

# Comparison of Minnesota School Wellness Policies: Where They Differ and How Well They Support a Healthy School Environment

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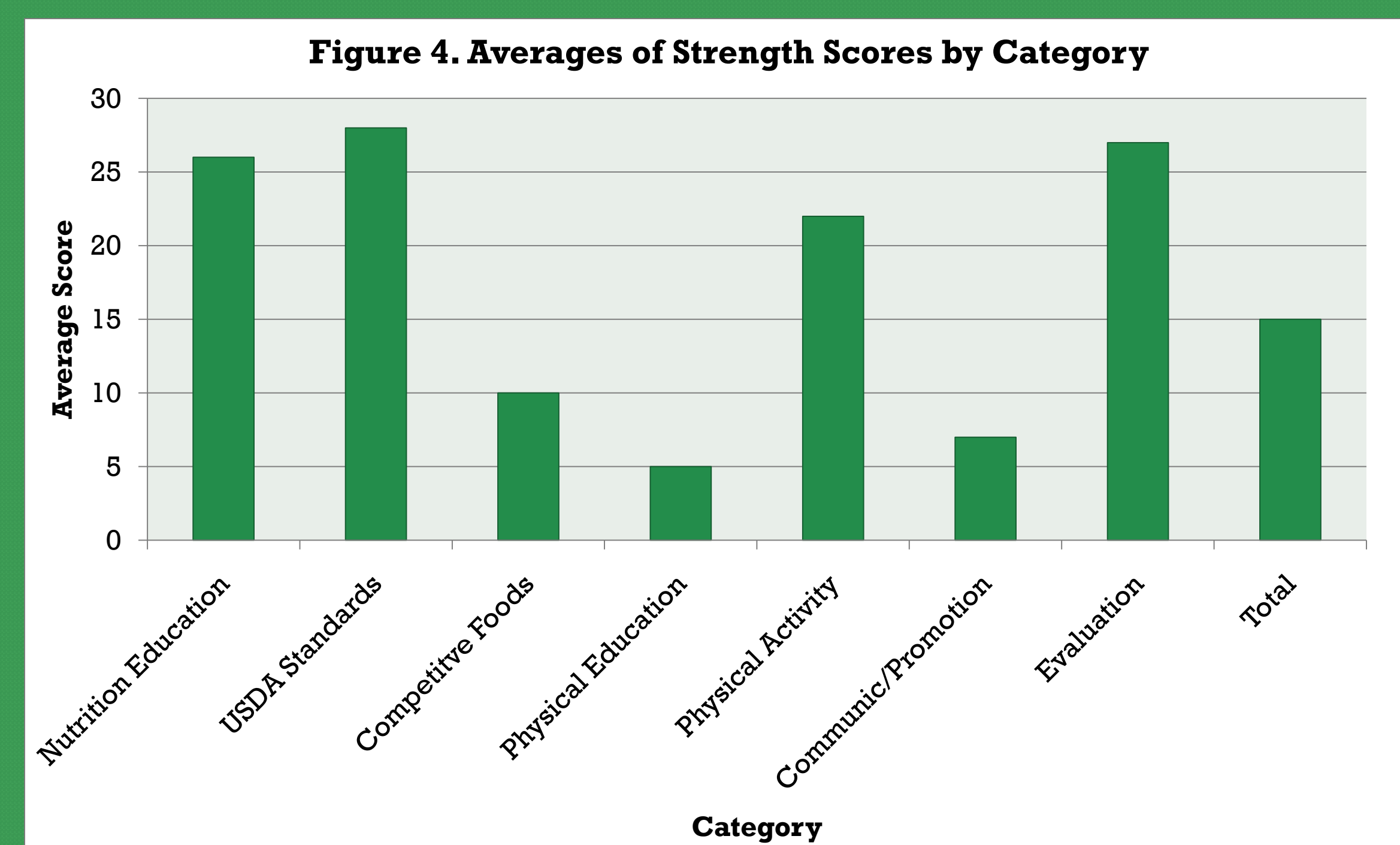
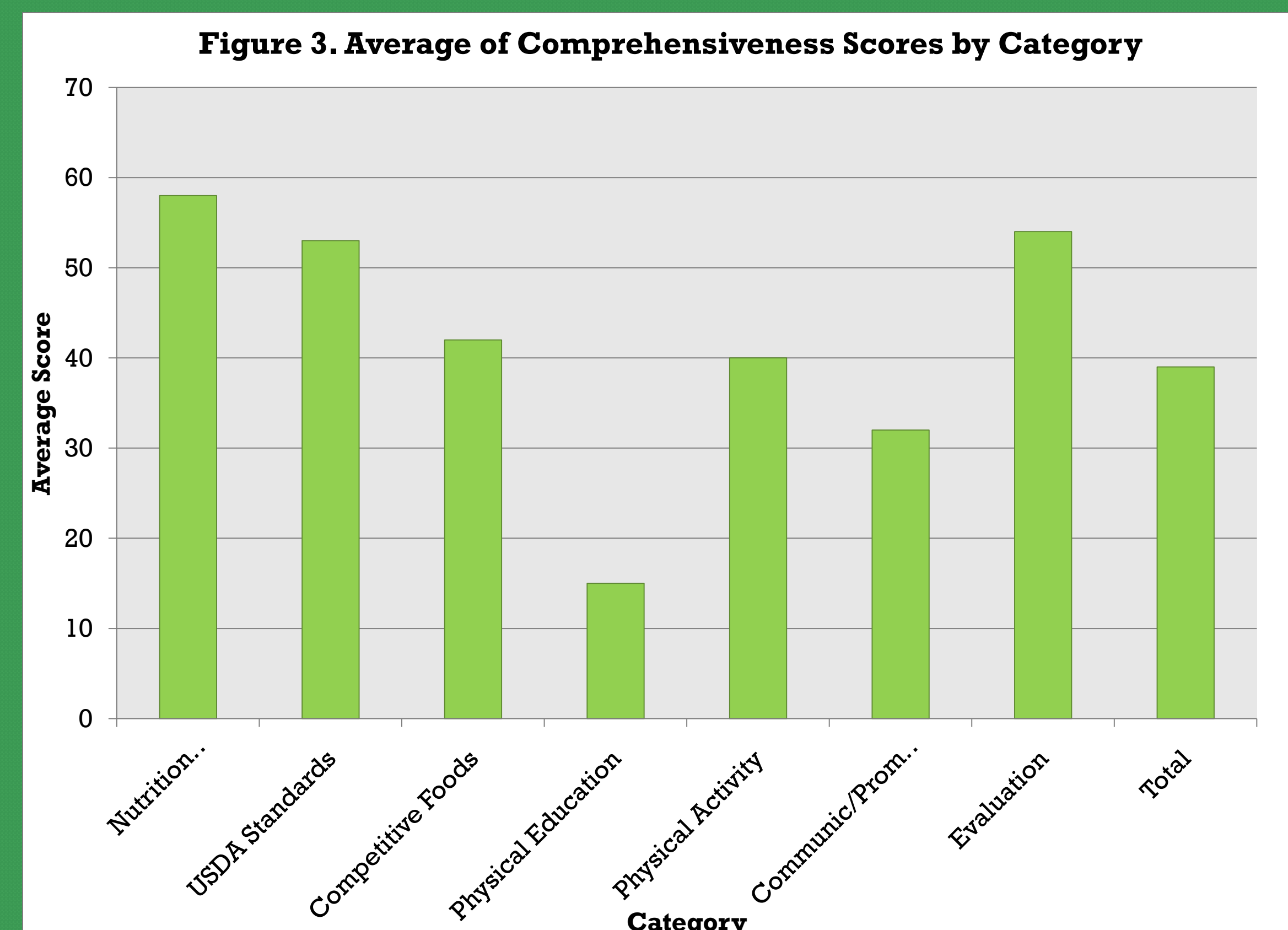
