Promoting Nutrition Awareness and Changing the School Food Culture through a Comprehensive EFNEP Intervention

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Abstract

**Objective:** To engage the entire school in EFNEP’s comprehensive nutrition intervention to help kids, families, and schools create a positive, healthy food environment.

**Theory:** Social Learning Theory

**Target Audience:** Middle school youth, parents, and school staff

**Description:** Maryland Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has partnered with Thomas Johnson Middle School (TJMS) to implement a 6-week series of nutrition/cooking classes, which includes a special art project, with middle school students. At the end of several series, EFNEP and TJMS plan to hold an art exhibit to showcase the students’ art projects and showcase what they have learned during the intervention. The ultimate goal is to engage parents in improving their children’s behaviors and encourage enrollment into the EFNEP adult program.

**Evaluation:** EFNEP youth evaluation (pre/post surveys) will be used to collect data about the students’ improvements in knowledge and behavior changes. EFNEP’s adult evaluation (behavioral checklist and 24-hour food recall) will be used to determine parents’ changes in nutrition practices.

**Conclusions/Implications:** This fac, students have learned about healthy food choices and benefited from experiential learning through their involvement in cooking, art projects, and interacting with school administrators and parents. Some process outcomes from this intervention will include: 1) developing handouts/activities for the parent newsletter; 2) posting the students’ artwork; 3) enrolling new parents into the EFNEP adult program; and 4) developing a screening tool to assess a school’s readiness to implement EFNEP’s comprehensive nutrition program. There will be continuous enrollment into EFNEP’s adult and youth nutrition workshops to create holistic changes throughout the school environment.

**Process Objectives**

1. To develop recruitment materials and adapt lesson plans for all models of nutrition intervention that will be implemented with students and parents.
2. To outline the process for integrating hands-on, interactive nutrition/health-related projects into in- and after-school nutrition intervention with kids.
3. To create the process for implementing at least 2 nutrition promotional activities or projects (e.g., photo voices, school showcase) in order to increase awareness about healthy lifestyles in the school.

**Process Outcomes**

- Two series of science-based lessons were implemented at Thomas Johnson MS (TJMS) during enrichment/study period.
- One series of after-school nutrition/cooking lessons was implemented at TJMS.
- A new series of after-school nutrition/snacks/gardening was implemented at Beacon Heights Elementary School.
- Two series of parent nutrition classes (Spanish) were implemented at Beacon Heights Elementary.
- A Parent Readiness Survey and Program Model Matrix were developed.
- Parent materials were developed, including promotional fliers and bilingual parent handouts/activities.
- Project-based promotional activities included art canaas with health messages which were posted around TJMS and a MyPlate model and art work were posted in garden at BHE.
- Pre/post assessments for all programming models were analyzed to determine program effectiveness and overall impact on participants’ behavior changes.
- There will be continuous enrollment into EFNEP’s parent/youth nutrition classes at these schools to create greater impact.

**Intervention Outcomes**

- Partner Readiness Survey and Program Model Matrix were developed for potential collaborator meetings to determine partner capacity and readiness.
- Students learned about healthy food choices and benefited from their involvement in cooking, art projects, and interacting with school administrators and parents.
- Partnership agreement should be made with a school’s “Healthier Generation” club sponsors or wellness council.
- Strong relationships should be forged with PE, health, or science teachers for in-school, science-based programming.
- More qualitative evaluation tools need to be developed to measure:
  - Quality of life changes that the participants make.
  - Level of confidence of participants (and efficacy) to change their behaviors.
  - Nutrition policy/environmental changes that the school has made by end of series or before the end of the year.
- Ideally, students and parents at each school should participate in EFNEP classes together (family-based programming) to improve impact.
- An integrated extension model could be developed as a result of comprehensive nutrition programming:
  - EFNEP could teach nutrition/cooking/gardening series to both students and parents.
  - FCS/SNAP-Ed could train all school personnel to incorporate nutrition/physical activity into their classrooms and cafeterias.

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