4
Middle or Junior High	76.6
High School	53.1
Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility (n=494)	
Less than 25%	8.7
25 – 49%	22.4
50 – 74%	27.8
75 – 100%	41.1



Nutrition Education in the School Environment

Nearly all of respondents agreed that nutrition education should be a priority and a majority agreed that it was valued within their districts (Table 2). This was also the case regarding superintendent encouragement of providing nutrition education to students. Although the majority of respondents agreed that nutrition education was not a part of the job description or duties (Figure 1), almost three-quarters indicated that the nutrition services program is involved in nutrition education in the school or district (Figure 2). School nutrition staff provide informal nutrition education in the lunchroom in the districts of over 60 percent of respondents. (Table 2).

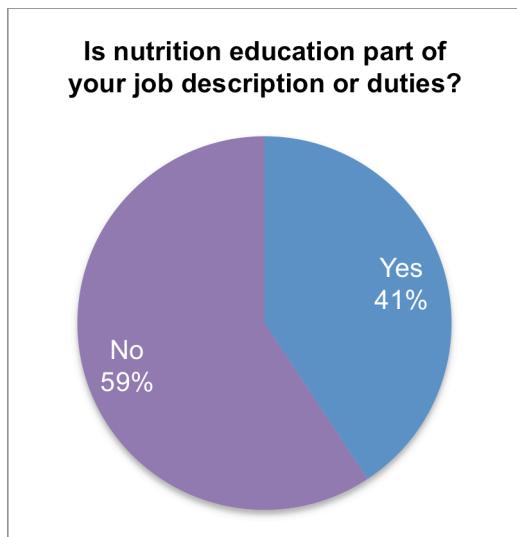


Figure 1: Nutrition education as part of respondent job duties by percentage of respondents.

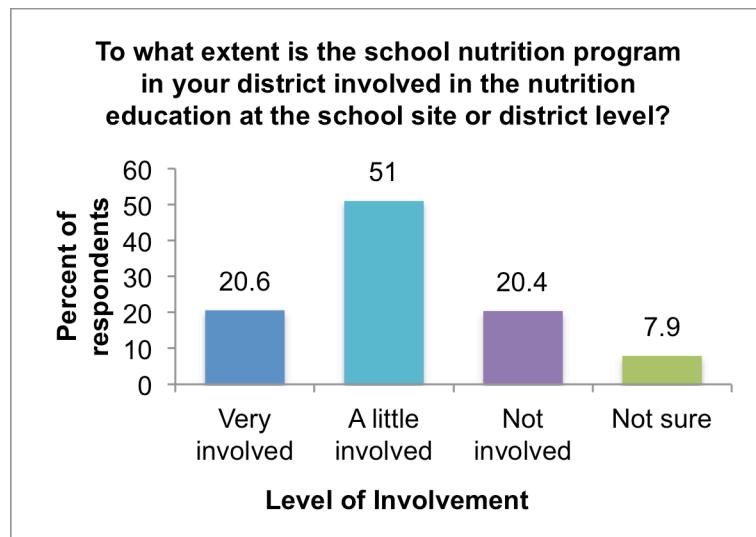


Figure 2: Level of involvement in nutrition education by percentage of respondents.

Table 2: Nutrition Education in the School Environment Likert Scale Responses

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Nutrition education should be a priority.	2.6	2.2	6.3	20.5	68.4
Nutrition education is valued in our district.	5.5	9.2	18.1	32.0	35.3
The superintendent encourages providing nutrition education to students.	4.2	7.9	24.3	28.3	35.3
School nutrition (food service) staff provide informal nutrition education to students in the lunchroom.	8.8	9.2	18.9	31.6	31.5
Non-school nutrition personnel provide formal nutrition education to students in the lunchroom.	17.0	16.2	32.3	21.7	12.8

Just over a third of respondents indicated that there was a nutrition education coordinator in their district (Table 3). Most districts either do not have a nutrition education coordinator or the respondent wasn't sure. Despite this, coordination of school lunch with classroom nutrition

education occurred in almost half of respondent districts. The district wellness policy includes language for implementing nutrition education in a majority of the districts. Evaluation of the effectiveness of nutrition education was largely unknown or relatively uncommon (Figure 3).

Table 3: Response percentages to questions regarding coordination of nutrition education.

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
Is there a person in your district responsible for coordinating nutrition education throughout the school environment?	36.3	42.5	21.1
Does the school nutrition program coordinate with classroom nutrition education in any way?	47.9	32.6	19.5
Does your district's wellness policy contain specific language for implementing nutrition education?	59.4	11.9	28.6

