

# SNAP-Ed New Mexico

Policy, System and Environment Evaluation  
2018-2019 Academic Year



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

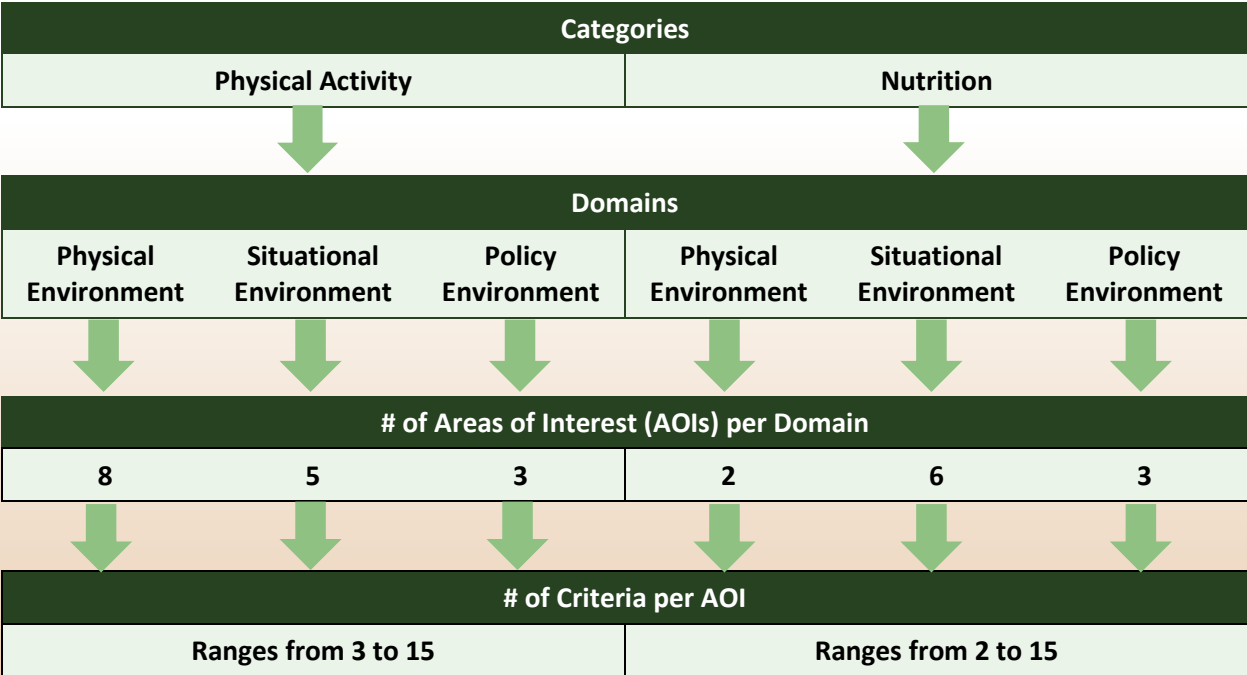
Healthy school environments are critical for facilitating healthy eating and active living among children. One of the goals of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education in New Mexico (SNAP-Ed New Mexico) is to expand opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. SNAP-Ed NM does this by facilitating implementation of policy, system and environmental (PSE) strategies that support healthy eating and active lifestyles.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess baseline nutrition and physical activity environments at NM elementary schools served by SNAP-Ed programs in the state: Cooking with Kids (CWK), Kids Cook! (KC!), Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC), and New Mexico State University (NMSU) Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition (ICAN).

## Methods

The UNM PRC collaborated with SNAP-Ed New Mexico programs to collect baseline data during the 2018-2019 academic year. A total of 19 observations were conducted at elementary, middle, and high schools using the School Physical Activity and Nutrition Environment Tool (SPAN-ET) (see Figure 1). Follow-up assessments will be conducted in 2021.

