

THE ORGANWISE GUYS (OWG) COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL PROGRAM (CSP)/ THE HEALTHIER OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLCHILDREN (HOPS) STUDY AND PROGRAM

The OrganWise Guys (OWG) Comprehensive School Program (CSP)/The Healthier Options for Public Schoolchildren (HOPS) Study was an innovative pilot study that took place in 53 elementary schools (42 intervention schools; 11 control schools) in Florida, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, and West Virginia, including approximately 24,000 ethnically and racially diverse children. The study, which began in a set of six schools in central Florida in the fall of 2004, tested the feasibility and efficacy of an holistic nutrition and healthy lifestyle education program implemented in the elementary school setting *that is modeled every day in each school cafeteria*. Study interventions were thematically integrated and included healthy dietary offerings (school meals), nutrition and lifestyle educational curricula, increased levels of physical activity, and other school-based projects, such as school gardens. The goal was to improve the health and academic performance of elementary-aged children in a manner that is replicable in other public school settings. All 53 schools participated in twice-yearly data collection activities (fall/baseline and spring/follow-up).

The nutrition and healthy lifestyle educational arm of the study included: 1) HOPS Foods of the Month (FoM) programming; 2) *The OrganWise Guys*[®] (OWG); and 3) WISERCISE!. HOPS FoM highlighted nutrient-dense, healthy foods and food groups (such as whole grains, good fats, cruciferous vegetables) and included monthly dissemination of FoM Parent Newsletters, Student Activity Packets, Cafeteria Cards and Posters, and other healthy handouts for parents, teachers, and staff. A training module was conducted with Foodservice staff about nutrient-rich foods and how to menu these foods as part of school-provided meals. Accordingly, school cafeterias menued FoM items as part of the regularly-served meals at least five times per month, thus modeling nutrition education taking place in the classrooms. The OWG was the cornerstone of the highly successful Healthy Options for People through Extension (HOPE) Tri-State (LA, AR, MS) Initiative funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. OWG is a set of evaluated teaching tools that bring the body to life and facilitate the communication of important health issues in a manner understood by children. This innovative, stand-alone curricula is sustainable long-term since it requires little implementation assistance and is linked to core curricula standards (math, language arts, science, etc.). WISERCISE! facilitates daily 10-minute physical activity sessions in school classrooms, linked to core subject areas (math, language arts, etc.) and always includes nutrition lessons. Implementation of FoM, OWG, and WISERCISE!, through partnerships with child nutrition experts such as University Cooperative Extension, was shown to be very replicable (1-6).

Study results showed interventions improved weight, blood pressure, waist circumference, and academic scores of elementary-aged children in a statistically significant manner. Specifically, data showed statistically significant differences between treatment groups with respect to improvements in body mass index (BMI) percentiles, weight z-scores, and waist circumference (7-11), as well as systolic and diastolic blood pressure measures (8), in intervention children as compared to controls. Additionally, intervention children achieved statistically significantly higher average Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) math scores as compared to children in control schools. Intervention children achieved higher FCAT reading scores as well, and although the difference did not reach statistical significance, the data are trending in this direction (7). These health and academic improvements were sustained over a three-year period (12), and were especially strong among low-income, minority children (7-9). Nutritional analyses of six weeks of intervention and control breakfast and lunch menus showed nutritional benefits of the program. In 2005-6, dietary programming, which models nutrition education activities taking place in classrooms, resulted in approximately 28% less total fat, 21% less saturated fat, and about two times more dietary fiber in intervention versus control menus (13,14). Nutrition analyses of 2006-7 menus yielded similar results: the intervention menu resulted in approximately 29% less total fat, 21% less saturated fat, and about one and a half times more dietary fiber than control school menus (15,16).

The OWG CSP is expanding in schools and early childhood centers in ~25 states currently, in collaboration with School Districts, University Extension, State Departments of Health/Education/Agriculture, and others, with support from public (United States Department of Agriculture, State Departments of Education, etc.) and private (W.K. Kellogg Foundation for example) funders. [References on back]

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