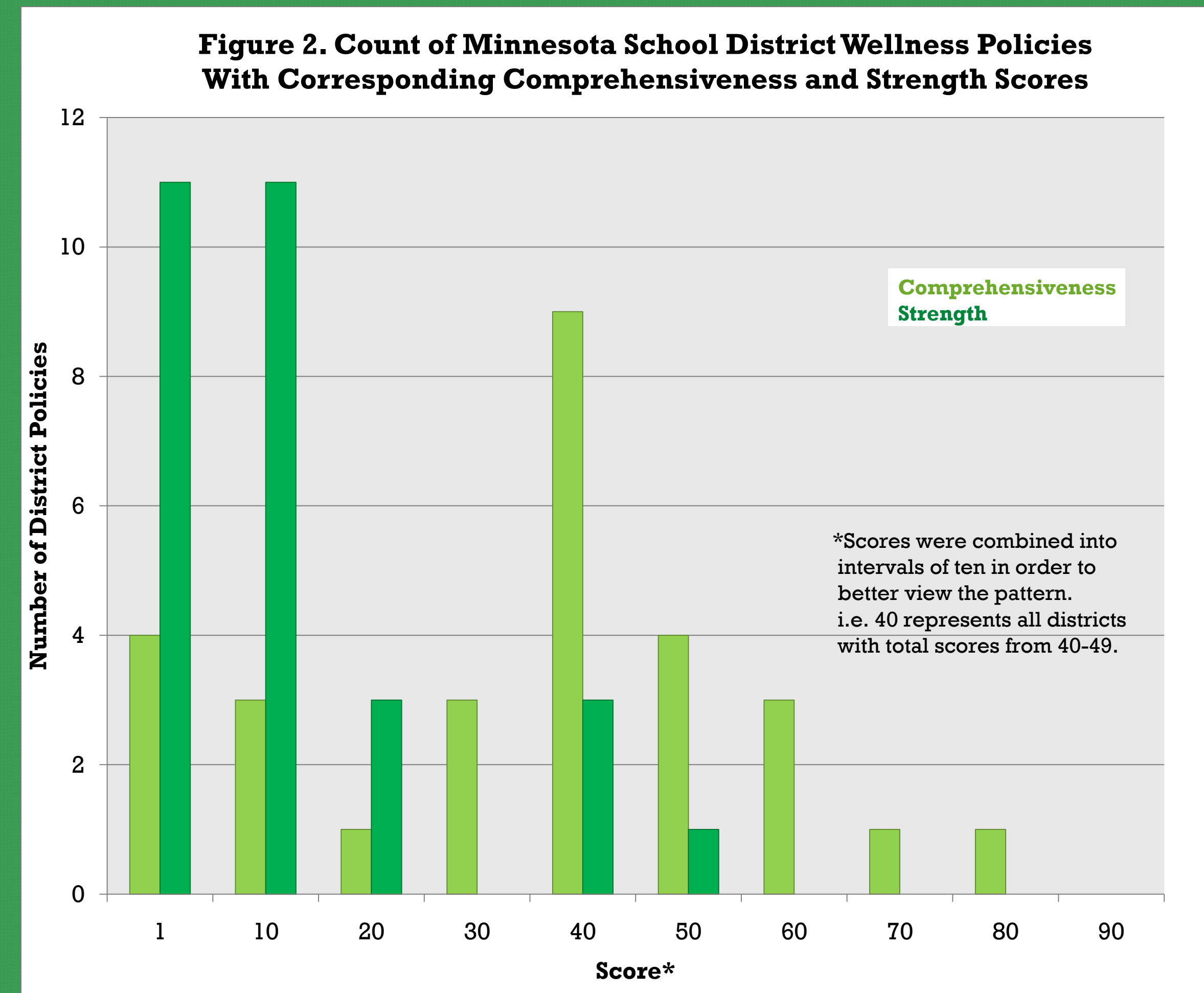
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## Introduction