**FIGURE 1: SPAN-ET Model**



## Key Findings

- The average overall SPAN-ET score was 54%, indicating that overall, schools in New Mexico are following “good practice”. Individual school scores ranged from 40% to 67%.
- Schools had higher scores in the physical activity category (mean score: 57%) than in the nutrition category (mean score: 51%).
- In over half (16) of the areas of interest (AOIs) across all domains (27 total), 90-100% of schools had criteria that were met. These were more common in the physical activity category (16 AOIs) than in the nutrition category (11 AOIs).
- Schools were more likely to meet criteria related to the physical environment (10 total AOIs across both physical activity and nutrition categories) and situational environment (11 total) than for the policy environment (6 total).
- Principals were receptive to implementing suggested changes.
- Some schools began implementing changes during the 2018-2019 school year after receiving school reports.



## Conclusion

The SPAN-ET is a useful tool for identifying nutrition and physical activity supports and gaps in schools. Although physical activity PSE scores were generally higher than nutrition PSE scores, there was considerable room for improvement in both areas, especially in the policy domain. Participating sites and SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies are already using the results to implement changes.

## BACKGROUND

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The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education in New Mexico (SNAP-Ed New Mexico) is a program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service. SNAP-Ed New Mexico focuses on promoting healthy eating and active living, specifically to low-income populations across the state. In New Mexico, about one in five people live below the federal poverty level (19.7%), which is below the US average (13.4%).<sup>1</sup> Poverty in New Mexico is even greater among children (under age 18) at 26.2% compared with 18.4% nationally. Nearly half a million people in New Mexico (447,874) participated in the SNAP program in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

In New Mexico, fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity overall are comparable to or higher than the national average. Among adults 16.8% report consuming at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day,<sup>3</sup> and among NM teens, 17.8% consumed vegetables more than 3 times per day.<sup>4</sup> Regarding physical activity, 75.5% of adults in New Mexico reported leisure-time physical activity in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Among New Mexico teens, the majority (85.9%) reported being physically active in the last 7 days. Although comparable to the national average, these data leave substantial room for improvement.



One of the goals of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education in New Mexico (SNAP-Ed New Mexico) is to expand opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. SNAP-Ed NM does this by facilitating implementation of policy, system and environmental (PSE) strategies that support healthy eating and active lifestyles. Because healthy learning environments are critical influences of healthy behaviors among children, a major focus of the SNAP-Ed New Mexico PSE effort is on schools. These PSE efforts complement the nutrition education provided by SNAP-Ed statewide.



The University of New Mexico (UNM) Prevention Research Center (PRC) was contracted by the State of New Mexico Human Services Department (NM HSD) to conduct an evaluation of the state's SNAP-Ed programs and how they affect nutrition and physical activity supports at schools. Specifically, this evaluation addresses the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework outcome medium-term (MT) indicators MT5: Nutrition Supports and MT6: Physical Activity and Reduced Sedentary Behavior Supports. An evaluation of behavior change and social marketing is being conducted separately.

The state currently has five implementing agencies (IAs) working to improve policies and environments in schools. Programs conducted by these IAs include:

1. Cooking with Kids (CWK), a non-profit working in public elementary and K-8 schools in Santa Fe County and Rio Arriba County;
2. Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC), a NM Department of Health-funded program that works through community coalitions to implement programming in schools in 14 counties throughout the state;
3. Kids Cook! (KC!), a non-profit working in public elementary schools in Bernalillo County and Sandoval County;
4. Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), which conducts a modified version of CWK in elementary schools in Doña Ana County; and,
5. Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition (ICAN), a program of New Mexico State University (NMSU) which conducts programming in elementary, middle and high schools in 21 New Mexico counties.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess baseline nutrition and physical activity policies and environments at NM schools served by these IAs.



