Adolescent Obesity Prevention Project Yields Policy, System, and Environmental Changes in Middle Schools

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Abstract

Objective: To develop a community-based program targeting overweight and obesity prevention among adolescents in limited resource, minority communities.

Description: Summary of analyzed data for a tri-state, quasi-experimental project including six communities (one control and one intervention community from each state) who were responsible for creating and implementing one nutrition and one physical activity program addressing overweight and obesity among 6th-8th grade youth.

Evaluation: Mixed methods approach used in collecting community food and physical activity environmental data, student health behavior questionnaire data, intervention community focus group data, steering committee annual meeting transcripts and ripple effect mapping (REM) data.

Conclusion and Implications: This project developed a potential framework for creating community-focused, sustainable and effective adolescent obesity prevention programs. Outcomes reported from REM data support this framework by increased student awareness and importance of positive health behaviors, as well as the willingness to adopt these health behaviors; positive changes in school culture related to collaboration, involvement and commitment to wellness; an increase in school-community partnerships; improvements in the physical environment; and increased opportunities for physical activity before, during and after school in the community. This implies community-centered efforts, guided by community stakeholders, educators and youth have led to changes related to policy, system, and environment which promote healthier dietary and physical activity behaviors in youth living in limited-resource communities.

Methods & Evaluation

- Baseline and post intervention food and physical activity (PA) environmental assessments using the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey (NEMS-Stores & NEMS-Restaurants) and Physical Activity Resource Assessment (PARA) and Active Neighborhood Checklist (ANC)
- Baseline and post intervention youth health behaviors and perceptions questionnaire
- Tri-state community leader focus groups, community visits with stakeholders and community committee meeting notes
- Adult and youth REM sessions were conducted by trained researchers at post-assessment in intervention communities only.

Project Objectives Align with REM Impacts

- Identify behavioral and environmental factors of overweight/obesity in target population
  - Reported impact: More family engagement in activities and learning about nutrition in the home
- Increase dietary fruit and vegetable consumption
  - Reported impact: Youth eating more and a greater variety of fruits and vegetables
- Decrease solid fat and added sugar consumption
  - Reported impact: Decreased vending machine sales at school; drinking less soda; more water
- Increase physical activity
  - Reported impact: Increase in youth participation in school athletics; exposure to new activities
- Assist communities in identifying factors that influence overweight and obesity in 6th-8th grade youth
  - Reported impact: Increased youth leadership in school; improved sense of community and increased community relations

Conclusion: Toolkit Development

- The projects main deliverable is a web-based community toolkit integrating videos and project resources has been developed for use in other communities with the purpose of identifying a potential framework for creating community-focused, sustainable and effective adolescent obesity prevention programs.

Youth health behaviors questionnaire

Policy change evaluation tool

Youth focus group moderator’s guide

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