



**Testimony to National Commission on Hunger
El Paso, Texas Hearing**

**Representing The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
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Speaker-elect of the House of Delegates**

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Good afternoon!

As the Speaker-Elect of the House of Delegates for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the Academy) and as a Texas food and nutrition leader, I appreciate the National Commission on Hunger's invitation to present testimony today. The Academy would like to commend this commission on the important work you are doing for our nation.

I am a registered dietitian nutritionist in San Antonio and have owned my own private practice for the past 20 years, counseling clients on a variety of health issues such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and malnutrition. I have been an appointee to the SA Mayor's fitness council for 6 years and have volunteered for several community nutrition programs, including the SA Por Vida Healthy restaurant initiative and health vending initiative.

Today I am representing my professional organization, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The Academy is the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, representing more than 75,000 members, including Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN), dietetic technicians registered (NDTR), and other food and health professionals. Its mission is to optimize the nation's health through food and nutrition.

RDNs are passionate and dedicated food and nutrition professionals who translate the science of nutrition into practical every day food choices and nutrition behaviors, which consumers of all ages can implement into their daily lives. Many of our members work in community nutrition and public health settings, where they empower food insecure consumers with the knowledge and skills to make safe, healthy and cost effective food choices.

The Academy's EatRight.Org Website is a trusted public and professional resource on food, health and fitness for all age groups. We provide nutrition education materials and toolkits, many free of charge, for the public and community educators. These resources could be helpful to your efforts.

RDNs are leaders in addressing food and nutrition insecurity.

As a profession, we are especially concerned about food insecurity from the standpoint of the associated higher rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes and overall health care costs. Our House of Delegates conducted a mega-issue dialogue on Food and Nutrition Insecurity in May of 2013. As a result of that meeting, an Academy Food and Nutrition Insecurity Task Force was established. The action plan now receives oversight by our Public Health Community Nutrition Committee, which reports regularly to our membership and includes a focus on development of novel ideas and new resources. These resources will be at our member's fingertips when working on food insecurity and public health issues. One idea that came out of that action plan was a toolkit entitled "Hunger in Our Community." This toolkit includes two presentations—one for parents and one for teens. Each presentation is 20 minutes long and includes PowerPoint slides, optional activities and handouts. A new toolkit, "Smart Choice for a Healthy Planet" is in development now.

The Academy believes in the value of nutrition education for consumers.

We would like to dispel the perception that nutrition education is boring, un-engaging and limited to passing out brochures. Here are a few examples of our collaborative work that resulted in position statements related to nutrition education.

- The Academy is working closely with the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) director, who established Centers of Excellence, to identify best practices for nutrition education. This will help with the validation of effective nutrition education.
- In public policy, the Academy was recently asked to provide our language for nutrition education, so it will be included in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act.
- Selected references that provide more information on the impact of nutrition education's value.
 - Position of the American Dietetic Association, School Nutrition Association, and Society for Nutrition Education: Comprehensive School Nutrition Services, J Am Diet Assoc. 2010;110:1738-1749. Accessed July 2,2015
 - State of Nutrition Education & Promotion for Children and Adolescent, http://www.sne.org/documents/SNENENPreport630_Final_000.pdf Accessed July 2,2015
 - National nutrition education curriculum standards could have a variety of benefits, Olson, Steve and Moats, Sheila Food and Nutrition Board (2013) Nutrition Education in the K-12 Curriculum: The Role of National Standards - Workshop Summary. The National Academies Press, Washington, D. C.. ISBN 978-0-309-28719-7 Accessed July 2,2015

We believe in the value of consumer education on growing food, preparing meals at home and limiting food waste, as important ways to control food cost. Academy members have the expertise to educate consumers on these issues, as shown by their leadership in WIC, SNAP-Ed, Farm to School, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program to name a few.

Academy Recommendations

Today, I would like to present recommendations on ways that the members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics can support this commission's efforts to find ways to more effectively use existing program and funds, as well as develop new initiatives that will combat domestic hunger and very low food security.