## METHODS

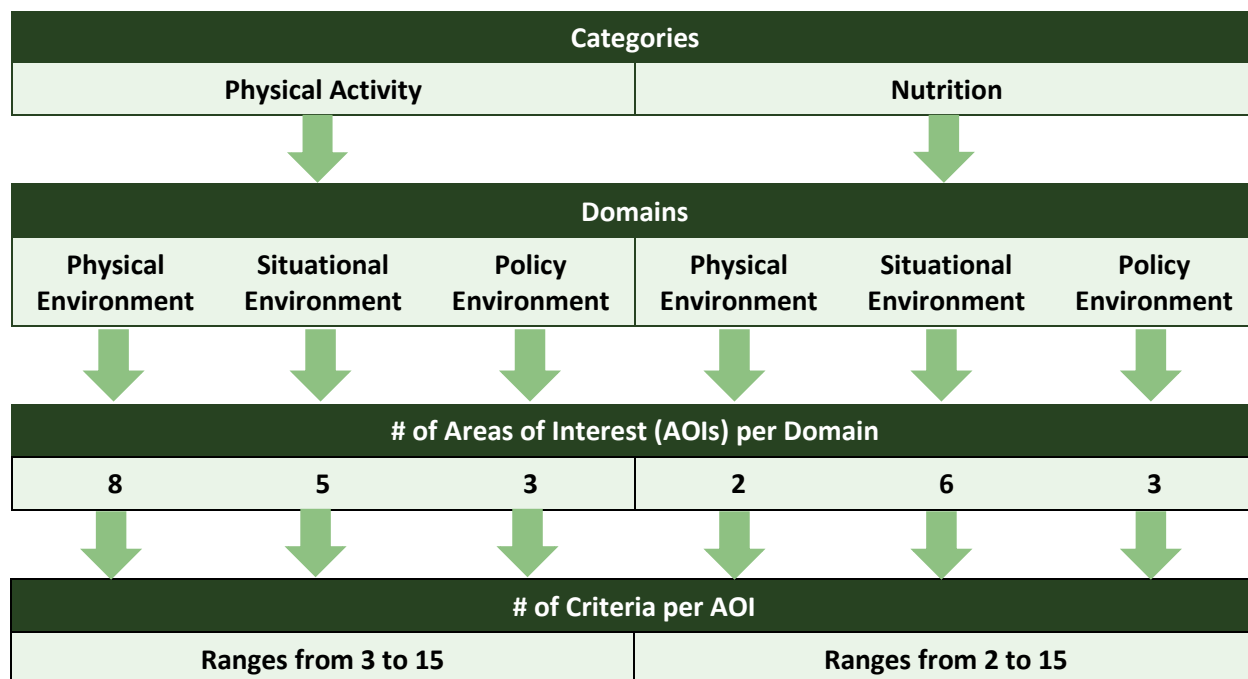
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The UNM PRC conducted a baseline assessment of the physical activity and nutrition environment of a purposive sample of schools throughout the state. The evaluation design consists of a baseline assessment conducted in 2018-2019 and a follow-up assessment to be completed in 2021. Baseline assessments were conducted at 16 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 2 high schools. Sites were selected by SNAP-Ed program coordinators from each IA. Sites were eligible for selection if they had not yet worked on PSE change efforts with the IA and their perceived readiness to engage in PSE changes to support healthy eating and physical activity was high.

### Survey Instruments

In 2018-2019, the School Physical Activity and Nutrition Environment Tool (SPAN-ET)<sup>5</sup> was used to assess New Mexico schools served by SNAP-Ed funded nutrition programs (see Figure 1). The survey includes 27 Areas of Interest (AOIs), with each AOI containing questions designed to assess the physical, situational, and policy environments related to two categories: physical activity and nutrition. In each AOI, a series of statements are evaluated based on a description and standardized criteria. Each element is then marked “met” or “not met”.

**FIGURE 1: SPAN-ET Model**



The UNM PRC Evaluation Team added items to two SPAN-ET AOIs that were not scored but that provided more detail on specific questions of interest to implementing agencies. These included determining if schools that had existing garden spaces or greenhouses also had resources that would ensure their sustainability (AOI 18: Nutrition – Garden Features); and documenting the display of any Eat Smart to Play Hard promotional materials, as well as photographing any kitchen classrooms or other designated nutrition education area or equipment (AOI 20: Nutrition – Food and Beverage Habits).