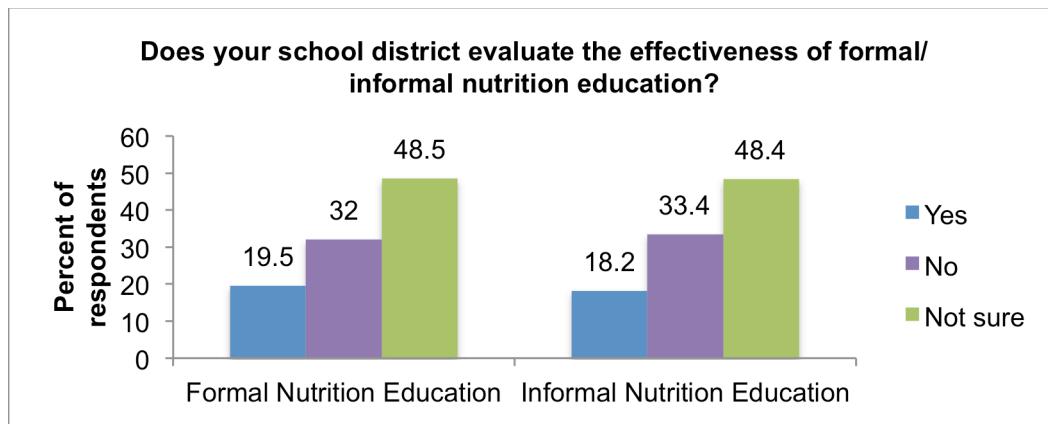


Figure 3: District evaluation of formal and informal nutrition education by percent of respondents.

Consistency with Nutrition Education

Consistency with nutrition education students receive in the classroom is fairly common with school meals, competitive foods, as well as marketing on the school campus. More than half of respondents agreed this was the case (Table 4).

Table 4: Consistency with Nutrition Education Likert Scale Responses

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
School meals are consistent with nutrition education students receive in the classroom.	5.8	5.2	25.4	24.3	39.4
Competitive foods sold on campus are consistent with nutrition education students receive in the classroom.	11.7	9.2	31.8	21.5	25.8
Marketing, outreach, and media messages on the school premises are consistent with nutrition education students receive in the classroom.	7.4	7.4	29.6	27.4	28.1

Support, Collaboration, and Access to Resources

The majority of respondents indicated that they have support from teachers, staff, and/or outside experts in providing nutrition education to students in the lunchroom (Table 4). More than half of respondents also agreed that they collaborate with others within the school to provide nutrition education, or with outside nutrition experts. Access to resources was also the case for most respondents.

Table 5: Support, Collaboration, and Access to Resources Likert Scale Responses

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
I have support from teachers, staff, and/or outside experts in providing nutrition education to students in the lunchroom.	5.8	13.4	20.7	36.0	24.1
I collaborate with teachers and/or other school staff in providing nutrition education to students.	9.7	11.1	25.2	33.9	20.0
I collaborate with outside nutrition experts in providing nutrition education to students.	11.3	11.8	26.6	26.9	23.5
I have access to resources for providing nutrition education to students in the lunchroom.	6.5	6.3	17.1	35.8	34.2

Only one-fifth of respondents reported district access to outside sources of funding for nutrition education in the school nutrition program (Table 6). Materials available at no cost are being used by a majority of respondents, although a significant percentage is not sure. Among those using free materials (n=241), over two-thirds agreed that these free materials meet their need for nutrition education (Figure 4).

When asked the sources of free materials they currently use, the most commonly mentioned sources were: the Dairy Council (n=62); USDA (n=51); Team Nutrition (n=40); CDE (n=28); Harvest of the Month (n=28); and MyPlate (n=28).

Table 6: Response percentages to questions regarding outside funding and use of resources available at no cost.

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
Does your district have outside sources for funding nutrition education in the school nutrition program?	21.6	48.5	29.9
Is your program using nutrition education materials resources, or curricula that are available at no cost?	60.1	11.9	27.9

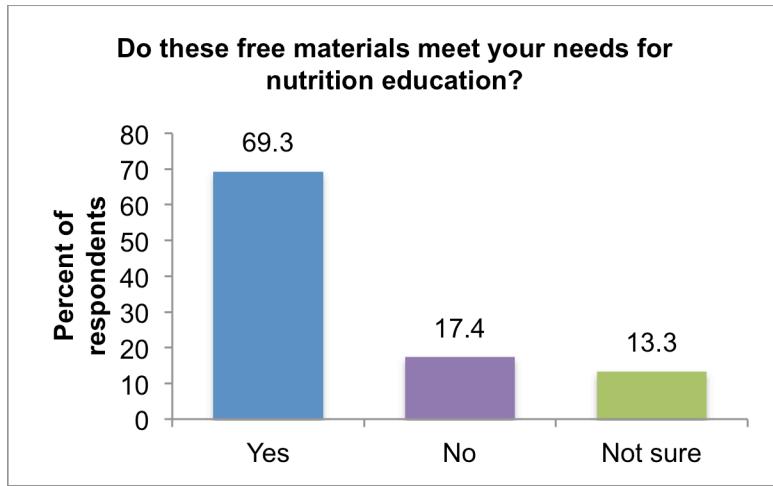


Figure 4: Needs met by free nutrition education materials by percent of respondents.

Food Literacy

More than half of respondents were at least somewhat familiar with the term “food literacy” (Figure 5). Over two-thirds of respondents were interested in learning more about providing food literacy education in the lunchroom (Figure 6).

