

June 17, 2011

David Burr, Director  
Program Accountability and Administration Division  
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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
3101 Park Center Drive  
Alexandria, VA 22302-1500

Dear Mr. Burr,

We are writing in response to USDA's informal request for comments about key programmatic provisions of paragraph (3) (A) of section 241 of the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010*, which outlines the new Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant Program. We collaborate on a number of nutrition and healthy living education projects, many of which are coordinated in multi-state, multi-level partnerships funded by the SNAP-Ed program and leveraged by additional funding and support from organizations such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, various Blue Cross & Blue Shield organizations, regional foundations, state departments of education, among others.

Collaboratively, we make a strong impact on the health and academic achievement of young children and their families who participate in programs led by our SNAP-Ed programs. One of the core programs we utilize through our multi-state partnerships has a very strong evidence base, which is described below in more detail, including statistically significant improvements in weight, waist circumference, and blood pressure measures, as well as standardized test scores. Thus, our nutrition education programming, implemented through SNAP-Ed state and county level educators and specialists, positively addresses the obesity crisis daily, primarily through the setting of the school that we utilize as a "hub" of other obesity prevention/nutrition and healthy living education activities.

We appreciate the opportunity to share some stories of the impact of our multi-level, multi-setting SNAP-Ed programming below, after a short description of the evidence base of the model we use to coordinate our efforts. Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments prior to the publication of proposed regulations.

Sincerely yours,

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## State-Specific Comments

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Schools and/or child care centers are ideal “hubs” of healthy weight activities because children generally attend school five days per week during nine months of the school year, and schools are located in communities of every socioeconomic and racial/ethnic group – thus they provide ideal locales for interventions. Also, school-age children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who participate in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program, receive a substantial proportion of their daily nutrient requirements at school, often resulting in as much as 51% of daily energy intake<sup>1</sup>. Schools also are places where the public feels comfortable and where regular interaction with families occurs. Thus, messages about healthy living and good nutrition behaviors that are promoted in these settings have a strong likelihood of crossing into other sectors including the home, afterschool, clinic, and other settings that care for children.<sup>2,3</sup>

A very strong evidence-base, including peer-reviewed, published articles by authors of this paper, exists for projects in these settings. Results have been shown to improve, significantly, the health and academic achievement of children, longitudinally, over the three-year intervention.<sup>4-8</sup> Specifically, school-based interventions that include The OrganWise Guys (OWG) nutrition and healthy living education ([www.organwiseguys.com](http://www.organwiseguys.com)), dietary changes to foods served in schools/child care centers, and increased levels of physical activity using WISERCISE!, resulted in statistically significant improvements in weight, waist circumference, and blood pressure measures, as well as higher average standardized test scores, among intervention children as compared to children not participating in the programming.<sup>5-8</sup> Evaluation data also show that parents increasingly are engaged with their children’s nutrition and healthy food choices as a result of the nutrition education resources provided through the schools.<sup>9</sup>

The model of school-base nutrition and healthy living programming we utilize is facilitated, and sustained, through strategic collaboration with Land-grant Universities (especially Cooperative Extension), Departments of Health, and other community-based health education entities that offer the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) program in low-income schools. SNAP-Ed nutrition educators are allowed, and encouraged, to use evidence-based OWG programming as they work with low-income children and families. They train teachers and child care providers on how to use the curricula that are matched to state core academic standards, and they provide ongoing technical assistance year after year, through a combination of federal, state, and local funding sources. Through these efforts, children become healthier and improve their academic success, while at the same time, children become very vocal, passionate “nutrition educators” of parents, bringing important nutrition and healthy living messages home that they learn at school.

The descriptions of partnerships provide below are possible through a number of funding partnerships, including a six-state, \$2 million project funded by the W.K Kellogg Foundation called Healthier Options for People Through Extension 2 (HOPE2) and a four-state, \$1.2 million project funded by Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC, through their Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas Plans). Some of the impacts of these partnerships on children and their caregivers are described below by our collaborators.

