

Effects of childhood obesity on learning, and the role of the school food environment

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Heart Foundation in Education



- 21 Nutrition Advisors
- Support Schools and Early Learning Services
- Fuelled4Life

www.learnbyheart.org.nz



Objectives

Summary of evidence prepared for the Heart Foundation by Adjunct Associate-Professor Penni Cushman, University of Canterbury on:

- The association between children's educational outcomes and obesity
- The association between educational outcomes and the school food environment
- The modifications needed to the school environment to address any negative associations between obesity and educational outcomes.



Currently....

The Annual Update of Key Results 2015/16: New Zealand Health Survey²

1 in 9 children (2-14yrs) were obese

15% Maori and 30% Pacific children obese

Children in most deprived areas 5x more likely to be obese

34% of children don't eat breakfast at home



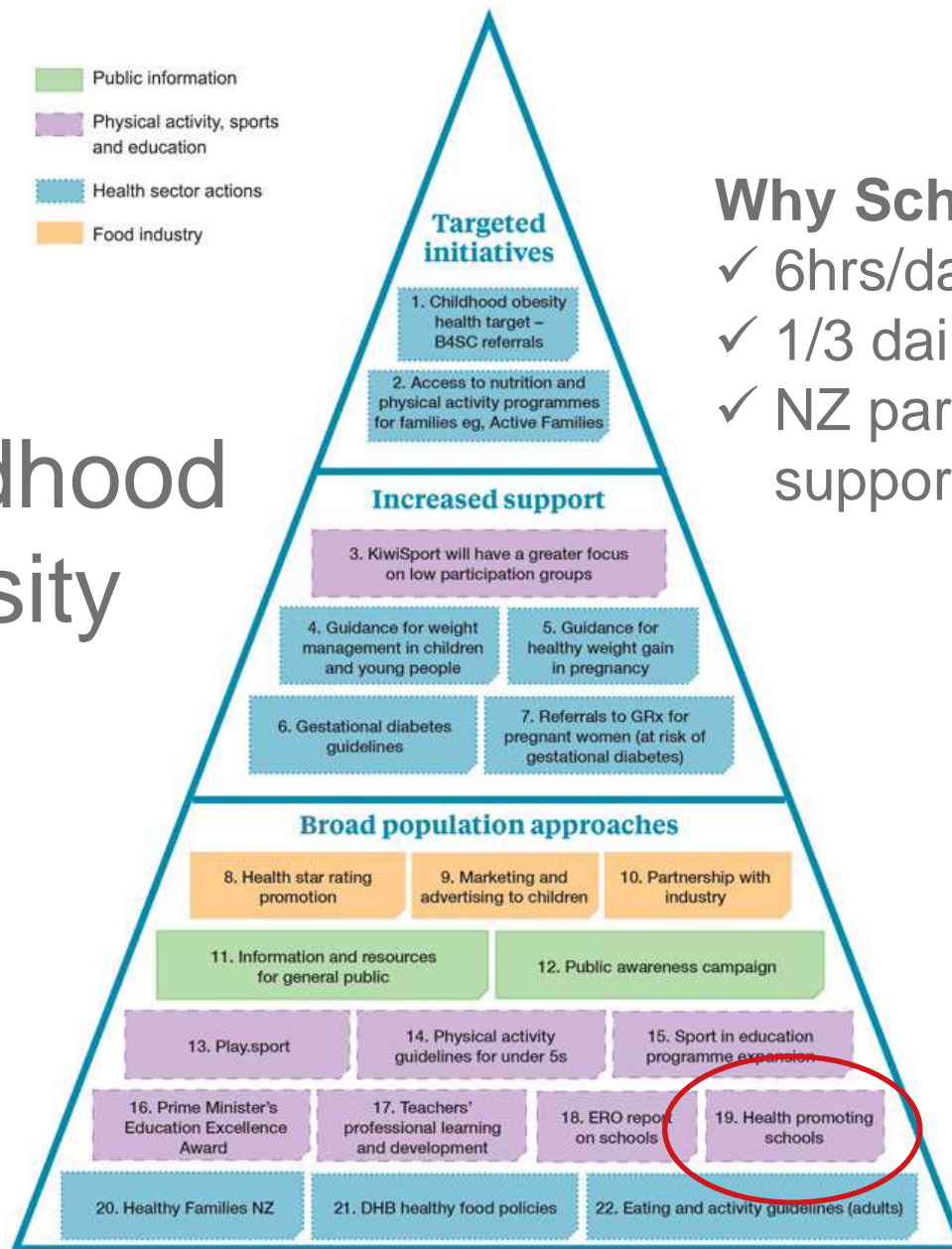
The need to improve school food environment

