Strengthening Nutrition Education in Child Nutrition Programs: Team Nutrition

Team Nutrition Funding

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<td>$15.5m</td>
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The Importance of Nutrition Education

Our country is making critical investments in Child Nutrition Programs. But are we getting the most out of these investments? When access to healthy food (e.g., school meals with strong nutrition standards) is paired with effective nutrition education, we can maximize the existing investment and help put millions of children on the path to lifelong health. Simply knowing what to eat is not enough – especially for children. American children are eating too many unhealthy foods, and too few fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low fat dairy products. We are facing an epidemic of obesity in this country, with more than one third of American children and adolescents overweight or obese. Successful nutrition education efforts have a positive, lasting impact on kids’ eating habits and ultimately, their health.

Nutrition education benefits kids by helping to:

1. Decrease overweight and BMI, which can positively impact health and personal earnings throughout their lives.
2. Increase how much kids like and eat fruits and vegetables.
3. Improve kids’ performance in school.

Team Nutrition (TN) is the primary resource for nutrition education in Child Nutrition Programs. While TN can be effective in promoting healthy eating, its impact is limited by inadequate funding. In 2015, TN could only provide TN Training Grants to 19 of the 28 states that requested funds. The 2017 agriculture appropriations process is an opportunity to strengthen TN by increasing funding by $9.5 million for a total of $25 million, the full authorized amount (½ cent per each school lunch). This would ensure that thousands more children receive high quality nutrition education. Currently, Team Nutrition funding provides less than 50 cents per child per year of those participating in the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, despite the fact that school-based nutrition education is a cost-effective obesity prevention strategy.
What is Team Nutrition?
Team Nutrition is the only dedicated federal nutrition education and technical assistance program that supports schools and childcare providers through training, resources, and grants. The goal of Team Nutrition is to improve children’s lifelong eating and physical activity habits using the principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate.22

Team Nutrition uses three strategies to build healthy habits:
- Training and technical assistance to child nutrition professionals to enable them to prepare and serve nutritious meals that appeal to children.
- Nutrition education through multiple channels to help children have the knowledge, skills, and motivation to make healthy food and physical activity choices as part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Support for healthy school and child care environments that encourage nutritious food choices and physically active lifestyles.

Team Nutrition Training Grants
TN Training Grants provide states with funding to create nutrition education and training efforts that are specifically tailored to their states' students and their students' needs. In FY2015, 19 states received a total of $5.6 million in TN Training Grants. States can apply for Team Nutrition Training Grants for up to $350,000 to support trainings that focus on encouraging healthy eating. Those efforts could include:
- Using Smarter Lunchrooms strategies to encourage healthy choices through behavioral economics.
- Meeting meal pattern requirements for school meals.
- Delivering interactive nutrition education activities.
- Providing schools and child care providers with technical assistance to create and maintain a healthier environment.

Funding Team Nutrition at $25 million would allow for:
- A doubling of Team Nutrition Training Grants so that most states have access to this vital grant program.
- Increased technical assistance and resources to maximize the reach and implementation of Child Nutrition Programs, such as providing more culturally competent and translated materials to accommodate a variety of cultures and languages.
- Improved technology-based nutrition education resources.
- Strengthened capacity for Team Nutrition to serve as a clearinghouse for nutrition education materials for school based and child care settings.
- Increased recognition and visibility of the Team Nutrition Network.

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References