



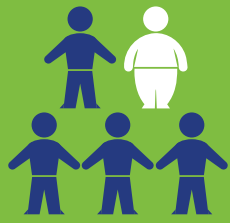
PennState
PRO Wellness



BETTER TOGETHER:

Providing Support to Early Childcare Centers to
Prevent Childhood Obesity

THE CHALLENGE



>20%

OF CHILDREN
BETWEEN TWO AND
FIVE ARE OVERWEIGHT

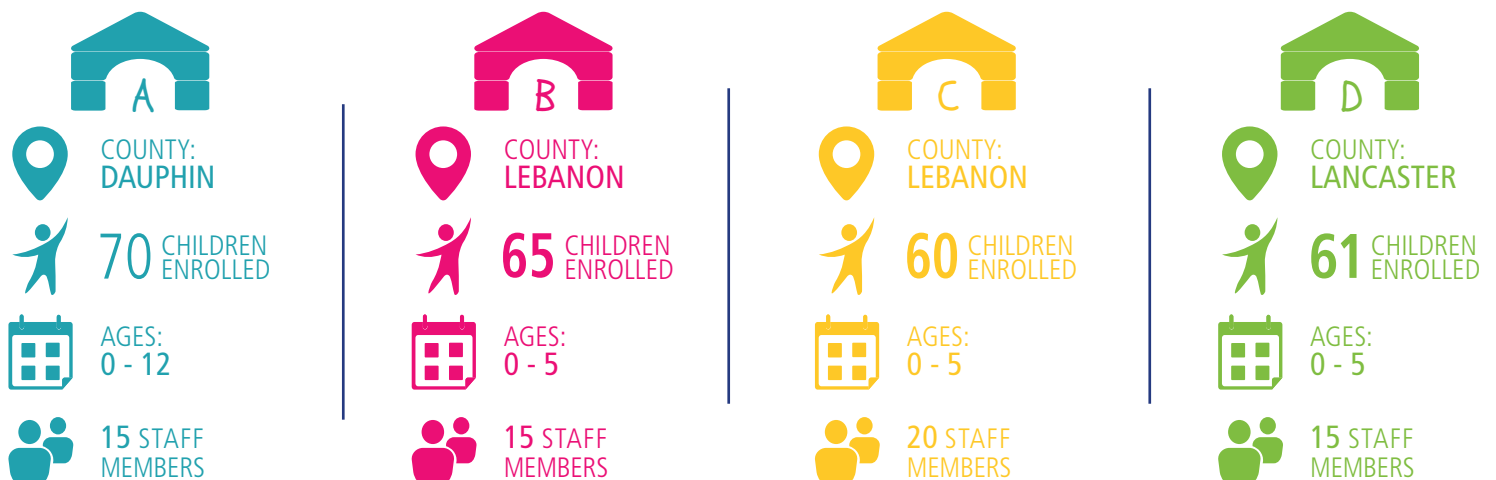
Nationally, the prevalence of obesity among infants under two years of age has increased by 60% over the past three decades.¹

More than 20% of children in the United States between the ages of two and five are overweight, and the prevalence of obesity among infants under two years of age has increased by 60% over the past three decades.¹ Currently, 75% of children ages three to five are in childcare full-time, spending an average of 29 hours per week in childcare centers.

Implementing effective wellness policies and establishing best practices in childcare settings can positively affect what children eat and drink and influence their screen time and physical activity.² However, centers have limited expertise in developing and implementing wellness policies. Additionally, lack of education and communication creates a barrier between centers and parents, ultimately impeding obesity prevention efforts. To address these barriers, we conducted a multilevel child obesity intervention that included center-level technical assistance for curriculum and policy revisions; enhanced family support and education; and broader community engagement.

SUMMARY

In an effort to prevent childhood obesity, Penn State PRO Wellness partnered with four early childcare education centers in Dauphin, Lebanon, and Lancaster counties. Centers were randomized into two groups, Enhanced and Basic, to assist us in measuring the level of engagement required to improve obesity prevention efforts. The primary endpoint of this study was to determine if in-person vs. webinar professional development training affected the reported changes of family engagement at the center level. Secondary study outcomes included environmental and community changes. Ultimately, this project aimed to improve the practices at these four centers to better the health of our youngest community members, in the environment where they spend their greatest number of waking hours.



| ENGAGEMENT | ENHANCED CENTERS | BASIC CENTER |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| In-Person Professional Development Workshop | X | |
| Professional Development Webinar | | X |
| Take Home Activities | X | X |
| Wellness Policy Review | X | X |
| Wellness Practice Review | X | X |
| Action Planning | X | X |



Professional Development Workshops/Webinars were geared toward staff members and focused on the importance of family engagement and family engagement activities. In-person workshops included a review of the center's wellness policies, and tailored guidance and resources for improving policy wording.