Obesity can affect a child's health, educational attainment and quality of life⁵

- Rising obesity rates
- Poverty-related food issues
- Nutrition↔learning



NZ Childhood Obesity Plan



Why Schools?

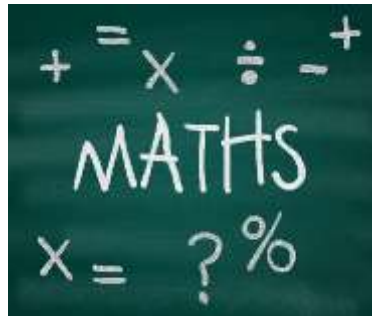
- ✓ 6hrs/day
- ✓ 1/3 daily nutrient intake
- ✓ NZ parents overwhelmingly support healthier school food⁶



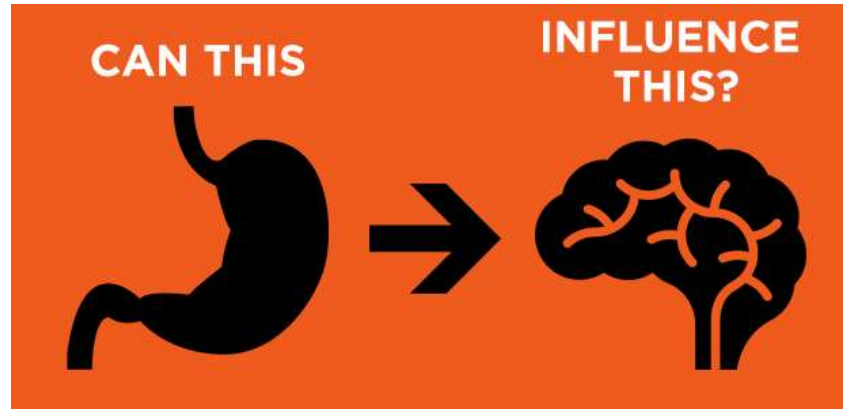
Obesity and learning outcomes

Healthier children are more likely to succeed academically⁸

Obesity-related issues negatively affect students' learning outcomes



Obesity and learning outcomes



- Social and emotional factors have been viewed as underlying relationships between obesity and learning outcomes
- Healthy diet is linked with better emotional health²⁸

School food and learning outcomes

- Healthy food consumption = better educational outcomes¹
- Habitual breakfast eaters = better educational outcomes and classroom behaviour^{68,69}



School food and learning outcomes



- Whole school food environment needs to improve, not just canteen⁸⁵
- Student achievement rises when whole school environment promotes healthy eating⁸⁵

Modifying school food environment

- Food policy development must include all school stakeholders¹³⁵
- Classroom nutrition education and food provision need to be mutually supportive¹⁰⁰



School Gardens



- 55% of NZ schools have school gardens = ↓ BMI and ↓ fast-food consumption¹¹⁰
- ↑ self-esteem and confidence for students who struggle academically¹¹¹



Food outlets



Fast food outlets near schools inhibit school canteens to offer students healthy choices¹³⁵

68% of urban and 14% of rural schools had a convenience store within 800m¹³⁸



Parental involvement

↑ likelihood that healthy initiatives will be transferred into the home¹¹⁸

When dietary changes extend to family, parents are more likely to role-model healthy food habits¹²⁴



In summary...

The school food environment can be modified to assist in addressing obesity, and to encourage and promote healthy eating for students and their families.

Thank you to www.fuelled4life.org.nz for funding the review.

Fact Sheet available for download from:

www.fuelled4life.org.nz/news/obesity-educational-outcomes-and-the-school-food-environment

For further information or a copy of the full paper, please contact:

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