

STUDENT FEEDBACK/RESPONSE HEALTH AND WELLNESS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Three Focus Groups – approx. 60 students
Surveys – 2000+

Key Issues: FOOD/BEVERAGES

1. Choices served in the cafeteria need to meet some key parameters: they need to be affordable, portable, taste appealing, quick to purchase, and offer a variety.
2. Fresh vegetables and fruits are preferable to cooked or steamed veggies
3. Don't go too skimpy on portions or strictly limit the amount of portion a student could purchase. Male students in particular have big appetites and if 'we can't satisfy our hunger in the cafeteria, we'll be more likely to buy junk food later'
4. Students want to retain choice. They would not be supportive of pre-packed or "TV dinner" type meals all packaged together
5. Students would like the alternatives phased in more slowly – as well as a slower transition out of items we will no longer carry. They would like cafeterias to start sampling or 'modeling' the new food choices now so they can make the adjustment more slowly
6. Students want to keep favorite things like pizza, fries, chicken patty sandwiches, etc. They are hopeful new products might be able to meet the guidelines but still taste good. Some students commented they eat pizza or fries every day because they don't like what's served with the daily meal menu.
7. A small number of students commented about food allergies or other dietary issues being a concern, such as those who are lactose intolerant or those who prefer a vegan diet. They would like to see those needs at least addressed in the menu choices if not in the policy
8. Students seem to purchase a LOT of pop at high school right now. Taking pop out of the building during the school day will not be popular at the high school level.
9. Many students do purchase food/meals in the cafeteria at least once per day – with a significant number saying they eat two meals a day.
10. Students don't always feel they have enough time to eat. That's another reason they buy snacks or more portable food instead of sitting down to a meal.

Key Issues: HEALTH EDUCATION

1. Most students felt it is 'too late' to provide health education in high school. They felt these classes would have much more impact in the lower grades
2. Students felt that such classes – at any level – need to be practical and offer wellness skills like menu planning, effective exercise methods, basic nutrition, label reading, health food preparation, etc. While they thought health assessments might be a good thing to do in these classes, they did not think high school students would be motivated to do anything about the results they might get from such assessments
3. Students did NOT feel these skills are being taught in schools at this time.

KEY ISSUES: Physical Fitness

1. There's a bit of a dichotomy here: many students commented that they don't feel they get enough opportunities for physical fitness/physical activity during the day BUT by and large, they do NOT want to see PE classes increased or have more conditioning or aerobic activity in PE classes. Many would rather not have to take PE at all.
2. Students were accepting of a health report card – and even the use of the BMI – but most did not think those results would motivate them to change any of their behaviors.
3. Students were concerned about having to be weighed or measured in an environment that wasn't private and confidential. They were OK with the BMI but did not think a single number was adequate for determining whether or not they were fit. They would want an explanation of the BMI, the procedure, would want it down privately, and want results kept confidential. They were more comfortable with an overall health report card that measured many different things.
4. Many students – both male and female – were concerned with anything that might label them as "fat" or "overweight" or "out of shape". They felt they already know if they are those things and don't need some assessment to tell them that. They also worried that something like that might tend to increase anorexic or bulimic behavior
5. Again, students felt such exercise/fitness habits should start earlier. They don't think that high school students care or will really do anything about it. They feel these habits are already established.
6. Some students who are in sports or other physical activity (like cheerleading) feel they should be exempted from PE because they are already getting enough activity.

KEY ISSUES: Classrooms and Fundraising

1. Students were extremely concerned about the negative effect the recommendations could have on fundraising for everything from dances to classroom materials. They want to know what the district is going to do to make up that loss of revenue.
2. Students like to 'graze' throughout the day and like the opportunity to have or purchase snacks. The ones they prefer are chips, pop, and candy. But they thought kids might purchase healthy alternatives if they didn't get too expensive and they tasted good. They think selling snacks in the classroom is fine and also do not see problems with eating in class as long as people are neat and not rude about it.
3. Students are very aware that many teachers and groups sell items during the day to purchase class materials and even equipment. If we are going to limit this through the policy, they are worried about how those things will still be purchased.
4. Students agree they will need time to look for different alternative items to sell but feel they will need help from the district to do this.
5. Students in general think most teachers model 'fairly decent' wellness behavior in classrooms – but they all had examples of teachers who drink pop in class, go to McDonald's, who are overweight, or who give candy away in their rooms.

GENERAL THOUGHTS

1. Students were ambivalent about a county-wide policy. They didn't see it as being an advantage or an issue for them
2. An overwhelming majority of students responded they were aware that young people in America are becoming more overweight and experience health problems because of it.
3. A majority of students responded that they try to make positive health and nutrition choices for themselves
4. A majority of students responded that health and nutrition are important to them.
5. A majority of students disagreed, however, that a health report card would make them more aware of their health status OR would lead them to make changes.

6. The majority of students felt that this is all coming too late for current high school students but that it may be more positive for younger students
7. There was some sense that the district makes a lot of decisions without getting student input and they will just have to 'live with whatever the Board decides anyway. However, many students were at least pleased to be asked for feedback.
8. Many students argued why schools should even be in the business of mandating health or wellness recommendations. They are very adamant about wanting the freedom to choose and to make their own decisions. They see such policies as being intrusive and of little value in really changing their behavior. Many of them also said that students will just go out after school and buy what they want anyway.
9. In a positive note, the students did provide a number of suggestions for healthier food they'd like to see served in the cafeteria. I'll compile a list of those items for the Food Service Department to review. One good idea was 'to go' lunches

SOME EDITORIAL COMMENTS: In general, the students responded very positively to the overall process. There was excellent and thoughtful participation at the focus groups AND the survey process was taken very seriously. There were many written comments and good suggestions. In the main, high school students simply resent any kind of control or dictatorial-type policies. This is their nature I think at this age, so should not be taken too negatively.

This was a very good and workable experience for soliciting input from students. I do not personally feel it is something we should implement for all policies by any means, but there may be issues where it makes sense and could be meaningful.