- First, the Academy has developed some valuable, evidence-based tools and resources, many of which may be used free of charge, to help develop and implement effective interventions and education.
- Secondly, our Academy members can be valuable resources not only because we, as nutrition professionals, have influence on policies, business decisions, budgets and programming, but because we are uniquely qualified to create and deliver consumer friendly, cost-effective, science-based nutrition education services.

Academy Resources:

1. Evidence Analysis Library

Our Academy's Evidence Analysis Library (EAL) is a synthesis of the most relevant and current nutritional research, to help guide best practices for our members. A grade is assigned to each conclusion statement to indicate the overall strength or weakness of evidence. We use this evidence as the backbone of everything we do, from client counseling to our research. Work on our Health Disparities project was published between 2009 and 2011. The topic of Food Security was added to this project in 2011.

Six questions were asked about food insecurity. Here are a few examples of the methods found to have strong evidence conclusions for the following question: "What are the effective intervention strategies that have been identified to assist food insecure individuals in meeting their nutritional needs?"

- 1) Including fruits and vegetables in the WIC package
- 2) Fruit and vegetable vouchers to be used at a traveling store
- 3) Encouraging farmer's market nutrition programs
- 4) Advocacy for efforts to improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the home, particularly for adolescents
- 5) Nutrition education interventions focused on increasing home meal preparation, including timesaving meal preparation, shopping and cooking techniques.

In the Health disparities project we also have evidence analysis on effective cross-cultural communications, food security and effectiveness of nutrition intervention methods. These conclusions can be accessed through our EAL website: (www.andean.org) and are free to Academy members. Non Academy members can purchase an annual subscription for \$250.

2. GENIE-Guide for Effective Nutrition Interventions and Education

It can be very difficult to compare programs, when they are all uniquely designed. In 2014, the Academy and Academy Foundation, with funding support from the ConAgra Foods Foundation, designed a tool called GENIE—Guide for Effective Nutrition Interventions and Education, to help with this. We believe that this tool could be very helpful to your evaluation process.

GENIE is a free, online, validated tool, consisting of a checklist of 35 quality criteria in nine categories, to help nutrition education practitioners (RDNs, Food Bank Directors, Grant Administrators) design high quality and effective PROGRAMS. It also contains helpful video tutorials and suggested resources.

GENIE has 2 purposes:

- 1) it evaluates the quality of existing or proposed nutrition education programs so that funders have a set of criteria to determine which programs are most likely to succeed and
- 2) it serves as a resource for individuals planning nutrition education programs to understand best practices and self-evaluate their programs

Case studies highlighting how each of 5 food banks strengthened their nutrition education programs through GENIE, can be found in the article, “GENIE: Out of the Bottle and Into the Food Bank”, which is currently being published. Combined results from 5 food banks showed that they improved in every GENIE category-- from a pre-GENIE overall score of 65%, to a post-GENIE overall score of 89% for all nine categories combined.

3. DANEH-- Designing and Assessing Nutrition Education Handouts

DANEH is the first validated tool to provide objective criteria for reviewing the quality of NUTRITION education HANDOUTS. It is a FREE checklist tool, that was developed for and housed on the Healthy Food Bank Hub website.

The Healthy Food Bank Hub is a project developed in partnership with Feeding America, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and National Dairy Council®. The Hub provides a platform to connect food banks with agencies and nutrition and health professionals to share strategies, tools and innovative practices that help connect efforts around hunger-relief, nutrition, and health.

DANEH consists of 22 yes or no questions, which evaluate quality in 5 categories: content, behavior, focus, cultural sensitivity, written word, organization and readability. At the end of the questionnaire you are provided with a score and a resource list. Because of the level of research that went into DANEH, results are shown across all levels of education.

So as a comparison, DANEH focuses on one element of nutrition education (handouts) while GENIE deals with entire programs.

