

Use of focus groups to
develop an adolescent
and community-driven
obesity prevention
program in an urban,
multi-ethnic high school



A Description of the Focus Groups and Key Findings

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Statewide Agency Committed to Obesity Prevention

- **Healthy Macdonough**
 - Robert Wood Johnson Fdn. 1/1/06-4/30/07
 - Ecological: environmental and policy change
- **Nutrition and Physical Activity Program**
 - 2008-09: Testing 4-evidence based HEPA curricula in 4 Middletown elementary schools (DPH-funded)
- **Food Smart and Fit**
 - Office of Women's Health 11/1/06-3/31/08
 - Chronic Care Model/Self-management goals
- **Healthy Tomorrows**
 - MCHB/AAP HT Partnership grant 2007-2012
 - Hybrid—Youth Leadership
- **Living Smart Living Fit**
 - HRSA 2008-2011





Healthy Tomorrows for Teens

LOOK GOOD--FEEL GOOD--DO GOOD!

- Five-year (2007-2012) program funded by the Maternal Child Health Bureau and American Academy of Pediatrics' Healthy Tomorrows Partnership program
- Target Population: Adolescent girls enrolled in New Britain high school (3129 students: CT's largest hs)
- Portfolio of activities, including: nutritional counseling, YWCA fitness programs and community service learning and leadership projects





LOOK GOOD, FEEL GOOD, DO GOOD

LEADERSHIP BUILDING THROUGH SERVICE

- **Youth Development:** Emphasis on assets/leadership potential NOT problems
- **Service Learning:** Engaging youth in solving problems in their schools/communities, helping them see their questions in larger context of social justice/policy.
- **Community-Based Participatory Research:** Giving youth a role as co-researchers



Healthy Tomorrows Community:

Profile of NBHS Students (2007-08 DOE report)

- 71.8% minority
 - 52.3 % Hispanic (predominately Puerto Rican)
 - 17.5% Black
 - 28.2% Caucasian (many Polish immigrants)
 - Over 40% of students from homes where English is not the primary language
- 47.7 % eligible for free/reduced-price lunch
- 26.1 % drop out rate (4X state avg. 6.2%)
- Teen pregnancy rate (2008): 17.7% overall; 26.5% for Latinas
- Statewide data show Latina teens more likely to be sexually active, have intercourse w/ 4 or more partners & initiate sex before age 13



Our Methodology

Focus groups as planning, intervention and evaluation tool

- Focus groups fostered leadership; gave teens a voice in how HT evolved
- 42 teens and parents participated in five focus groups from 05/07-08/08, facilitated by University of Connecticut faculty- at the school, YWCA and a Latino community agency.





Focus Group 1: Early Planning: May 2007

- 9 teen girls recruited via SBHC
- Purpose
 - Body image
 - Barriers to physical activity/good nutrition
 - Program input



Focus Group 1:

- Cultural Differences shape attitudes about body image and weight: "thick", "full-bodied is norm in community.
- Girls perceive eating as less an issue than exercise. "Laziness" is a problem; also medical concerns
- PE classes were a barrier rather than facilitator of activity. Girls "hate" being forced to run.
- Enthusiasm expressed about a new program but no overt emphasis on health.



How we used findings:

- Offer a flexible “portfolio” of fun activities
- Combine group activities with individual interventions
- Adapted our strategy—include content in workshops/activities girls defined
- Expanded partnership with the YWCA of New Britain: decision to provide FREE memberships for all (not an incentive)
- Obtained approval from NBHS guidance for HT to satisfy community service requirement
- Emphasis on peer support.