### Physical Environment

Eight AOIs assess the physical environment related to physical activity, and two AOIs assessed the physical environment as it pertained to nutrition. Physical activity AOIs related to the physical environment included questions about the gymnasium, outdoor play areas, shade structures, natural features, school gardens, and neighborhood features. Nutrition AOIs related to the physical environment included questions about the cafeteria and garden.

### Situational Environment

Five AOIs assessed the situational environment related to physical activity, and six AOIs assessed the situational environment as it pertained to nutrition. Physical activity AOIs included questions about promotional materials, sensory items such as flowering plants, active “brain breaks” during class, extracurricular activities, and garden spaces.



Nutrition AOIs included questions about school meals, marketing of foods, availability of water and other drinks, cafeteria atmosphere, and extracurricular activities.

## Policy Environment

Three AOIs assessed the policy environment related to physical activity, and three AOIs assessed the policy environment related to nutrition. Physical activity AOIs included questions about the school's physical activity wellness policy and committee, and other policies pertaining to physical education. Nutrition AOIs included questions about the school's nutrition wellness policy and committee, and health and nutrition education.

## Survey Implementation

Evaluators from the UNM PRC and representatives from each IA attended a two-day training in October 2018 on implementation of the SPAN-ET. The protocol for administration of the SPAN-ET specifies that two trained auditors independently complete the tool, and then reconcile their assessments to achieve consensus. Baseline assessments were completed between October and December of 2018 for all school sites. Assessments included document review, on-site observations, and interviews with school administrators and staff. State policies, school district policies, parent handbooks, menus, and other documents were reviewed by two auditors from the PRC prior to site visits. Site visits were arranged by auditors from each IA and included, at a minimum, an hour-long interview with the school principal, an interview with the PE teacher, and an interview with the cafeteria staff. Interviews with other school staff were conducted when possible and appropriate. Auditors noted observations of the grounds and observed lunch, recess, and when possible, PE class and after-school programs.



## Quantitative Data Analysis

Each criterion that was met was assigned a value of 1. The percentage of criteria that were met was calculated for each AOI for each school and averaged across schools for each domain (e.g. Physical Activity Physical Environment). The percentage of criteria that were met was then calculated for all physical activity domains and for all nutrition domains.

Mean scores for each AOI were calculated across schools and transformed into a percentage representing the number of schools with each AOI met.

Within schools, the percentage of AOIs that were met in physical activity and nutrition categories were calculated for each school, resulting in an overall score for each school that represented the percentage of AOIs that were met.



# RESULTS

## Response rate

Fourteen public elementary schools, one public charter elementary school, one Pueblo community school serving children in grades K-6, one middle school, and two high schools participated in the assessment (see Table 1). All selected sites agreed to participate in the evaluation.

**TABLE 1. Characteristics of Sites Included in the SNAP-Ed Evaluation, Fall 2018**

School	IA	County	2018-2019 Enrollment	Free and Reduced Lunch	Hispanic Students	American Indian Students
ES1	CWK	Rio Arriba	99	100%	93%	1%
ES2	CWK	Santa Fe	298	69%	78%	2%
ES3	CWK	Rio Arriba	284	100%	72%	25%
ES4	CWK	Santa Fe	559	67%	72%	2%
ES5	HKHC	Chaves	420	88%	85%	0%
ES6	HKHC	San Juan	387	99%	2%	98%
ES7	HKHC	Rio Arriba	79	100%	0%	100%
ES8	HKHC	Socorro	75	100%	64%	0%
ES9	LCPS	Doña Ana	552	100%	62%	1%
ES10	LCPS	Doña Ana	296	100%	67%	0%
ES11	LCPS	Doña Ana	616	100%	76%	0%
ES12	LCPS	Doña Ana	394	100%	73%	3%
ES13	Kids Cook!	Bernalillo	491	100%	59%	23%
ES14	Kids Cook!	Bernalillo	209	100%	73%	6%
ES15	Kids Cook!	Bernalillo	414	100%	91%	1%
ES16	NMSU ICAN	Torrance	307	100%	69%	1%
MS17	NMSU ICAN	Torrance	91	100%	76%	3%
HS18	NMSU ICAN	Torrance	183	100%	67%	2%
HS19	NMSU ICAN	Torrance	697	62%	48%	1%

