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Online Version

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) is pleased to release this new issue of FRAC Focus: Obesity and Poverty. This periodical e-newsletter focuses on obesity and low-income children and adults, looking at the intersection of obesity, low income, food insecurity, the federal nutrition programs, and federal food and nutrition policy.

This issue first features a new brief from FRAC that summarizes the latest research reflecting the positive impact of the relatively new school meal nutrition standards on school food offerings, reducing school meal quality disparities, and student nutrition-related outcomes.

The six Research Highlights that follow provide digests of – and links to – peer-reviewed studies on a variety of topics, including the impact of breakfast in the classroom on dietary intake, association between food insecurity and obesity, and food access challenges and potential solutions in low-income communities.

The issue concludes with four summaries of – and links to – important resources and reports recently published by national organizations and policy researchers, including a new policy brief on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and infographic on the potential contributors to obesity.

**New from FRAC!**

**Research Shows that the School Nutrition Standards Improve the School Nutrition Environment and Student Outcomes**

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 created a process for enhancing the quality of all food and beverages served and sold in schools by empowering the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set new nutrition standards both for school meals and for “competitive foods.” New standards first took effect in the 2012 – 2013 school year for lunch, 2013 – 2014 school year for breakfast, and 2014 – 2015 school year for competitive foods.

There is overwhelming evidence that the new standards for school meals are working. Administrative and public opinion data indicate that the standards are being successfully implemented and are supported across the nation. In addition, a number of research studies have examined the impact of the relatively new school meal nutrition standards on school food offerings, school meal disparities, and student nutrition-related outcomes. The studies find many positive results, as demonstrated in a new brief from FRAC. Key findings from the brief are summarized below.

### **School Nutrition Standards Improve the Food Offered in Schools**

Several national studies have found positive improvements to school meals since the implementation of the new school nutrition standards. For example, a report released in August by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that significantly more schools offered at least two different non-fried vegetables at lunch each day since the implementation of the new school nutrition standards (79 percent of schools in 2014 compared to 62 percent in 2000).

### **School Nutrition Standards Reduce School Meal Disparities**

Some prior school nutrition disparities have been reduced or eliminated since the implementation of the new school nutrition standards, based on national data on 792 middle schools and 751 high schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. In the 2010 – 2011 school year (prior to the implementation of the standards), students attending predominantly white schools and larger schools had significantly greater availability of some nutritious items. Most of these disparities were eliminated or reduced in the 2012 – 2013 school year (after implementation of the standards), as schools with higher percentages of minority students and smaller schools had increased their nutritious food availability.

### **School Nutrition Standards Improve Student Nutrition-Related Outcomes**

National studies as well as studies set in specific school districts across the country have found positive improvements in student nutrition outcomes since implementation of the standards. For instance, vegetable consumption and fruit selection both significantly increased at lunch after implementation of the standards among elementary and middle school children in an urban, low-income school district of Massachusetts. In addition, food waste did not increase in the district under the new standards.

The full report is available [here](#).

## **Research Highlights**

### ***Federal Nutrition Programs***

#### **School breakfast policy is associated with dietary intake of fourth- and fifth-grade students**

Breakfast in the classroom is associated with more students eating breakfast as well as better dietary quality, but not with higher breakfast or daily calorie intake,

according to a study in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. [More...](#)

## ***Food Insecurity and Obesity***

### **Household food insecurity as a determinant of overweight and obesity among low-income Hispanic subgroups: data from the 2011 – 2012 California Health Interview Survey**

A new study in *Appetite* finds that household food insecurity is associated with overweight/obesity among Mexican-American women, but not among Mexican-American men or non-Mexican-American adults. [More...](#)

### **The relationship between food insecurity and BMI for preschool children**

A study in the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* finds no association between overweight/obesity and household or child food insecurity among preschool-aged children. [More...](#)

## ***Coping Mechanisms and Barriers to Healthy Eating***

### **Food insecurity, overweight and obesity among low-income African-American families in Baltimore City: associations with food-related perceptions**

Perceptions about healthy food affordability and convenience may be barriers to their purchase and consumption for food-insecure families, according to the authors of a recent study in *Public Health Nutrition*. [More...](#)

### **Depression affects emotional eating and dietary intake and is related to food insecurity in a group of multi-ethnic, low-income women**

New findings in the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* indicate that low-income women with depression have higher scores for both food insecurity and emotional eating, and consume more energy and servings of discretionary calories than their non-depressed peers. [More...](#)

## ***Food Access Challenges and Solutions***

### **Diet and perceptions change with supermarket introduction in a food desert, but not because of supermarket use**

According to a study in *Health Affairs*, the introduction of a new supermarket in a food desert leads to some improvements in dietary intake and neighborhood satisfaction, but not because of regular supermarket use. [More...](#)

## ***In Case You Missed It!***

### **New Reports and Resources**

The reports and resources highlighted below were chosen because of their focus – in whole or in part – on obesity, hunger and the federal nutrition programs among poor and low-income populations.

### **SNAP, Food Security, and Health**

A new policy brief from the Institute for Research on Poverty finds that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) reduces the risk of food insecurity, impacts food consumption similarly to other income sources, and has no

clear positive or negative impact on obesity. [More...](#)

### **Meeting New Nutrition Standards: How Much Do School Lunches Really Have to Change?**

In this issue brief, Mathematica Policy Research used national data from USDA's fourth School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study (SNDA-IV) to examine how closely aligned school lunches were to some of the new school nutrition standards in the 2009 – 2010 school year (before the standards actually were implemented). Most schools met or came close to meeting the initial sodium target, and most lunches already included at least one fruit or vegetable serving. [More...](#)

### **Potential Contributors to Obesity**

A new infographic from The Obesity Society (TOS) depicts the wide range of "potential" contributors to the development and/or maintenance of obesity, including food insecurity, age-related changes, stress, weight gain-inducing drugs, and maternal employment. [More...](#)

### **Availability of Healthy Food Products at Check-out Nationwide, 2010 – 2012**

Based on data from 8,617 retail stores across the U.S., a new research brief from Bridging the Gap finds that healthier foods and beverages (e.g., fruits and vegetables, bottled water) are less available at store check-outs than unhealthy foods and beverages (e.g., candy). In addition, the availability of products varies by store type and community characteristics. [More...](#)

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