Focus Group Two: Early Evaluation and Expansion

- Held at YWCA of New Britain - end of year celebration, yoga & food
- 15 girls who had participated in HT activities during the year & had become program leaders "Ambassadors"
- Purpose
 - Feedback & evaluation
 - Generate new ideas, especially for leadership component



Focus Group 2:

- Girls liked & wanted to repeat activities.
- Liked activities with a "purpose" (e.g., breast CA walk)
- Program not marketed well- few knew about free Y memberships
- Timing & transportation were big barriers
- External influences on body image in school (as opposed to community) are media ideas. Self-confidence is important but these are reality.
- Would be comfortable in leadership role.



Focus Group 2:

- Add summer Ambassadors (leadership) program
- Planned for girls to market the program in school in Fall 08
- Expanded partnership with YWCA
 - fitness coordinator
 - began mentoring middle school girls



Focus Group 3: Partnership Building:

- Spanish Speaking Center :
NEW partner
- 18 Latino participants
- Purpose
 - Gather input from parents and participants
 - Community Outreach
 - Recruit parents for HTs



Focus Group 3:

- Lack of awareness of program, but a great interest in HTs-especially Y membership
- Parents expressed interest in becoming members of the Advisory Board.
- Parents of older adolescents very concerned about loss of insurance coverage for children over age 18.
 - Frustration and fear expressed. Confusion about eligibility and application for continuation of coverage.



Focus Group3: How we used the findings

- Expand the partnership with the Spanish Speaking Center.
 - Help with marketing the program and engaging parents of participants.
- Partner with local pediatricians to foster referrals.



Review of Literature: Putting our findings in context

Use of focus group methodology:

- Increase provider understanding of body image, attitudes/barriers to PA/healthy eating among teens/adults
- Advance understanding in the field and at formative stage of project development (planning)
- Evaluate programs and as an intervention/ leadership development strategy is less common.
 - Horowitz et al "A Model for Using Community-Based Participatory Research to Address the Diabetes Epidemic in East Harlem."



Our Findings Supported by the Literature

Research shows that teens have:

- Complex, contradictory attitudes about weight
- Sophistication about cultural context & possible solutions: good leadership potential but essential knowledge about nutrition is low ([Ambassadors program + education from RD](#))
- Need for autonomy: ([a "portfolio"](#))
- Preference for programs that give social support and access to PA venues ([partnership with YWCA](#))
- Common barriers: lack of time & transportation & perception that neighborhoods are unsafe ([work with school to change bus route](#))

Incorporating the Findings to Modify or Expand Program Strategies and Interventions

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MS, RD, CDE, CD-N



How do we help teens adopt healthier behaviors?

- Healthy diet
- Exercise
- Health behaviors
- Leadership





Our Original Plan

- Offer a 6-week nutrition workshop, FoodSmart and Fit modeled after a successful program developed for a program funded by Office on Women's Health.
- Each Session:
 - Educational component
 - A physical activity component
 - Weigh-In
 - Goal setting/action plan
 - Self-report action plan/problem solving



Adapting our Nutrition Program FoodSmart and Fit

- Offer "stand alone" workshops once a month, not once a week.
- Recruit
 - Partner with favorite teachers
 - Email, My Space
 - Snail mail
- Don't expect instant success
- Use of FoodSmart and Fit for feedback and adjustment of program





Other key FSF

- Reiterate take-home points
- Limit your key messages
- Include a fun activity: zumba
- Offer food...healthy food choices!!!!
- Incentives





Incorporating Self-Management Goal Setting into

- We don't want to be their Mom!
- "Now honey...eat your brussel sprouts. They are good for you."

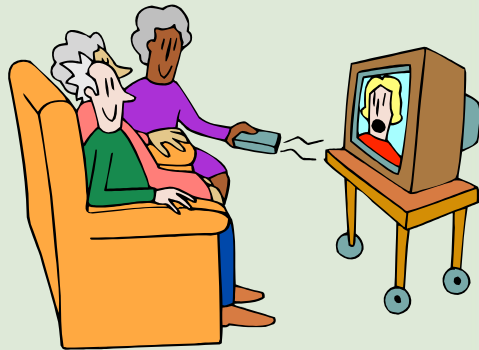




However, just like parents, providers impart well-

- Melissa, you really should lose some weight.
- Cherina, I want you to stop drinking soda and avoid fast foods.
- Azara, why don't you walk every night for 30 minutes? It will help you to lose weight.