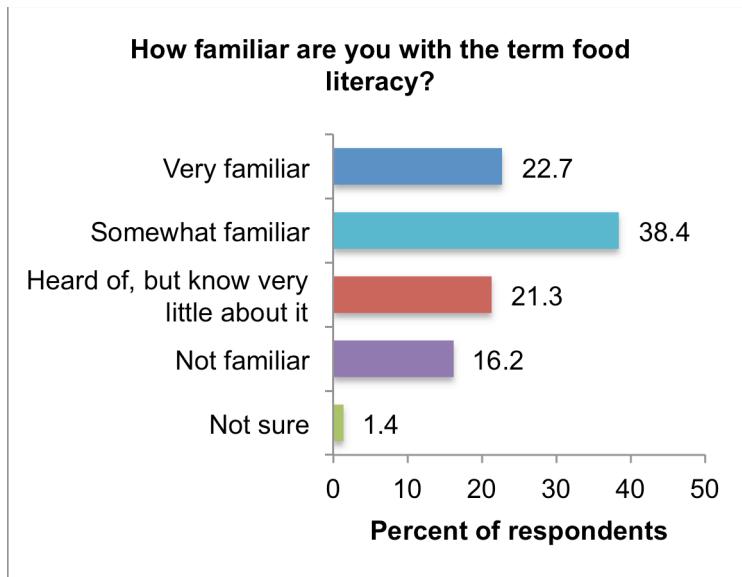


Figure 5: Familiarity with the term “food literacy” by percent of respondents.

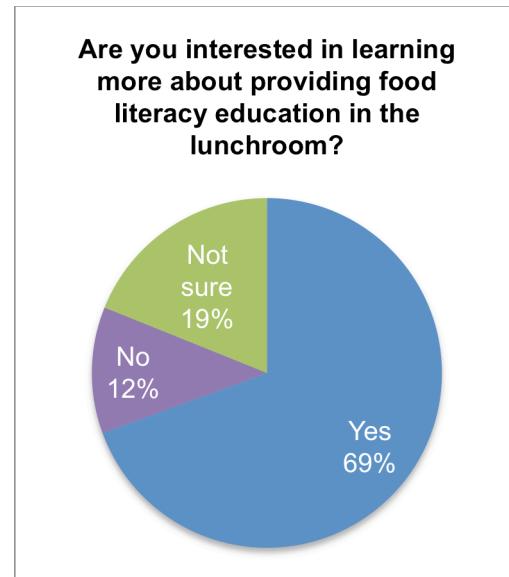


Figure 6: Interest in learning more about providing food literacy education by percentage of respondents.

Those who had indicated they were at least somewhat familiar with the term “food literacy” were asked several follow-up questions. Of the 335 respondents that indicated familiarity with food literacy, over half were involved in food literacy education in the district. In respondent districts, a majority agreed that school nutrition staff provide informal food literacy education (Table 7). It was less common for non-school nutrition personnel to provide formal instruction in the lunchroom. Slightly less than half have access to resources for providing food literacy education.

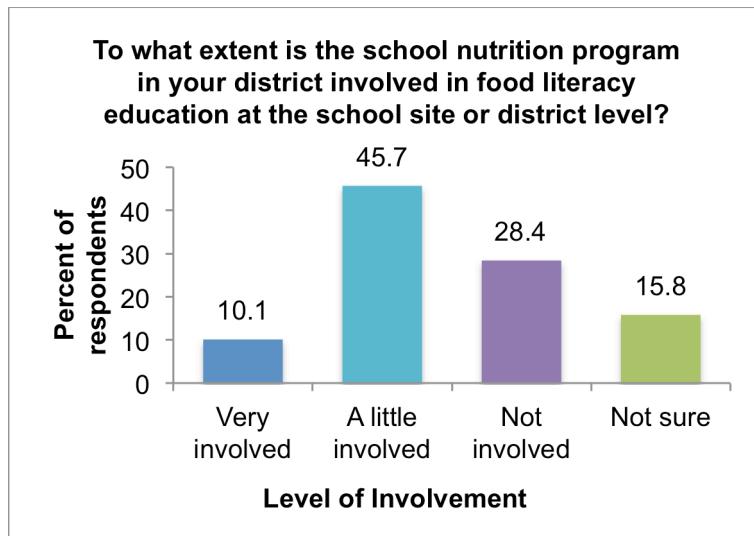


Figure 7: Level of involvement in food literacy education by percentage of respondents.

Table 7: Food Literacy Likert Scale Responses

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
School nutrition (food service) staff provide informal food literacy education to students in the lunchroom.	12.0	12.0	20.9	36.0	19.1
Non-school nutrition personnel provide formal food literacy education to students in the lunchroom.	17.4	17.1	33.5	19.4	12.7
I have access to resources for providing food literacy education to students in the lunchroom.	7.2	13.4	30.6	29.4	19.4

References:

1. Position of the American Dietetic Association: individual-, family-, school-, and community-based interventions for pediatric overweight. J Am Diet Assoc. 2006;106:925-945.
2. IOM (Institute of Medicine). Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press. 2012.