# Illinois (HCSC)

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ORGANIZATION: University of Illinois at Chicago -- Chicago Partnership for Health Promotion (CPHP)

The University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago Partnership for Health Promotion (UIC-CPHP) provides SNAP-Ed in the city of Chicago. To date, the UIC-CPHP has implemented the OWG program in 38 Chicago Public schools. School-based programming led by UIC-CPHP includes implementation of the OWG through monthly classroom presentations, collaboration with cafeteria staff and programming, and through outreach to parents. Experiential food education will be made possible through a partnership next school year between UIC-CPHP and the Chicago Public Schools contract food services companies whereby OWG Foods of the Month (FoM) Club activities, including food tastings and inclusion of FoM items on school menus, will commence. To extend the school-based healthy living and good nutrition activities, UIC-CPHP partners with the Chicago Park District after school program and summer camp program.

In large part due to UIC-CPHP's partnership with the school district, nine (9) elementary schools achieved recognition for their nutrition and physical activity efforts through the USDA HealthierUS School Challenge. They are listed below:

**HealthierUS Challenge Award:**

**Gold Award of *Distinction***

**Gold Award**

Namaste Elementary

Ana Roque De Duprey Elementary

Cyrus H. McCormick Elementary

Manuel Perez Elementary

Nathanael Greene Elementary

Irma C. Ruiz Elementary

**Silver Award**

Calmecca Academy of Fine Arts and Dual Languages

Sharon Christa McAuliffe Elementary

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

A parent of a special needs child, who also happens to be a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools, attended an OWG training mainly because she wanted to learn more about *who* the "OrganWise Guys" were since they were powerful enough to make her son give up french fries, his favorite drive-through food, and order apple slices instead. This teacher is now OrganWise and does Wisercise with her students daily.

# Louisiana (HOPE2)

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ORGANIZATION: LSU AgCenter

## **Assumption Parish**

*Bayou L'Ourse Primary* and *Bell Rose Primary* began during the 2009-2010 school year. Activities included the following:

- Health and nutrition education, tied to the subject areas throughout the day
- A Family Nutrition Night was planned and conducted.
- The Body Walk was implemented last school year

In Bell Rose, HOPE2 was expanded with a garden and outdoor learning area funded by a 4-H Walmart Foundation Grant called Fit 4 the Future. The learning area was built and installed under a tree by a Parish High School class.

## **Outcomes at Belle Rose Primary—Expanding HOPE2 with 4-H Walmart-funded garden project**

A study was conducted to examine what effects a school garden had on students in a low socio-economic first grade classroom. A garden was established in a school in the southern state parish (county) of Assumption in collaboration with HOPE2. The qualitative study used the interview method to gather data. Three first grade teachers were individually interviewed and each classroom of students was interviewed as a class. The study found the garden project provided a positive experience for students, opportunities to try new foods, and an understanding of the origin of food. Teachers were able to incorporate the garden into curriculum and the garden established a new connection between parents and teachers. Cafeteria workers noted an increase vegetable consumption over the year. Results also showed first grade teachers agreed the garden project provided most students a once in a lifetime experience and that the garden was a motivating factor to learn. Teachers indicated the project had a positive impact on students and they incorporated exercise daily. Teachers reported students

- Were able to make the connection between eating right and exercising and being healthy
- Were motivated to behave in class and rarely had to be disciplined in the garden
- Learned teamwork and citizenship and took ownership of the garden
- Experienced traditional learning in a nontraditional way
- Were all at the same level when they were in the garden; the garden served as an equalizer
- Students experienced tasting and eating new foods
- The students learned where food comes from and were very protective of their garden

Results of the interviewed classrooms' comments are below. The students, when asked

- Were able to list and identify what was grown in the garden
- Tasted all vegetables harvested through a variety of food preparation methods
- Made the connection between gardening and learning how to save money
- Stated that the garden provided healthy foods
- Agreed that the garden was hard work, physically

## *Other findings*

Students participated in classroom activities centered on the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. In the garden project, students were instrumental in planting, tending and harvesting. Students learned responsibility, citizenship, fairness, respect and caring. They were able to participate in gardening, most for the first time; learned where food comes from; were able to taste fresh produce, many for the

first time; learned to eat new foods and began selecting more fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria. During an oral pre and post question and answer period, students were questioned regarding their garden experience. Of the 49 first graders: only 4 had prior knowledge or experience with growing a garden and teachers reported that 78% of the students were selecting more fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria and if it's something they didn't like, they would at least try it. As a result of the garden: 100% indicated that they liked gardening; 96% liked eating foods that they had grown; 80% could name and identify at least 5 vegetables they grew; 50% reported having tasted a new vegetable, raw or cooked, that they would continue to eat; 12 parents at the school enrolled in SNAP-Ed nutrition classes; by 2010-11 school year end, every Assumption parish school will have a garden; and first grade teachers divided the garden so last year's first graders will continue their garden experience as second graders.