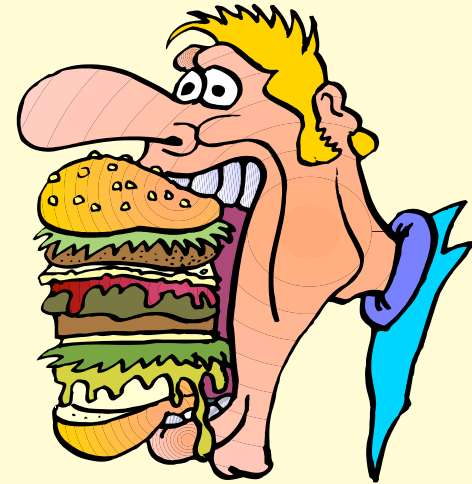




And what happens?

Melissa

Cherina



Azara





Self Management-

Traditional patient education focused on acquisition of knowledge

Research shows programs lead to improved knowledge but not improved outcomes*

Examples: education sessions, lectures, groups, handouts

- Norris et al Diabetes Care 2001, 24 (3) 561

control



How do we foster Self-Management in the teen

- Requires patient-centered goal setting
- "Coach" helps patients identify goals they are confident they can achieve now
- Achieving the goal is more important than the nature of the goal
- Promote self efficacy



Moving Forward





Health Class Survey-

- Partnered with the University of Connecticut
- Students self-reported information
 - weight, height
 - developmentally relevant health behaviors
 - nutrition knowledge
 - body image
 - influences on health behaviors

