Development and Formative Evaluation of the M.E.N.T.O.R. Program for Preventing Childhood Obesity in School Age Children

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INTRODUCTION

Nutrition and physical activity (NPA) habits begin in early childhood, persist into adulthood, and predict the development of obesity later in life. School-based interventions hold promise in curbing child overweight/obesity and potential for broad reach, as nearly all US children ages 5-18 are enrolled in school. Teachers have the opportunity to play a key role in the development of NPA behaviors. However in-service classroom teachers (SCT) often need to prioritize state-mandated competencies and standardized testing content. Pre-service teachers (PCTs) however are uniquely positioned to influence child health behaviors and outcomes within the student teaching curriculum, yet these opportunities are underutilized in obesity prevention programs.

The aim of the Mentoring, Education, and Nutrition Knowledge for Teachers to Reduce Obesity Risk in Children (MENTOR) program is to determine if a PCT focused intervention can enhance classroom nutrition and physical activity content, teacher modeling of positive health behaviors and enrich the health content in the classroom environment.

DESCRIPTION

Program development followed community-based participatory approaches and included 3 phases:
1) community needs assessment with in-service (SCTs) and pre-service teachers (PCTs)
2) initial program development
3) community stakeholders interviews (n=5)

Formative evaluation also included post-workshop questionnaires and feedback with participating SCTs and PCTs (n=14)

EVALUATION

Based on feedback from the needs assessment, a multi-modality program was developed:
1. one in-person training session,
2. a project website to host program curriculum
3. a social media extension

Overall PCTs and SCTs felt the program was needed, liked the level of detail in the materials and were positive about the format. Areas for improvement included the amount of materials needed for teachers to implement some of the lessons in the curriculum along with the amount of time required to implement lessons.

Formative evaluation results indicated that teachers felt the workshop was well organized (100% strongly agreed), that the materials were informative and easy to understand (92.9% strongly agreed) and that they gained useable skills that they will be able to apply to teaching (100%).

The program is currently being evaluated using a pre-post intervention design model. Future directions include the extension of program curriculum and the development of a parent component.

This project was supported by Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grant no. 2015-690011-23241 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.