

A Food Pricing Intervention in Pueblo City Schools

Initiative Description

Pueblo City Schools' local wellness policy supports county-wide efforts to initiate prevention programs focused on reducing the burden related to chronic diseases by addressing risk factors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. In 2006, Pueblo City Schools agreed to enhance the implementation of its wellness policy by implementing a pricing strategy aimed at encouraging the consumption of more nutritious snack foods.

In all five high schools in the district, the pricing strategy

- Lowered prices of more healthy foods.
- Raised prices of less healthy foods.
- Took place from February 2007 through May 2007, across all food purchasing venues: a la carte sales, vending machines, and school stores.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the food pricing intervention involved the collection of baseline pricing and sales data from all sources selling competitive foods at the five Pueblo City Schools high school campuses.

Findings

Evaluation of the pricing strategy revealed the following lessons learned:

- *Communication.* When planning for a pricing strategy, stakeholders (e.g., school store advisors, school-level food service staff, and vending suppliers) need to be in continual contact with a representative from the school district to ensure that information about the price change is clear and precise, and that the school staff, parents, and students are informed in a timely manner.
- *Universal Implementation.* When a pricing strategy is implemented in a school or district, it should be implemented evenly across all formal and informal food sale venues to maximize potential effectiveness and avoid confusion and discontent among school staff and students.
- *Food Selection.* When selecting foods for price manipulation, it is important to consider student preferences, popularity of items, and comparability of items. It is important to offer healthy options that are the same portion size and of a comparable nature as the less healthy items.
- *Grounding the Intervention in Policy.* Policy mandates are an important tool to help guide school-level stakeholders, particularly when competing pressures for fundraising may affect their willingness to change practices.

Implications

Pueblo City Schools has demonstrated their commitment to improving the nutrition environment for all students. This evaluation provides lessons learned that may be helpful to school districts across the United States that are seeking to successfully implement a pricing intervention.

The Public Health Problem

- Greater consumption of fruits and vegetables is associated with a decreased risk for chronic disease.
- Many young people do not consume the recommended amount of healthy foods throughout the day due to limited options in schools.
- Creating a school environment that encourages students to eat healthy throughout the school day may improve students' eating habits.



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