## **Iberia Parish**

*Caneview Elementary* began the program during the 2009-2010 school year. School activities included:

- Taste testing with the Food of the Month were provided. Teachers documented each day how many students at least tried their fruits and vegetables. According to the teachers "there was a noticeable increase throughout the year".
- Health and nutrition was tied into most of the subject areas throughout the day
- The music teacher used the Organ Wise Guys songs through the year in her music classes.
- The 5th grade started a vegetable garden to grow vegetables and prepared recipes with the produce. They sold the produce as a school fund raiser and hope to make the garden larger next year. A SNAP-Ed agent held student cooking demonstrations promoting healthy eating.
  - Students logged the plants' progress in journals during each site visit and groups compared and contrasted the growth process between types of produce.
- A Family Nutrition Night was planned for April
- The PE teacher and Principal are huge supporters of HOPE2 and encourage the teachers to use the program.
- The school received funding for a community-based school garden through a HOPE2 Healthy Incentive Project (HIP) grant.

*North Lewis Elementary* began the program during the 2009-2010 school year. School activities included the following:

- The Body Walk was implemented last school year
- The teachers continue to use the OWG materials, Wisercise and OWG Fruit and Vegetable tracking in their classrooms

## **Plaquemines Parish**

*Boothville/Venice Elementary* and *South Plaquemines Elementary* began the program during the spring of 2009-2010 school year and currently is fully implementing the program. School activities included the following:

- A Family Nutrition Night, with funding from the HIP grant was completed during the Fall of 2010.
- Both Boothville/Venice and South Plaquemines are located near the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill and therefore received the OWG Emotional Health kit for the guidance counselors to use.
- The school participated in the Louisiana Body Walk during April 2010.

# Mississippi (HOPE2)

ORGANIZATION: Mississippi State University Extension Service

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The Family Nutrition Program (FNP), part of the Mississippi State University Extension Service, uses various curricula to educate students about the importance of nutrition and physical activity. Six schools in the Jackson Public School (JPS) system participated in the HOPE2 project during the 2010-2011 school year. With support from school administration, active advocacy from the JPS Food Service Executive Director, training and support from the MSU-ES, and cooperation and involvement from teachers and food service staff, the HOPE2 Project yielded exciting results among the six schools. Below is an overview of activities among each school and additional projects underway because of the HOPE2 Project.

- Jackson Public School teachers regularly incorporated OrganWise Guys curricula, activities, DVDs, dolls, and Wisercise! Into their daily classroom activities.
- Each school participated in the “Food of the Month.” Monthly-featured foods were incorporated into the cafeteria meals and were highlighted on the food line with a “Food of the Month” card. Posters were placed in the cafeteria and food service staff wore OWG pins to promote the “Food of the Month.” Some teachers incorporated the “Food of the Month” into their classroom activities such as using sweet potatoes as a snack. Food service staff also engaged the students (and vice versa) regarding food options.
- Marshall Elementary students prepared a school garden. Students were responsible for planting, tending, and harvesting the garden. Produce was used in “Food of the Month” demonstrations, and when enough of a food item was available, teachers arranged tastings. The garden is funded by a HIP grant.
- As an incentive to actively contribute in the HOPE2 project, the schools with the most nutrition education classroom hours (OWG) received \$10,000 worth of exercise equipment as part of the HOPS project. Four schools were awarded this equipment. Each school showcased their new equipment during a monthly “Parents and Community Health and Wellness Night.”

It is evident from the interaction between FNP educators, classroom teachers, students and students’ parents that children play a pivotal role in determining the nutrition and health behaviors in the household. Below are various stories from FNP educators reiterating the positive role that students engaging in our programming can have on the health of their entire family.