CWK = Cooking With Kids

HKHC = Healthy Kids Healthy Communities

LCPS = Las Cruces Public Schools

NMSU ICAN = New Mexico State University Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition

## Percentage of Criteria Met among All Schools

### Physical Activity – Physical Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 1-8)



The average score across schools for this domain was 58.4%. Average scores ranged from 26.3% to 88.7% (see Table 2). The lowest average score in this area was for AOI 5, Garden Features. The description for AOI 5 is “Gardens and landscaping includes a variety of plantings, growing environments (e.g. orchards, in-ground beds, raised beds, and/or containers), and topical conditions. The highest average score in the Physical Activity – Physical Environment domain was for AOI 7, Enclosures and Safety Features. The description for AOI 7 is “School yard, grounds, and outdoor facilities are enclosed and safe for physical activity.”

### Physical Activity – Situational Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 9-13)

The average score across schools in the Physical Activity – Situational Environment domain was 54.0%. Average scores ranged from 24.6% to 75.4%. The lowest average score in this area was for AOI 13, Garden Space. This AOI is described as “Existing landscape/garden spaces are designated and used to promote physical activity/active lifestyle habits.” The highest average score for the physical activity situational environment was for AOI 11, Movement Opportunities. This AOI is described as “Indoor and outdoor fixed and portable features promote physical activity, active play and a variety of developmental movements.”

### Physical Activity – Policy Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 14-16)

The average score across schools for this domain was 36.3%. Average scores ranged from 2.1% to 80.1%. The lowest score was for AOI 15, Physical Activity and Wellness Committee. This AOI is described as “Active wellness council/committee exists that has specific physical activity-related objectives and/or an active physical activity council/subcommittee.” The highest average score for physical activity policy environment was for AOI 16, Structured Physical Education. This AOI is described as “School has a structured physical education/physical activity program that is coordinated and/or instructed by trained/credentialed physical educator(s).”

### Nutrition – Physical Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 17-18)

The average score across schools for the Nutrition – Physical Environment domain was 57.7%. The lowest average score in this domain was for AOI 18, Garden Features (23.7%). This AOI is described as “School has orchards, greenhouses, in-ground gardens, raised beds, and/or container gardens to grow edible produce.” The highest average score in the nutrition physical environment was for AOI 17, Cafeteria/Meal Service Area (91.6%). This AOI is described as “Cafeteria or alternative meal service area (i.e. classroom) offers a clean, pleasant and safe setting with adequate space for eating meals.”

## Nutrition – Situational Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 19-24)

The average score across schools for this domain was 58.8%. Average scores ranged from 26.3% to 74.3%. The lowest average score was for AOI 24, Before and After School and Summer Extracurricular Programs. This AOI is described as “School provides and/or partners with community resources to provide healthy foods and beverages, and nutrition education opportunities before and/or after school and in the summer.” The highest average score in the nutrition situational environment was tied for AOI 19, School Meals and AOI 22, Drinking Water. AOI 19 is described as “Program meets or exceeds food and nutrition standards and is managed efficiently and inclusively.” AOI 22 is described as “Clean, safe, palatable drinking water is available, accessible, and promoted to all students and staff throughout the school day.”

## Nutrition – Policy Environment (SPAN-ET AOIs 25-27)

The average score across schools for the Nutrition – Policy Environment domain was 25.9%. Average scores ranged from 2.1% to 44.7%. The lowest average score was for AOI 26, Nutrition and Wellness Committee. This AOI is described as “Health education program includes functional knowledge and skills-based nutrition lessons. Nutrition behaviors/habits are taught in all grades.” The highest average score in the nutrition policy environment was for AOI 27, Health and Nutrition Education. This AOI is described as “Health education program includes functional knowledge and skills-based nutrition lessons. Nutrition behaviors/habits are taught in all grades.”

