

Development and Administration of a Survey to Measure Elementary School Teacher's Nutrition Beliefs and Practices in the School Environment

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To develop and administer a survey assessing elementary teachers' beliefs about the nutrition environment in their school as well as their eating behaviors in and out of the classroom; to assess these in relationship to their eating competence scores and number of nutrition courses taken.

Methods: Previously validated surveys were adapted and distributed to 4th grade teachers participating in the Fuel for Fun intervention. Teachers completed the 72-item survey assessing eating competence, responsibility for teaching students about nutrition, current nutrition environment at school, beliefs in ability to influence the nutrition environment, role modeling behaviors, and beliefs about role modeling's importance. Analyses included chi-square tests.

Results: Respondents (n=21) were more likely to believe they could influence the nutrition environments in their classroom than the cafeteria or school, and believed they had the greatest effect on student parties and food/treats in the classroom. Eating competent teachers were more likely to believe that teachers have the responsibility to encourage foods in the classroom (p=.006), and that it is difficult to provide a healthful nutrition environment at school (p=.02). Those who had one or more nutrition courses were more likely to believe that children imitate teacher eating habits (p=.002).

Conclusions and Implications: Teachers believed they had more influence over the classroom environment than other school areas, highlighting a potential area to focus future interventions. Few teachers who were eating competent had taken nutrition courses, and few of those who had taken nutrition courses were eating competent. This highlights the need for future studies to examine this potential relationship.