- Parent 1- Oh, you are Ms. Williams who has me going in the store buying fruit and yogurt.
- Parent 2- Daughter has started eating more vegetables like greens.
- Parent 3- Ms. Williams, you're all I hear about and eating the right foods.
- I have a set of twins in first grade and I went to school with their mother and she told me that on the way to school the next morning the boys told her that Ms. Jessica told them that they needed to brush their teeth and drink their milk... They were telling her about the book I read to them from OWG about grandmother and her dentures and that they did not want to have dentures... She said they had her rolling laughing... Also every time I am in a store or somewhere and the kids see me they are like momma that is the lady that tells us about nutrition.
- One of my 2nd grade teachers said that her class is making good decisions in the cafeteria concerning choosing healthier foods. They are reminded of the discussions that we have of making healthy choices.

- This information is from the Principal at Bates Elementary. A parent of a kindergartener walked in the office and asked the receptionist to have a meeting with the principal. The principal came; she asked him whom the lady is that teaches nutrition to the class. She complained that her daughter constantly stands over her family at home making sure they are singing the ABC song and washing their hands correctly.
- It is very pleasing when you see a child outside of the classroom, which I do all of the time, with their parents and they will say hello Mrs. Smith, mom this is the Nutrition Lady. They will explain to their parent what I teach or talk to them about in the classroom. He/she will tell their moms to get some fruit. Mrs. Smith says they are good for you. We shouldn't eat a lot of sweets. We need to eat nutritious foods. Then, the parent will say okay lets go get some. So that let's me know that they are paying attention to me when I teach about eating Healthy foods. One of the Teacher's classes I teach has a son in another class. She told me one day that her son is really getting on her about eating healthy. She said he watches her a lot now, when it comes to eating healthy. She said he is really learning a lot in the class about healthy eating and he is in Kindergarten.
- After teaching the "Heart Smart" lesson and talking about what can happen to your heart and other veins in your body if you eat too many fatty foods, I ran into a student's grandmother at the grocery store. She asked if I was the "healthy eating teacher," she said her grandson made her take the butter bowl off the table because it was bad for you to eat too many fats it would make your heart sick!

Through successful collaboration, communication, and support among school administration, MSU-ES, the Jackson Public School System, and the OrganWise Guys, the HOPE2 Project is yielding exciting results among our children and their families. In addition to reaching children during the school year, Hinds County is operating feeding sites at 3 schools serving 300 students at each location as part of a HIP grant. The feeding sites are featuring healthy foods like low-fat dairy in June and melons and water in July. The increased awareness of the important role schools play in shaping the health of students is evident through the various programs being implemented throughout the area. We hope to continue this momentum with the HOPE2 Project in the upcoming school year.

# New Mexico (HOPE2 and HCSC)

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ORGANIZATION: New Mexico State University – Cooperative Extension Service

New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service began partnering with HOPE2 and Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Mexico in Fall 2009. The goal was to encourage and support participation in a health curriculum that was fun, innovative and relevant to New Mexico schools. At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, NMSU Extension Service has recruited and worked with 41 schools under the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Grant and 14 schools under the HOPE2 grant. Feedback from school staff and administrators has been positive and helpful in our effort to promote healthy lifestyles to elementary aged students.

As part of our recruiting and program promotion efforts we have exhibited at various conferences and professional meetings for teachers, physicians, nurses, and school administrators. We work with principals and school “champions” to organize teacher trainings to help the school staff better implement the program into their classrooms. By attending school specific staff meeting trainings and offering one-on-one assistance to the school “champions”, we hope that they become more comfortable with putting their own spin on using the materials. Monthly OWG announcements are emailed to the school champions to forward to their staff, and an occasional email will be sent out to request feedback on the program.

In January 2011, the OWG program was presented to teachers and nurses that attended the Las Cruces Public School 180<sup>th</sup> day teacher in-service training day. In order to help the teachers and nurses better understand the materials, four “centers” were set up that the teachers and nurses would rotate through to10 participate in various activities. Center activities included reading an OWG hardback book as a group, physically participating and completing a Wisercise activity, completing a coloring page, and writing down five facts about the character that they chose to color. The entire group watched an OWG Short and was presented a slide show. The follow-up surveys that were collected provided positive feedback and showed an interest in participation. We are actively trying to recruit the entire Las Cruces Public School District to support the program and encourage the elementary schools to participate. One school in our project was awarded a HealthierUS School Challenge Award, East San Jose Elementary

## **HIGHLIGHTS:**

Grand Heights Early Childhood Center in Artesia, NM is one of our participating schools that has incorporated the program into their everyday activities. With approximately 400 kindergarten students that attend the school, the teachers have found it easy to include the characters in their classroom newsletters, bulletin board postings, breakfast and lunch program, as well as physical education activities and school assemblies. The teachers have turned holiday parties into OWG Parties, requesting that every child bring an item that helps support healthy nutrition. Anxiously looking into other ways to include the curriculum, the school has shown interest in receiving additional grants to support The OWG message.