**TABLE 2. Mean and Median Scores across Schools by SPAN-ET Area of Interest, Fall 2018**

Area of Interest:	Description:	Mean	Median
<b><i>Domain: Physical Activity – Physical Environment</i></b>			
1: Indoor Space	Gymnasium and/or dedicated multi-purpose space is available to accommodate physical education, physical activity/active play.	73.3%	80.0%
2: Outdoor Space/Fixed Features	Outdoor space is adequately sized for teaching and physical activity, has clearly defined boundaries, and comprises a variety of appropriate activity settings, fixed equipment, and materials.	71.3%	66.7%
3: Shelter and Shade Structures	Shade (natural and/or artificial structures) and/or shelters provide protection from sun and/or inclement weather.	33.3%	33.3%
4: Natural Features	Natural or green playground areas, elements, and/or features are available.	40.8%	50.0%
5: Garden Features	Gardens and landscaping includes a variety of plantings, growing environments (e.g. orchards, in-ground beds, raised beds, and/or containers), and topical conditions.	26.3%	33.3%
6: Surface and Surface Markings	Indoor and outdoor surfaces and surface markings support movement and activity variety and safety.	84.2%	100.0%
7: Enclosures and Safety Features	School yard, grounds and outdoor facilities are enclosed and safe for physical activity.	88.7%	85.7%

Area of Interest:	Description:	Mean	Median
<b>Domain: Physical Activity – Physical Environment</b>			
8: Neighborhood Features	Built environment features and neighborhood proximal to the school property provides safe physical activity/active transportation access for pedestrian and bicycle circulation from the neighborhood to the site entrances to the building.	49.5%	40.0%
<b>Domain: Physical Activity – Situational Environment</b>			
9: Portable Equipment	Portable equipment is available, easily accessible, and offers a wide variety/range of experiences.	57.9%	80.0%
10: Atmosphere/Ambiance	Indoor and outdoor spaces have a friendly, welcoming, inclusive, and inviting atmosphere that are culturally appropriate and stimulate the senses (i.e. touch/textures, smell, listening, looking, vestibular and proprioceptive input).	66.2%	71.4%
11: Movement Opportunities	Indoor and outdoor fixed and portable features promote physical activity, active play and a variety of developmental movements.	75.4%	83.3%
12: Before/After School and Summer Extracurricular Programs	School supports and/or partners with community resources to provide physical activity opportunities before and/or after school and in the summer. Extracurricular programs are available in various indoor and outdoor facilities.	45.9%	45.5%
13: Garden Space	Existing landscape/garden spaces are designated and used to promote physical activity/active lifestyle habits.	24.6%	0.0%
<b>Domain: Physical Activity – Policy Environment</b>			
14: Physical Activity and Wellness Policy	School has implemented the district wellness policy, drafted a written physical activity policy and communicates with school staff, families and the district regarding students’ physical activity progress on an annual basis; school’s physical activity goals are integrated into the school’s overall long-range wellness goals/plan.	26.8%	30.0%
15: Physical Activity and Wellness Committee	Active wellness council/committee exists that has specific physical activity-related objectives and/or an active physical activity council/subcommittee.	2.1%	0.0%
16: Structured Physical Education	School has a structured physical education/physical activity program that is coordinated and/or instructed by trained/credentialed physical educator(s).	80.1%	77.8%