Take Home Activities included wellness resources, guides and tips for home wellness. Enhanced centers were provided physical copies during in-person professional development workshops while Basic centers received electronic copies. Activities ranged from ideas to reduce screen time to "tips for a choosy eater."



Technical Assistance was provided to all participating centers and included **Wellness Policy and Wellness Practice Reviews** and **Action Planning**. The Wellness Child Care Assessment Tool (WellCCAT) was used by PRO Wellness staff to complete an in-depth review of current center policies.³ Centers were asked to complete the Go NapSacc Assessment and Family Engagement Assessment to assist PRO Wellness staff in evaluating current nutrition, physical activity, screen time and family engagement practices. After the reviews, centers received tailored guidance of ways their centers could improve policies and practices to promote healthful habits in their centers. Additionally, centers were provided guidance to create an action plan to assist in the implementation of policy and practice changes.



THE RESULTS



POST-ASSESSMENT CENTER RESULTS

Through a post-assessment completed by each center, it was found that the centers who participated in the in-person development training found it to be beneficial, whereas the centers who participated via the webinar did not. Additionally, there was increased participation and engagement with the in-person training compared to the online webinar.

While all centers received policy and practice recommendations, only one center successfully made changes to their wellness policies and two centers created action plans to implement wellness changes. Reasons why most centers were unable to make changes included lack of time and/or authority.



IN-PERSON

- BENEFICIAL
- INCREASED PARTICIPATION
- INCREASED ENGAGEMENT



ONLINE

- NOT BENEFICIAL
- DECREASED PARTICIPATION
- DECREASED ENGAGEMENT

| ASSESSMENT | CENTER A: ENHANCED | CENTER B: ENHANCED | CENTER C: BASIC | CENTER D: BASIC |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| WellCCAT Assessment | X | X | X | X |
| Go NapSacc Assessment | X | X | X | X |
| Family Engagement Assessment | X | X | X | |
| Family Engagement Professional Development Training | X | X | X | |
| Action Planning | X | X | | |
| Policy Changes Implemented | X | | | |
| Final Evaluation | X | X | X | X |

NEXT STEPS



We know that in school districts, the provision of technical assistance may help to establish or provide recommendations for improvement of wellness policies, deliver effective obesity prevention programming, develop communication and outreach for families and forge partnerships for sustainability of programming. Based on similarities in structure, administration, and population; our hope was that the application of these same principles would benefit early childcare centers. Unfortunately, the majority of our participating centers were unable to make policy changes due to lack of time and lack of authority to make suggested changes. However, in the final evaluation when centers were asked to identify which resource they found most useful, the majority of centers cited assessment results (i.e., Wellness Policy/Practice Reviews). Further, two

centers were successful in using these results to guide action plan development.



While results are limited, they support the inclusion of early childcare centers in other Penn State PRO Wellness programs such as Healthy Champions. The Healthy Champions program currently enrolls over 600 Pennsylvania K-12 schools annually. The program develops and implements promotional campaigns focusing on health topics such as nutrition and physical activity, and provides free resources such as infographics to all enrolled schools. To enroll in the Healthy Champion Schools program, an online assessment is completed, and “stars” are awarded based on the school’s current wellness practices spanning five categories: nutrition and physical activity, psychological and social services, school health environment, school health and wellness policy and health promotion.

Healthy Champion schools are provided their star score status and tailored tips to assist schools in identifying opportunities to improve and expand their wellness practices for their students. Many schools enroll in the program annually and have been able to improve their wellness practices with the average star score increasing in all five categories from the 2019/2020 to 2020/2021 program year. **Expanding this successful program to include early childcare centers provides the opportunity to further enrich the lives of our youngest community members.**

REFERENCES

1. Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. Prevalence of obesity and trends in body mass index among US children and adolescents, 1999- 2010. JAMA 2012; 307 (5): 483-90.
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3. Fable J, Kenney EL, Henderson KE, Schwartz MB. The Wellness Child Care Assessment Tool: A measure to assess the quality of written nutrition and physical activity policies. J Am Diet Assoc. 2011 Dec; 111(12): 1852–1860.



PennState PRO Wellness

Champions for bringing
healthy choices to life.

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