Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the parent and teacher perceptions of the Food for Kids Backpack program in Long Beach, CA.

The Backpack program provides meals for children over the weekend by sending home food in children’s backpacks. There is limited research on nutritional impacts of backpack programs; further research is needed to assess impacts and inform future work.

Hypotheses

H01: There will be no significant difference in perceived impacts of the backpack program between teachers and parents on the children’s academic outcomes.

H02: There will be no significant difference in perceived impacts of the backpack program between teachers and parents on the recipients’ health outcomes.

H03: There will be no significant difference in perceived impacts of the backpack program between teachers and parents on overall program perceptions.

Methods

To begin, two surveys were created, one for parents and one for teachers, that assessed parent and teacher perceptions of the Backpack program’s impact on child’s energy level, diet, nutrition knowledge, concentration level, and academic performance. Surveys also assessed factors related to participation, such as perceived difficulty of participating and whether respondents would recommend it to someone else.

Surveys were distributed through the Backpacks and the parents and teachers were given two weeks to complete and return them.

A Cronbach’s alpha test was run to measure the internal reliability of the survey constructs. Descriptive data were used to characterize perceptions of the program.

Results

In total, 98 student and 6 teacher surveys were collected. For this survey, 15 schools in Long Beach, CA were surveyed. Of the 15, 7 schools responded.

Of the schools that responded, all were predominantly Hispanic with every school having a student population of at least 59% Hispanic and ranging from 48-50% female and 50-51% male (Stevenson, 2019; Oropeza, n.d.; Willard, 2019; Burbank, 2019; Grant, n.d; Webster, 2019). The schools also contained 85-93% low-income students and 83-88.2% of students who receive free or discounted lunch (Stevenson, 2019; Herrera, n.d., Oropeza, n.d.; Willard, 2019; Burbank, 2019; Grant, n.d; Webster, 2019).

Insufficient response by teachers precluded evaluation of the three hypotheses. Descriptive findings are reported below.

Discussion

The results from this study are consistent with a previous study performed at the Food Bank of Delaware (Cotugna & Forbes, 2007). The Food Bank of Delaware program found that the majority of the parents felt participation in the program was not difficult and all would recommend the program to someone else (Cotugna and Forbes, 2007). This is consistent with results of the current survey in which 94% and 96% of parents felt participation in the program was easy and would recommend the program to someone else.

Another study conducted by Hanson and Connor concluded that the backpacks were often used to feed the children lunch on the weekends (Hanson & Connor, 2017). The results from this survey are consistent with these in that 41.9% of parents reported the food in the backpacks lasted through the weekend.

The results found in the current study are consistent with existing literature. One study found that 50% of respondents perceived that their child’s academic performance improved and 38% found that their concentration improved (Ecker and Sifers, 2013). The results from this study were remarkably higher in that 83% of parents believed their child’s concentration to improve and 82% felt that their child’s academic performance had improved.

Conclusion

The study found that the majority of parents and teachers have a positive perception of the Food Finders Backpack program and would recommend it to someone else.

The Backpack program has a perceived effect of reducing food insecurity and improved diet quality.

Written feedback from program participants indicated areas for improvement, including provision of fresh fruits and vegetables, milk, and bread and reducing the amount of beans and other canned items given.

Further research needs to be performed to accurately capture the effects of the Backpack program on students and teachers.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my chair, Dr. Virginia Gray, and my committee members, Dr. Gail Frank and Ms. Saundra Lorenz for being for helping me to accomplish this project. Thank you to Chris Wong for allowing me to survey the Food Finders program.

For more information

Please contact lauren.cook1@csulb.edu. More information on this and related projects can be obtained at www.csulb.edu.

References