Impact: NYSDOH worked with local grantees to measure the impact of program activities. During the funded period, 125 school districts adopted nutrition policies and 341 school buildings implemented nutrition strategies. Altogether, these accomplishments improved the nutrition environment for 449,992 students — 17% of all students in NYS.

During the first phase of the program, NYSDOH used WellSAT 1.0 to measure the strength of nutrition policies in targeted school districts. Results demonstrate significant improvements were achieved (see Figure 1). The percent of district policies restricting sales of competitive foods increased from 8% to 27%, the percent restricting sales of competitive beverages increased from 22% to 39%, the percent restricting celebrations with food and beverages increased from 14% to 24%, and the percent restricting fundraisers with food and beverages increased from 9% to 20%. When WellSAT 2.0 was released, NYSDOH used it to determine that 47% of district policies restrict advertising and marketing for food and beverages, although only 15% of the policies use strong language for this strategy.

During the second phase of the program, NYSDOH adapted the WellSAT-i and used it to measure implementation of nutrition strategies in targeted school buildings. Results demonstrate most buildings are implementing key nutrition strategies (see Figure 2). For example, 74% of school buildings restrict sales of competitive foods, 80% restrict beverage sales, and 78% restrict fundraisers with food and beverages. Using School Health Profile data, NYSDOH determined that 75% of school buildings restrict advertising and promotion for food and beverages.

NYSDOH uses multiple surveillance systems to monitor student health indicators including Student Weight Status Category Reporting System, Fitnessgram, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), and Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS). During the funded period, the prevalence of obesity declined slightly in NYS. Among students in targeted elementary schools, the prevalence decreased from 20.4% to 19.7% (see Figure 3). But unhealthy nutrition behaviors are still common: 43.8% of students consume fruit less than once a day (YRBS, 2015), 22.3% drink sugary beverages at least once a day (YTS, 2016), and 34.7% eat vegetables less than once a day (YRBS upstate, 2017). Now that district wellness policies have been strengthened, it is time for public health programs to focus on increasing building-level implementation.

WellSAT is the Wellness School Assessment Tool. It measures the quality of school district wellness policies. WellSAT-i measures policy implementation.