Area of Interest:	Description:	Mean	Median
<b>Domain: Nutrition – Physical Environment</b>			
17: Cafeteria/Meal Service Area	Cafeteria or alternative meal service area (i.e. classroom) offers a clean, pleasant and safe setting with adequate space for eating meals.	91.6%	100.0%
18: Garden Features	School has orchards, greenhouses, in-ground gardens, raised beds, and/or container gardens to grow edible produce.	23.7%	0.0%
<b>Domain: Nutrition – Situational Environment</b>			
19: School Meals	Program meets or exceeds food and nutrition standards and is managed efficiently and inclusively.	74.3%	77.8%
20: Food and Beverage Habits	Promoting healthy food and beverage choices and habits is accepted and integrated into the school culture.	47.4%	42.9%
21: Food and Beverage Practices	All foods and beverages served or sold outside of the school meals program during the regular and extended school day meet or exceed federal and/or state standards for foods and beverages sold in schools (see appendix).	57.9%	40.0%
22: Drinking Water	Clean, safe, palatable drinking water is available, accessible, and promoted to all students and staff throughout the school day.	74.3%	75.0%
23: Cafeteria Atmosphere	Meals served to students are attractively presented in a pleasant (friendly, comfortable, and inviting) environment with sufficient time for eating.	72.6%	70.0%
24: Before/After School and Summer Extracurricular Programs	School provides and/or partners with community resources to provide healthy foods and beverages, and nutrition education opportunities before and/or after school and in the summer.	26.3%	28.6%
<b>Domain: Nutrition – Policy Environment</b>			
25: Nutrition and Wellness Policy	School has implemented the district wellness policy, drafted a written nutrition policy and communicates with school staff, families and the school district regarding its nutrition progress on an annual basis. The school's nutrition goals are integrated into the school's overall long-range wellness improvement goals/plan.	30.9%	26.7%
26: Nutrition and Wellness Committee	Active wellness council/committee exists and has specific nutrition-related objectives and/or an active nutrition council/subcommittee.	2.1%	0.0%
27: Health and Nutrition Education	Health education program includes functional knowledge and skills-based nutrition lessons. Nutrition behaviors/habits are taught in all grades.	44.7%	50.0%



## Within School Scores

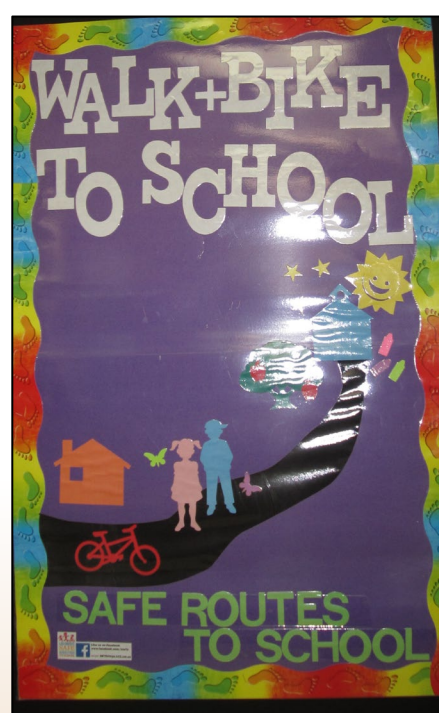
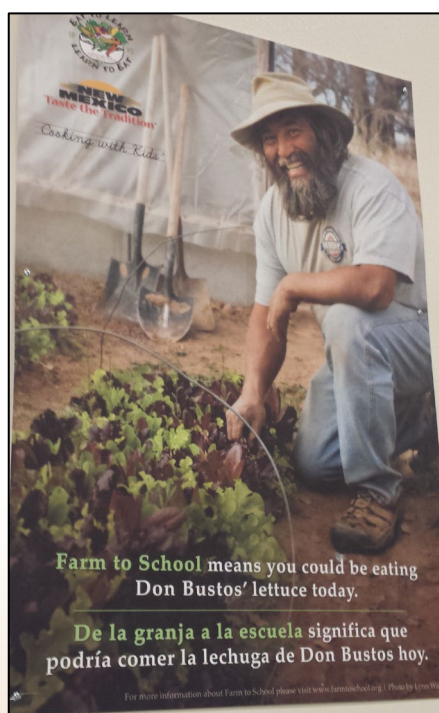
Each school received an overall score, representing the proportion of AOIs met across all domains, as well as separate scores across all physical activity AOIs and all nutrition AOIs. The mean overall school score was 54.0%. Overall scores ranged from 40.0% to 67.0% (see Table 3). The mean overall physical activity score among schools was 57.0%, with individual school scores ranging from 40.0% to 76%. The mean overall nutrition score was 51.0%, with individual school scores ranging from 41% to 63%.

