

# HOPE2 Elementary Schools as “Hubs” of Community-wide Obesity Prevention Activities in Six States

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## BACKGROUND

Childhood obesity continues to be a major clinical and public health issue. As shown in the Healthier Options for Public Schoolchildren (HOPS) Study, a four-year quasi-experimental study that took place in seven states from 2004-2009 led by some of the authors listed above, school-based dietetic/nutrition and health education programming can improve obesity risk factors to a statistically significant extent. HOPS showed that school-based interventions resulted in program children experiencing statistically significantly greater improvements in weight, blood pressure, and waist circumference measures, as well as significantly higher average standardized test scores, as compared to children in non-program schools. Thus, schools provide ideal settings to implement obesity prevention programming to large and diverse pediatric audiences.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of Healthier Options for People through Extension (HOPE)2 was to improve the health and achievement of elementary aged children by replicating and expanding the model tested during the HOPS Study.

**Objective 1** To implement evidence-based, school-wide nutrition and healthy living programming and assist in changing school wellness policies with the aim to support childhood obesity prevention efforts.

**Objective 2** To expand school-based programming into communities by using schools as “hubs” for community-wide obesity prevention efforts that engage child care centers, faith based institutions, afterschool/summer camp programs, and other socializing and care institutions of children.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM AND TARGET AUDIENCE

HOPE2 was a 4-year (2009-2012), six-state (AR, FL, LA, MI, MS, and NM) project aimed to teach children and their families about good nutrition, healthy living, and obesity prevention. The target audience included elementary-aged children, and their families, in low-income communities with high rates of obesity.

During years 1-4, HOPE2 was designed to facilitate adoption of a model of school-based obesity prevention addressing the combined effect of (1) social marketing about nutrient rich foods using the OrganWise Guys (OWG) Foods of the Month Club (with a secondary aim to improve the dietary content of school-provided breakfasts, lunches, and extended day snacks that are part of the United States Department of Agriculture [USDA] feeding programs, as well as assist with securing awards as part of the USDA HealthierUS School Challenge); (2) OWG nutrition and healthy lifestyle curricula linked to the core subject requirements for each grade level Kindergarten through fifth grade (using fun characters of OWG to make messages “stick”); and (3) other

school-based wellness activities such as daily physical activity using WISERCISE! and gardens.

During years 3-4, HOPE2 activities included Health Incentive Project (HIP) minigrants to community-based organizations in the footprints of the participating schools. Recipients of minigrants included faith-based institutions, child care centers, summer camp operators, summer feeding programs, and others. In all, more than 100 HIP minigrants were awarded to organizations to implement contextually-specific obesity prevention programming.

In all states, the Land-grant Extension University Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) faculty and staff served as implementation partners, leading activities in schools and other community-based locations where low-income populations receive nutrition education. Partners included:



## EVALUATION

The evaluation of HOPE2 included a variety of quantitative (Healthy School Climate Survey, Foodservice Survey) and qualitative (content analyses of narratives from sites, newspaper coverage, participant observation, etc.) approaches. Some results have been presented at professional conferences including the Food and Nutrition Conference & Exposition of the American Dietetic Association, The Obesity Society Annual meeting, among others. Results show improvements in school wellness policies, wellness

environments, consumption of nutrient-rich foods served in schools, overall increase in knowledge and associated health outside of the school setting, among other key obesity prevention successes.

## CONCLUSIONS

HOPE2 showed positive effects of using schools as “hubs” of obesity prevention efforts that reach out into community-based organizations in the footprints of the schools. The HOPE2 model is easy to replicate and thus shows much promise for successfully combatting childhood obesity.

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