- Healthy school environments have been found to be positively correlated with healthy body mass indexes in students attending those schools<sup>1</sup>
- In an attempt to create healthier school environments, a public law was put into effect requiring all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to create a School Wellness Policy by the start of the 2006 school year<sup>2</sup>
- Dr. Leslie Lytle at the University of Minnesota and her colleagues have postulated that obesity of students is associated in some way with the quality of the School Wellness Policies as assessed by their comprehensiveness and strength. This study aimed to determine the health of School Wellness Policies and how those policies differed across Minnesota

## Methods

- Part of the Etiology of Childhood Obesity (ECHO) study, a population-based study examining potential predictors of unhealthy weight gain in youth
- Schools were invited to participate based on cohort members of the ECHO sample attending the schools, 98% agreed to participate and provided data for the study
- The schools provided district level policies; 39 school districts are represented in the sample
- District policies were coded independently by two individuals and then reviewed by a third for consensus agreement using the coding tool shown in Figure 1
- A total of 96 topics were coded using the following categories: Nutrition Education, Standards for USDA Child Nutrition Programs and School Meals, Nutrition Standards for Competitive and Other Foods and Beverages, Physical Education, Physical Activity, Communication and Promotion, Evaluation, and Total.
- Comprehensiveness (how many topics were addressed in the policy) and Strength (how well topics were addressed) were calculated using a previously developed and validated coding analysis tool
- Scores for both Comprehensiveness and Strength can range from 0-100, with 100 being the perfect score
- Data analysis was completed to evaluate the health of the policies overall and their health in certain categories. This was done by creating graphs of policy scores and averaging scores



## Results

- While scores for total comprehensiveness ranged from 1 to 81 out of 100, the majority of policies scored less than 50% for comprehensiveness (mean score = 39%)
- Policies were overall very weak, with the score for strength ranging from 1 to 50 out of 100 (mean strength score = 15%)
- The pattern of better comprehensiveness scores than strength scores was also true for individual categories
- Average scores of each category show "Nutrition Education" was the most comprehensive while "Physical Education" was the least comprehensive.
- The mean strength scores were very low overall. By category, the category for "Meeting USDA Standards" was the strongest, while "Physical Education" was the weakest.

## Conclusions

- Results of the ECHO study will hopefully give school districts in Minnesota a better idea of where they are lacking in both the comprehensiveness and strength of their School Wellness Policies.
- Further studies could aim to answer more definitively how the differences in School Wellness Plans influence the health of students at those schools or how well schools adhere to their policies
- Creators of School Wellness Policies overall made more comprehensive policies than strong policies. In the future, work should concentrate on creating a workbook for school administrators to aid them in creating comprehensive and strong policies.

**Figure 1. Example of a School Wellness Policy Topic and Coding Guidance<sup>3</sup>**

This figure shows an example of one of the 96 topics of School Wellness Policies that a group of researchers determined necessary<sup>3</sup>. It gives the topic and examples of how to include the topic in the policy and its matching score. A topic was comprehensive if it scored a 1 or 2 and strong if it scored a 2.

### NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR COMPETITIVE FOODS (EXAMPLE)

Addresses limiting regular (sugar-sweetened) soda	Score	Description
	0	Not mentioned
	1	<b>Either of the following:</b> Regular soda is limited but not prohibited Prohibition of regular soda is suggested, time- or location-specific, or subject to principal's discretion
	2	<b>Either of the following:</b> Regular soda is prohibited Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) are prohibited at all times on school grounds. Prohibiting FMNV qualifies for a "2" because the definition of FMNV includes soda. <b>Examples:</b> "Soda will not be available on school grounds." "Only water, 100% juice, and milk will be available at school."

## References:

1. Kubik MY, Lytle LA, Hannan PJ, Perry CL, Story M. The association of the school food environment with dietary behaviors of young adolescents. *American Journal of Health Behavior.* 2003; 93(7): 1168-1173.
2. Schwartz M.B., Lund A.E., Greves M, McDonnell E, Probart C, Samuelson A, Lytle L. 2008. A Comprehensive Coding System to Measure the Quality of School Wellness Policies. Available from author.
3. Schwartz MB, Lund A, Greves M, McDonnell E, Probart C, Samuelson A, Lytle LA. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Healthy Eating Research Program, Working Group 1. 2008. School Wellness Policy Coding Tool. Version 3.

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