The HEROs Study Year 3: Engaging Families To Promote Healthy Eating And Activity Behaviors In Early Childhood

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**PHASE 1: FORMATIVE RESEARCH**

Objective 1: To understand behaviors, attitudes, facilitators and barriers to improving the home food and activity environments, through formative research with parents, Head Start staff and community stakeholders (n=346).

**PARENT BELIEFS AND VALUES RELATED TO ACTIVITY**
- Parents believe that children naturally learn fundamental movement skills (FMS, or something right on the first try)
- Parents value motor skills and overall activity as an opportunity for children to manage (helps get their energy out)
- Parents believe that children need to be taught to eat vegetables, to feel included, to improve self-confidence, to be healthy and for behavior or attitudes at mealtime (including picky eating, consuming little food or refusal to sit at the table)

**FAMILY MEALTIMES**

**PARENT BELIEFS AND VALUES RELATED TO MEALTIME**
- Parents place a high value on the evening family meal, and have idealistic goals for family mealtime: everyone eating together at the table, pleasant conversation, children finishing their plates
- Mealtime challenges include time/scheduling constraints and managing children’s behavior or attitudes at mealtime (including picky eating, consuming little food or refusal to sit at the table)

“It’s nice to have that interaction as a family, just the bonding.”

“[an ideal dinner time would be] we all sit down and just have fun, nobody is fighting, nobody is complaining about what’s on their plate.”

“It’s just too rushed. You make the meal. You take five minutes to eat it and then you’re off to the next thing. It doesn’t feel like enough time.”

**CONTEXT OF FAMILY DINNER TIME**
- Most mothers eat at the same time and eat similar foods as their child
- A majority of families serve large portions to their child; possibly setting up disappointment if the expectation is that children finish their plate

**QUALITY OF FOODS SERVED AT DINNER TIME**
- A majority of dinner meals include protein (usually beef, pork or chicken)
- Many families serve vegetables, but potatoes are the most commonly served
- Few families serve milk, fruit or whole grains at the evening meal
- Few families serve vegetables, but potatoes are the most commonly served

**PHASE 2 & 3: INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT & TESTING**

Objective 2: To develop a family intervention which will help children and parents learn together and build skills related to healthy eating and activity.

- Extensive formative work and mixed method approach to synthesizing findings yielded insight into key intervention targets, including positive parent-child interaction around eating and activity
- The intervention will consist of 3 components:
  - Parent workshops (n=8)
  - Child workshop (n=8, simultaneous to parent workshops)
  - Technology component (mobile apps, website, social media)

- In Year 4, an implementation study will be conducted using the PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) framework to test proposed intervention components with a subset of families
- The PDSA framework will allow for an understanding of which of the proposed intervention components resonates with and drives participants towards behavior change

Objective 3: To implement and evaluate the family-based program, by conducting an intervention in Colorado with low-income families at increased risk for childhood obesity.

- In Year 5, a pilot randomized control trial will be conducted to test the efficacy of the intervention

**RESEARCH & EDUCATION OUTPUTS**

**EDUCATION**
- 16 students and trainees, including 4 undergraduate, 10 graduate and 2 post-doctoral fellows from 3 universities and 7 disciplines:

**PUBLICATIONS**
- 6 papers, 14 abstracts
- Methods
  - Family Mealtimes
- Mobile Device Use