

# TEACHERS COLLEGE EVALUATION

## Key Takeaways



The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy recently completed a two-year research and evaluation partnership with FoodCorps. Below is a summary of the work and findings—including the exciting news that students in high-implementation FoodCorps schools eat triple the fruits and vegetables compared to children in low-implementation schools.

The goals of this evaluation were to:

1. Revise FoodCorps' Healthy School Progress Report (HSPR) to better reflect FoodCorps' programming and evidence from the research literature on creating a healthy school environment to promote fruits and vegetables.
2. Better understand how the presence of a FoodCorps service member in a school changes the school food environment.
3. Explore which aspects of a healthy school food environment are related to higher consumption of fruits and vegetables at school lunch.

The Healthy School Progress Report measures the extent to which schools are conducting activities in FoodCorps' three areas of service; how they are engaging with food policy on a local or district level; and looks for indicators of “staying power”—how people across the school community are supporting a positive food environment for students. The tool offers discrete practices that FoodCorps members and their schools can put into place. Each suggested practice is rooted in evidence that the action leads to improved fruit and vegetable consumption by students.

## Tool Assessment and Creation

### Key Takeaways:

- **We have confidence in the HSPR:** This study both revised FoodCorps' primary measurement tool and evaluated its efficacy. We determined that the Healthy School Progress Report is an evidenced informed tool grounded in theory and does a good job of capturing the range of FoodCorps programming
- **The Fruit and Vegetable Recall Survey is a valid and useful tool for measuring consumption:** In order to accomplish goal #3 listed above, the Teachers College team developed a new tool to measure fruit and vegetable consumption. They paired it in several locations with a digital photographic study and were able to confirm that the results are reliable (i.e. That if children are tested in the right way, directly following their meal, they can be relied upon to report fairly accurately what they ate). This tool was used to measure consumption for this past program year and is now being recommended as a tool our service members—with proper training—could administer going forward.



# Healthy School Progress Report:

## Key Takeaways:

- **Over 75% of schools were measurably healthier school food environments after a year of FoodCorps presence in their school:** These results reflect the HSPR being administered by all service members across all of FoodCorps' schools served at depth. This represents any improvement at all no matter how small or large.
- **Students in schools with more hands-on learning activities are eating triple the amount of fruits and vegetables than students who receive less of that hands-on learning.** This suggests a strong association between hands-on learning—often the largest component of FoodCorps service—and increased consumption of fruits and vegetables at school lunch.
  - Hands-on learning includes activities such as cooking and gardening, and talking to students about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and how to incorporate more of them into their diets
- **Schools in the study that started with the lowest scores had the greatest improvements over a one-year period**
  - This suggests that it could be good to invest time and resources in schools that have a lot of room to improve
  - The reason that schools with higher scores improve less is likely because service members spend a lot of time in these schools maintaining existing programs, leaving less time for new initiatives
- **In schools where corps members spent more time, we saw a greater increase in progress report scores.**
  - This supports our movement towards service members spending more time in fewer schools
  - Anecdotal evidence suggests when a service member is focused on only one school, it has benefits to both the service member and the school, and might result in greater improvements to HSPR score.
- **The more people and resources there are in place to support the healthy school food environment, the greater the school's ability to increase their score:** Schools with higher “Staying Power” scores had larger changes in their Progress Report scores than those with lower “Staying Power” scores. [*“Staying Power” refers to how people across the school community—i.e. Not just the service member—are supporting a positive food environment for students.*]
  - Support can come from administrators, teachers, school food service staff and/or parents
- **Three levels of schools:** The data from PY16 was used to categorize schools into three levels of programming. Those with the lowest scores on the HSPR, those making progress, and those functioning at a high level. Through this study we determined a few key learnings about each level:
  - Schools coming into FoodCorps without a lot of this programming in place can make tremendous progress within a school year.
  - Schools that already have a lot of programming in place will need to dedicate much of their energy into maintaining that programming and making incremental programming additions over time. Expected change on the tool is smaller but for good reason.
  - Schools in the highest level of programming may be challenged to improve their score over time. Given the importance that Staying Power showed throughout the three levels of schools, there should be an ever increasing importance on making this high level of programming sustainable. A plan for eventual transition away (3-5 years) from being a FoodCorps school served at depth is suggested.
- **While schools with service members had larger score increases than schools that did not, our analysis did not find this to be a statistically significant difference.** Given that the trend is going in the right direction, a larger study on this is warranted, with a few tweaks in methodology, including a larger sample size.

