Evaluating School-Related Policies to Encourage Active Communities

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METHODS

Study Purpose

1.) Describe the prevalence of school-related provisions in policies and plans addressing school siting, pedestrian safety, accessibility, and joint use of school facilities for recreational purposes.
2.) Describe the sociodemographic characteristics associated with such policy/plan provisions.

Policy Collection/Coding

Policies and plans were collected in 2010 from local governments surrounding 154 secondary schools nationwide. Items collected included:
- Local ordinances (including zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations)
- Comprehensive/Master/General Plans
- Joint/Shared Use Agreements

Plans/policies were coded by researchers using a coding instrument to evaluate the extent to which they specifically address walking/biking and recreation around schools. Weak policies/provisions were coded as 1 or ENC (should, encourage, may, try, attempt). Strong policies/provisions were coded as 2 or REQ (must, shall, require).

Instrument

Descriptive statistics were computed, clustered to account for the sample design, and weighted proportional to the population of the local jurisdictions to account for the relative weight of the policies/plans from multiple jurisdictions inside the same school catchment. Multivariate logistic regression models examined the factors influencing whether the policy/plan addressed the topic of interest. To ease interpretation, the adjusted prevalence of each policy/plan provision was generated after controlling for all covariates.

RESULTS

School-Related Policy and Plan Provisions

Figure 1: Prevalence of School-related Policies in Zoning and Other Related Policies

Figure 2: Prevalence of School-related Policies in Plans

Figure 3: Prevalence of Any (Req. or Enc.) School-related Provisions in Policies and Plans

RESULTS

Factors Influencing Policy and Plan Provisions

Figure 4: Multivariate Policy Regressions: Community Characteristics Significantly Associated with School-related Policies and/or Plans

Table 1: Multivariate Logistic Regression Models for School-related Policies and/or Plans

Table 2: Multivariate Logistic Regression Models for Plans as a Predictor of Zoning

CONCLUSION

- Local governments are interested in identifying ways to improve the environment around schools as evidenced by the plan data.
- Data from this study indicate that interest does not always lead to actual policy enactment but policy language is significantly more likely if there is related plan language.
- Most school-related provisions are not prevalent in policies/plans.
- Predominantly white communities are less likely to adopt selected active living-oriented policies and plans.
- Disparities exist in lower income communities and the MW and Northeast regions of the country.

ABOUT BRIDGING THE GAP

Bridging the Gap is a nationally recognized research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation dedicated to improving the understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. Bridging the Gap is a joint project of the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Institute for Health Research and Policy and the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research. For more information, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org