

## Results in Brief: Evaluation of the Carol M. White Physical Education Program

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The Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) provides grants to districts and community-based organizations (CBOs) to initiate, expand, and improve physical education for students in kindergarten through grade 12. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education issued new regulations for PEP that included the following: (1) requiring grantees to give attention to healthy eating habits and nutrition; (2) requiring grantees to conduct a needs assessment, with districts and CBOs partnering with a district or school required to use four designated modules of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's School Health Index (SHI); (3) using this assessment to develop project goals and plans to address identified weaknesses; (4) encouraging grantees to establish partnerships with community entities; (5) encouraging grantees to collect and use body mass index (BMI) data; and (6) establishing new performance measures and standard data collection methods. This report provides the results of the implementation study of the 76 projects (64 district-led and 12 CBO-led) funded by fiscal year (FY) 2010 PEP grant awards—the first cohort of grantees under the revised PEP.

### Study Questions

1. What were the results of PEP grantees' self-assessments of their physical activity, health, and nutrition policies and practices?
2. What physical activity and nutrition policy efforts did PEP grantees report?
3. What physical fitness, physical education, and nutrition activities did PEP grantees report?
4. What role did community partnerships play in PEP projects?
5. What were PEP grantees' experiences with collecting and using BMI data?
6. What implementation challenges and lessons learned did PEP grantees report?

### Study Design and Limitations

This study used a mixed-methods research design that included surveys and a case study. Surveys of project directors were conducted in 2011 and 2013, during the first and third years of the grant period. A case study of five PEP projects (three districts and two CBOs) gathered more in-depth information from 59 interviewees regarding grantees' experiences with community partners and BMI data collection.

Although the surveys allowed for uniform data collection, no additional documentation or data collection exists to support the information reported by survey respondents. Although the case study data provide rich information about a sample of grantees' experiences with BMI data and partnerships, this information is not generalizable to the population of FY 2010 grantees.

### Highlights

- Grantees most often reported weaknesses in their policies and programs related to the Health Education (43 percent) and Physical Education (32 percent) SHI modules.
- The greatest percentage of grantees made significant changes to physical activity policies concerning the use of a standards-based sequential physical education curriculum (59 percent) and policies involving recommendations or offers of physical activity through before- or after-school programs (55 percent).
- About one-third of grantees made significant changes to nutrition policies aimed at reducing the availability of foods of minimal nutritional value, restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods at school, and requiring the adoption and implementation of strong nutritional standards for all foods sold and served in schools.
- Grantees implemented more physical fitness, physical education, and nutrition-related activities during the PEP grant compared with before receipt of the grant, particularly in the areas of improving instruction, staff professional development, student engagement in physical activity, and curricula revisions.
- The most frequently reported benefits of PEP partnerships were access to additional resources (reported by 90 percent of grantees with partnerships) and the ability to build on grantees' own knowledge bases (86 percent).
- Sixty-one percent of grantees that collected BMI data provided or planned to provide parents with information about their children's BMI scores to help them take appropriate action.
- The most common implementation challenge reported was executing the revised requirements for collecting data on the performance measures (83 percent).

## Assessing PEP Project Needs

**Grantees most often reported weaknesses in their policies and programs related to the Health Education and the Physical Education modules of the SHI (43 percent and 32 percent, respectively).**

Fewer respondents reported weaknesses in their policies and practices that addressed the Nutrition Services (19 percent) or the School Health and Safety Policies and Environment (19 percent) SHI modules.

Approximately half of the grantees (51 percent) reported medium to high scores across all four SHI areas.

## Physical Activity and Nutrition Policy Efforts

**Grantees more often reported implementing policy actions involving physical activity policies than nutrition policies.**

More than half of grantees reported making significant changes to physical activity policies concerning the use of a standards-based sequential physical education curriculum (59 percent) and policies involving recommendations or offers of physical activity through before- or after-school programs (55 percent).

About one-third of grantees made significant changes to nutrition policies aimed at reducing the availability of foods of minimal nutritional value, restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods on school campuses, and requiring the adoption and implementation of strong nutritional standards for all foods sold and served in schools.

## Implementing Physical Fitness, Physical Education, and Nutrition Activities

**Grantees implemented more physical fitness, physical education, and nutrition-related activities during the PEP grant compared with before receipt of the grant, particularly in the areas of improving instruction and student engagement in physical activity, staff professional development, and curricula revisions.**

The greatest increase occurred for activities designed to improve physical education instruction related to cognitive concepts (92 percent by Year 3, up from 21 percent prior to PEP). By Year 3, almost all grantees reported mostly or fully implementing activities to improve student engagement in physical activities external to the school-based curricula (96 percent, up from 29 percent prior to PEP) and to improve personnel/staff capacity to provide physical education instruction (92 percent, up from 30 percent).

By Year 3, the majority of grantees reported mostly or fully implementing activities to improve instruction on nutrition education (83 percent, up from 22 percent prior to the PEP grant) and to revise or expand existing curricula for nutrition education (76 percent, up from 20 percent).

## Community Partnerships

**The most commonly reported benefits of PEP community partnerships were access to additional (nonmonetary) resources (90 percent of grantees that formed partnerships) and the ability to build on the PEP grantees' own knowledge bases (86 percent).**

In addition, 75 percent of grantees reported that engaging with partners allowed them to reach more of their targeted population. Partners were most significantly involved in providing nutrition-related support.

## Experiences With BMI Data Collection and Use

**Sixty-one percent of grantees that collected BMI data provided or planned to provide parents with information about their children's BMI to help them take appropriate action.**

Case study respondents sent home letters with reports that provided BMI data along with other physical fitness data and provided opportunities for parents to obtain information through schools' online systems. Respondents also followed up with parents of students whose BMI scores indicated that they were at risk of developing weight-related health problems.

Case study respondents reported challenges in communicating with families about students' BMI data. Challenges were attributed to parents' lack of understanding about BMI, concerns about confidentiality, and a general discomfort with the district or CBO having a role in identifying potential health issues among their children.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

**The most common implementation challenge reported by grantees was executing the revised requirements for collecting data on the performance measures (83 percent).**

Grantees experienced the greatest challenges with the physical activity performance measures, with the majority reporting moderate or extreme difficulty collecting pedometer data (75 percent) and gathering self-report data from students using the 3-Day Physical Activity Recall measure (49 percent). The most commonly reported challenges in collecting the performance measures were the lack of proper data collection or reporting by students (59 percent), malfunctioning/faulty equipment (56 percent), and loss or theft of equipment (56 percent).

Grantees described strategies to address challenges related to data collection, including limiting the use of pedometers to school instead of allowing students to take them home, developing clear data collection protocols and time lines, and involving other staff members to facilitate data collection.