4. RD Parent Empowerment Program (RDPEP)

Establishing healthy family behaviors early in life is important in promoting healthy habits and preventing childhood overweight and its associated negative physical, mental, and social effects that persist into adulthood.

The RD Parent Empowerment Program was developed by the Academy Foundation in collaboration with Healthy Children, Healthy Futures. It demonstrated that a series of 4, 1.5-2 hour community-based workshops taught by registered dietitians (RD) or dietetic interns, showed promise in empowering parents in low-income families to make positive family environment and behavior changes.

A feasibility pilot of the RD Parent Empowerment Program operated during 2012. Twelve schools in three cities participated. Schools were selected from urban public school districts (in Chicago, IL; San Francisco, CA; and Washington, DC) with which the investigators had previous connections or had implemented other programs. Within each district, four schools were selected based on economic need (Title I school) and the interest and commitment of school administrators.

At the conclusion of the 2012 pilot, the program developers identified the most active school/RD team in each city and invited the team to participate in a revised workshop series during 2013. The remaining RD leaders in each city were invited to identify and partner with an interested community-based after school or early childhood education program, and apply to participate in the 2013 program. One RD in each city applied and was accepted. In addition, due to an interest in piloting the program in a rural site, one early childhood education site was recruited through professional networks. Across cities, participating sites served primarily African-American, Hispanic, or Chinese lower-income children and families. Head Start community sites (n.3) served children whose families fell below the adjusted poverty guidelines or met other Head Start admission criteria. In addition to demographic factors, sites' interest in and commitment to supporting the intervention was also a priority in site selection. Each site received a \$250 stipend.

Lessons were based on physical activity, screen time, eating breakfast, eating vegetables and fruits, wise portion sizes, drinking unsweetened beverages, and regular bedtime. Each lesson had a food-tasting component and there was a companion cookbook. Materials were available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

The Family Nutrition and Physical Activity (FNPA) survey was the quantitative tool used for evaluation of the program. It was a self-reporting tool of 20 items that evaluated the frequency of behaviors employed in the home. Reports found that the majority of parents implemented meaningful changes in their home. The most frequent changes mentioned were those involving diet changes. Health outcomes have not been measured and more studies need to be conducted to ensure that changes being made were sustained. Participants received a \$10 gift card incentive when they completed the survey.

One strong argument for the use of the FNPA evaluation was its versatility for use as an intervention tool as well as a source of quantitative data for program evaluation. This approach to program evaluation is useful in situations where evaluation funds are limited and concerns for participant burden are paramount.

Academy position papers:

These food insecurity resources, found on the Academy website: www.eatright.org may be valuable resources to this committee.

- Management of Sustainable, Resilient and Healthy Food and Water Systems
- Food and Water Safety
- Food Insecurity in the United States
- Nutrition Security in Developing Nations: Sustainable Food, Water and Health

New Programs in Development at the Academy:

1. Healthy Cities

Feeding America partnered with The Academy Foundation to test a suite of services at food banks in three cities. These services include implementing healthy places to play, health screenings and mobile food pantries. The results of the evaluation are not yet complete, but we feel that the concept of food pantries as linkages to other services is important.

2. Dietetic internship concentration in Food Insecurity/Food Banking

Most Food Banks have RDNs on staff as educators and food and culinary experts. The Academy has established a new concentration for dietetic internships in food insecurity/food banking, which means that we are at the forefront of ensuring that highly skilled professionals are available to work with food insecure populations.

Conclusion:

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics appreciates the opportunity to comment on Food and Nutrition Insecurity and serve as a resource to the National Commission on Hunger, as you develop your recommendations to present to Congress and the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture. We hope that when you make your recommendations, you will include Registered Dietitian Nutritionists as cost-effective, evidence-based nutrition education providers and you will also include the many free evidence-based tools and resources the Academy has to offer such as GENIE, DANEH and the RD Parent Empowerment Program.

Thank you!

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