Other participating schools have downloaded the OrganWise-ology software onto their school internet system and have used the games as a tool to provide computer training and usage to students. Many schools have also used the OWG Shorts to air as part of their morning or afternoon announcements. These same interstitial messages have also been aired on KRWG Public Television Station out of New Mexico State University to the Las Cruces Community and have given students the ability to recognize our program.

San Jose Elementary in Albuquerque, NM recently incorporated the OWG Program into their school curriculum and was recently awarded a Bronze USDA HealthierUS School Challenge Award. They have made attempts at receiving the award in the past and were unsuccessful due to the lack of health and nutrition education that they provided. Since implementing the OWG Program, they have been able to be successful at implementation and found the program fun and easy to incorporate into their Physical Education Program.

**ADDITIONAL PROGRAM SUPPORT:**

The following is an email from the Health Services Specialist at Las Cruces Public Schools.

Dear Lucinda:

Thanks so much for the great sessions you provided at our recent teacher conference - Integrating Nutrition and Physical Activity into Core Curriculum. Your classes were very well received as evidenced by the evaluations, which are attached. And, I heard from several excited teachers that they were getting grants to bring the OWG curriculum to their schools. Thank you for all your hard work, time and effort in helping to make our conference day a success.

Barbara Berger  
Health and Nutrition Specialist  
Las Cruces Public Schools

# Oklahoma (HCSC)

ORGANIZATION: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service

Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service began partnering with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma in 2009. Currently, 92% of schools participating during the FY09 and FY10 program years have continued in FY11. These continuing 23 school districts have been joined by an additional seven school districts in 2011. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma partnership allows a larger number of children to benefit from the educational program. The cumulative total served by OWG in the 2010- 2011 school year was 7,114 youth in approximately 268 classrooms across 30 school districts in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma focuses OWG programming efforts in low-income schools as designated by the Oklahoma State Department of Education Child Nutrition Program. Through a series of lessons the curricula promote four basic preventative health habits: (1) maintaining a low-fat diet (2) consuming high fiber foods (3) drinking plenty of water (4) engage in regular physical activity. The fact that Oklahoma ranks as 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for fruit and vegetable consumption and the fifth most physically inactive state indicates a continued need for the nutrition education efforts in the schools.<sup>10,11</sup>

Schools are reporting using the use of OWG books (4,125 minutes), OWG Activity Sheet (2,090 minutes), OWG Doll (1230 minutes), OWG DVD (1350 minutes) and Wisercise (5,790 minutes). Many schools have also used the OWG Shorts to air as part of their morning announcements. These same OWG Short messages have also been aired on OETA Public Television Station out of Oklahoma City which has reinforces the health and nutrition messages taught in the schools.

Outcome evaluation of the OWG program is being reported by teacher observation for Pre-K -2<sup>nd</sup> grade and pre/post test to measure changes in knowledge for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade and/or using the direct contact method. Additionally this program year, a food service survey is being used to report the OWG foods of the month featured in school menus and how the foods of the months were featured to the students. Currently this information is being aggregated for reporting purposes.

Examples of student responses to the following question, **Are there changes in student's food choices or other behaviors after receiving this nutrition education program? These changes may be based on your observation or others' are found below:**

- ✓ "They are more conscious of eating fruits & vegetables"
- ✓ "I hear the children talking after lunch. They will say things like" I ate all of my vegetables today." It has made them more aware of what they are eating"
- ✓ "They drink more water"

OWG materials will be expanded next school year to increase nutrition education in up to twenty additional schools across Oklahoma. Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service plans again to target Pre-K through 5th grade in low-income schools as designated by the Oklahoma State Department of Education Child Nutrition Program. The program will be implemented in partnership with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Caring Foundation, health care professionals, teachers, school administrators, Creek Nation, Extension Educators and volunteers.

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