**TABLE 3. Average Score by School Across Domains**

School	Overall Score	Overall Physical Activity	Overall Nutrition
ES1	50%	49%	51%
ES2	61%	65%	58%
ES3	50%	46%	54%
ES4	67%	76%	54%
ES5	48%	53%	42%
ES6	48%	48%	48%
ES7	56%	54%	59%
ES8	40%	40%	41%
ES9	55%	59%	51%
ES10	57%	59%	53%
ES11	52%	51%	53%
ES12	50%	48%	53%
ES13	58%	63%	53%
ES14	66%	67%	63%
ES15	53%	58%	47%
ES16	50%	54%	46%
MS17	58%	63%	52%
HS18	59%	64%	52%
HS19	56%	66%	42%

## Follow-up reporting

The SNAP-Ed New Mexico Evaluation Team prepared reports for each school. The brief reports focused on assets and opportunities for potential PSE work. The reports also highlighted recommendations tailored for each school as well as potential resources for schools and IAs to use in their PSE efforts. The SNAP-Ed Evaluation Team provided the reports to the IAs and offered to present the findings in-person to participating school principals. Most schools (16) welcomed the offer to present in-person. School staff were also receptive to the findings and suggestions. Some specific items identified through the assessment that schools wanted to address included starting a school garden, increasing the use of hand sanitizing stations, providing an in-service training for teachers on incorporating physical activity breaks throughout the day, placing materials promoting healthy eating and physical activity in the school, making nutritional content of school meals available on the school website, and implementing a structured PE curriculum.



## Next Steps

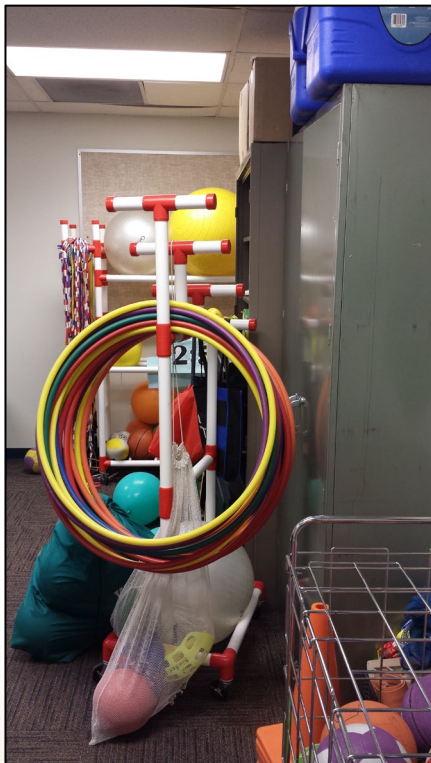
Individual schools will work internally as well as with the IAs and other community partners to select and implement PSE strategies identified during the assessments. These efforts will be reported by the IAs to NM HSD and to the SNAP-Ed New Mexico Evaluation Team. The Evaluation Team will review progress toward implementing PSE changes and will conduct another assessment using the SPAN-ET tool with participating schools in 2021. Data from the post-assessment and the quarterly reports will be used to evaluate efforts to improve nutrition and physical activity supports in schools over time.



## CONCLUSION

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SNAP-Ed New Mexico is expanding efforts to use PSE change strategies to support healthy eating and active living. It is important to be able to measure and evaluate PSE efforts. SPAN-ET scores for New Mexico schools varied widely across schools, domains, and areas of interest. The assessments identified opportunities for increasing nutrition and physical activity supports. The SPAN-ET tool provides useful data for assessing school physical activity and nutrition environments and identifying potential improvement strategies. Additionally, collecting data with the SPAN-ET tool across multiple time points will allow for the evaluation of the impact of PSE efforts in the state over time.





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