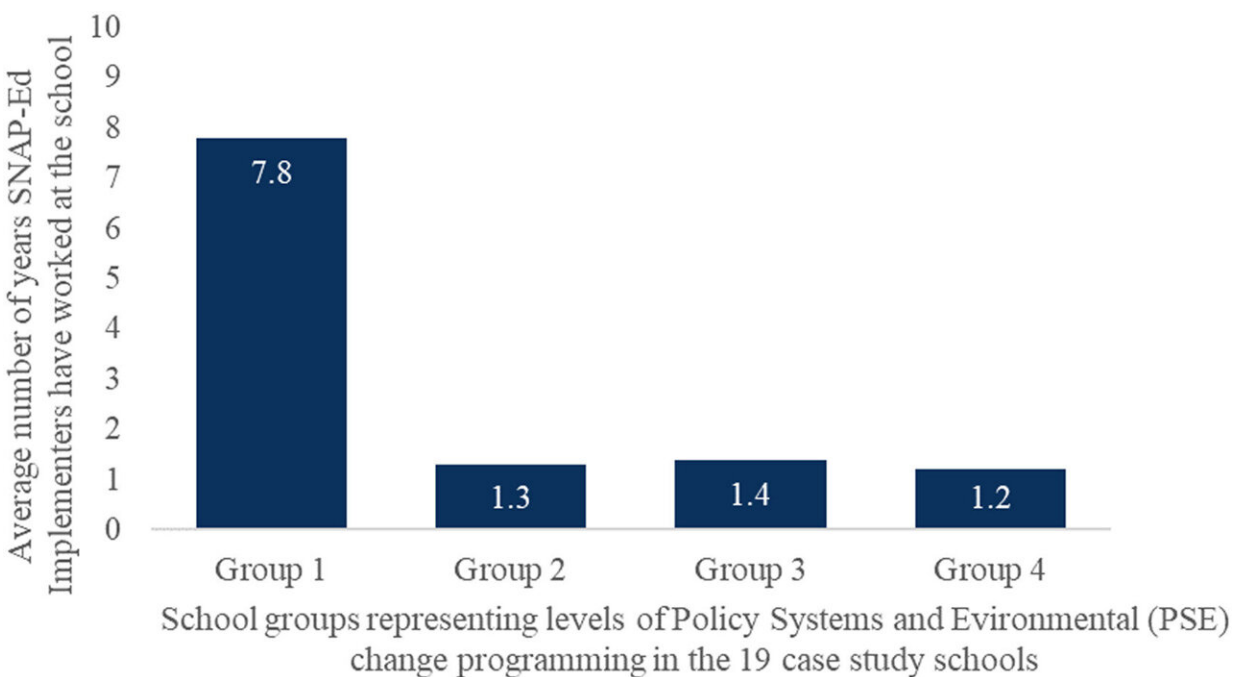


# In schools that could benefit most, building relationships is key to increasing capacity for nutrition education

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The average number of years SNAP-Education implementers worked with schools by school group representing the level of policy, systems, and environmental change programming in the 19 case study schools. Credit: *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2023.03.003

The US Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) provides nutrition programming to

individuals with low income, including students and their families, through a network of community partners who implement the programs.

Findings of a new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* suggest SNAP-Ed implementers could develop a school's readiness for programming by concentrating efforts on cultivating relationships, program-specific capacity, and motivation at schools.

Lead author Erin McCrossan, Ph.D., Office of Research and Evaluation, the School District of Philadelphia, says, "SNAP-Ed implementers make decisions about the types of programming to bring to a school based on their evaluation of a school's readiness to change. However, obstacles such as school staff shortages, lack of capacity, and organizational climate often prevent program implementation."

To gain a nuanced understanding of how SNAP-Ed community partners decide what programming a school is ready to implement and what organizational factors were needed before the initial implementation of programming, researchers collected data from the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), a city in which the [poverty rate](#) is higher than all major US cities and barriers to food access and food insecurity exist. They conducted interviews and observations at 19 SDP schools.

Examples of the types of activity observed at schools included level of student participation in recess/[physical education](#), number of students eating school meals, signage related to nutrition and [physical activity](#), and staff interactions with students. Philadelphia is served by seven SNAP-Ed agencies.

Study results indicated that SNAP-Ed implementers primarily focused on existing capacity—such as school climate, school staff motivation, and administrative support—when making programming decisions. Second, data revealed SNAP-Ed implementers could develop school

staff motivation and capacity to implement programming through relationships with school staff, resources, and support, responding to needs, engaging parents and families, and prioritizing health at the school.

This study demonstrates that building relationships between SNAP-Ed implementers and school staff was key to increasing [school staff](#) motivation and capacity to implement programming. Instead of viewing readiness as a characteristic that a school has or does not have, SNAP-Ed implementers could approach readiness as something they have an active role in cultivating.

Dr. McCrossan explains, "When SNAP-Ed implementers make decisions about programming based primarily on a school's existing capacity, they often avoid the schools most in need. Schools struggling with limited capacity are most often the highest-poverty schools. They are the very schools that would benefit most from changes that promote health because there is a strong link between students' physical health and their social-emotional health, attendance, and academic progress."

**More information:** Erin McCrossan et al, "A Growing Relationship": Cultivating Organizational Readiness to Influence Implementation of Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Change Programming in SNAP-Ed Funded School-Community Partnerships, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2023.03.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2023.03.003)

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