



Using Formative Research to Design and Implement a Program to Address Nutrition in Hispanic and Latino Communities

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BACKGROUND



Childhood obesity has increased dramatically over the past several decades. The prevalence of obesity in Chicago, IL, is higher than the national average, and varies drastically by age and community area. Low-income and ethnic minority communities are increasingly the most heavily affected by this public health challenge. The Healthy School Meals Realized Through Technology (SMART) Schools program was developed by Canyon Ranch Institute, Rush University Medical Center, The Hillshire Brands Company, and UNO Charter School Network. The goal of Healthy SMART Schools is to develop a technology-based system to track student food choices in the school setting and relay this information to the parents and caregivers, teachers and staff, and food service staff.

METHODOLOGY

Canyon Ranch Institute created distinct interview and focus group protocols for different populations: parents and caregivers, teachers and staff, food service staff, and students. CRI conducted in-depth formative research with the populations at Chicago UNO schools Tamayo and Paz to learn more about the community and tailor Healthy SMART Schools to meet the aims of the program and the community. The research was conducted in both Spanish and English. For example, the majority of interviews and focus groups with parents were conducted in Spanish. Each interview and focus group was recorded, with participant consent, and transcribed. Spanish interviews were translated and transcribed to English by a researcher fluent in both languages.

As part of the student interview and focus group protocol, students were invited to draw a healthy person and an unhealthy person, then a healthy meal and an unhealthy meal. Students were then asked to explain what they drew. Some of the student drawings are shown on this poster.



	Students	Teachers and staff	Parents	Food staff
Interviews	4	1	5	3
Focus Groups	4	1	5	2
Total participants	26	5	20	7

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RESEARCH FINDINGS



Expand Opportunities

- Provide interactive learning opportunities about healthy nutrition, perhaps inviting parents and caregivers to breakfast or lunch at the schools to directly engage them on nutrition topics
- Provide opportunities for teachers to work with food service staff to enhance the educational efforts about food and nutrition within the schools
- Include efforts to enhance access to physical activity and movement sessions for parents and caregivers, teachers, and students
- Expand the well-regarded afternoon snack program to a daily occurrence
- Offer and allow only healthy food options at school activities



Engage Stakeholders

- Engage parents and caregivers with activities such as cooking demonstrations combined with interactive learning opportunities about healthy nutrition
- Engage qualified parents and caregivers as volunteers to address nutrition, health and overall wellness at the schools
- Take every advantage to directly engage teachers and students with an overall health and wellness program
- Increase teacher engagement as potential role models, information sources, and, perhaps most significantly, as people who need information, support, and motivation to improve their own health and well-being
- Provide educational sessions for teachers and staff focusing on how food services function, and under what guidelines



Advance Health Literacy

- Provide information about nutrition at school in forms that successfully reach parents so that they can find, understand, evaluate, communicate, and use it to make informed decisions about their lives and their children's lives
- Provide health messages in schools
- Support teachers to have a brief discussion with students every day about the importance of eating breakfast and lunch
- Design and launch an intervention to correct the misperception that students inherently do not like vegetables
- Use several communication media to reach students, parents and caregivers, teachers and staff
- Communicate in English and Spanish

KEY FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH



What is too often superficially treated as the least powerful group – students – have a stronger ability to control nutrition and healthy activities in their lives and their families' lives than they are generally given credit for in any context.



It is very clear that what has driven family change to date regarding any aspect of nutrition or exercise-related behaviors is the diagnosis of chronic disease, or the death of a family member. The explicit goal of the program should be to change that situation to a prevention focus by advancing health literacy.



Food waste is a real problem and an ongoing concern within the schools. As one research participant told us, "Nutrition isn't nutrition if it is in the garbage." A technological intervention to document food choices in schools must include a component to document food waste.