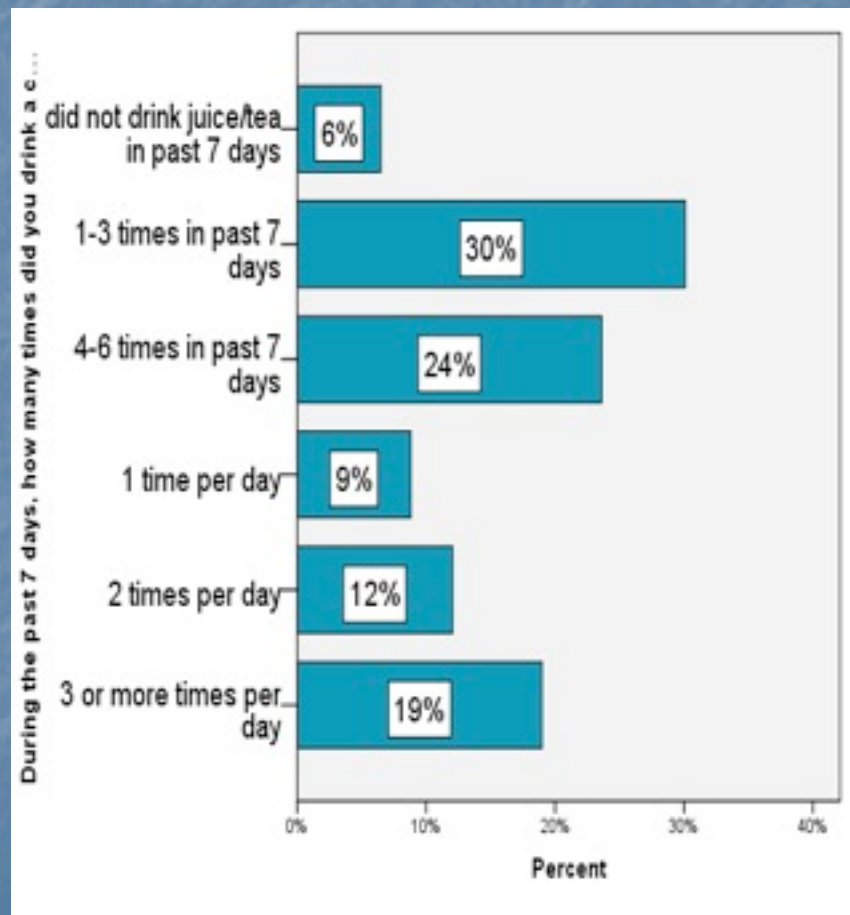


Barriers to Healthy Lifestyles for Latinas at NBHS: 9th Grade Survey

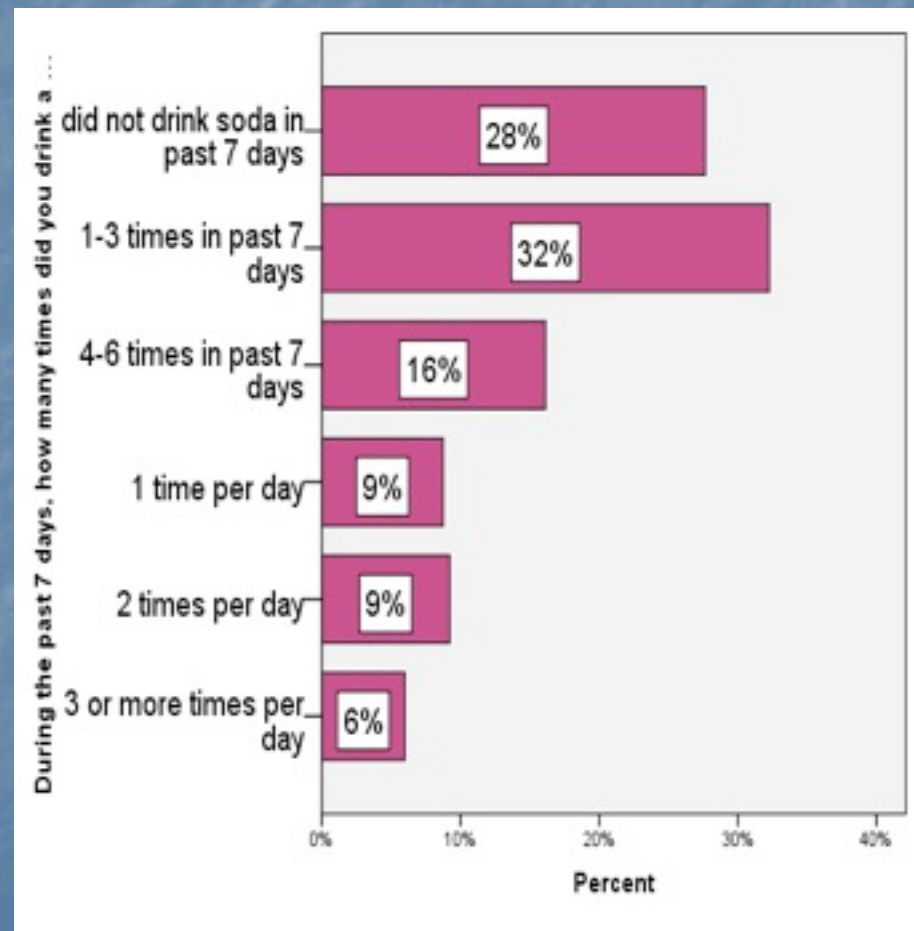
- 561 students completed U-Conn survey on eating/PA activities in May 2008: 117 were Latina females
- Latinas more likely to be dissatisfied with weight compared to African American & white peers
- Latinas most likely to be obese: 18% vs. 9% of African American & 0% of whites
- Latinas least likely to be physically active
 - 21% never get dressed for gym vs. 7.5% of African Americans
 - 54% failed gym/health at least once compared to 19% of whites
 - 33% involved in team sport vs. 51% of whites



Weight related behaviors - Eating behaviors



Juice/tea

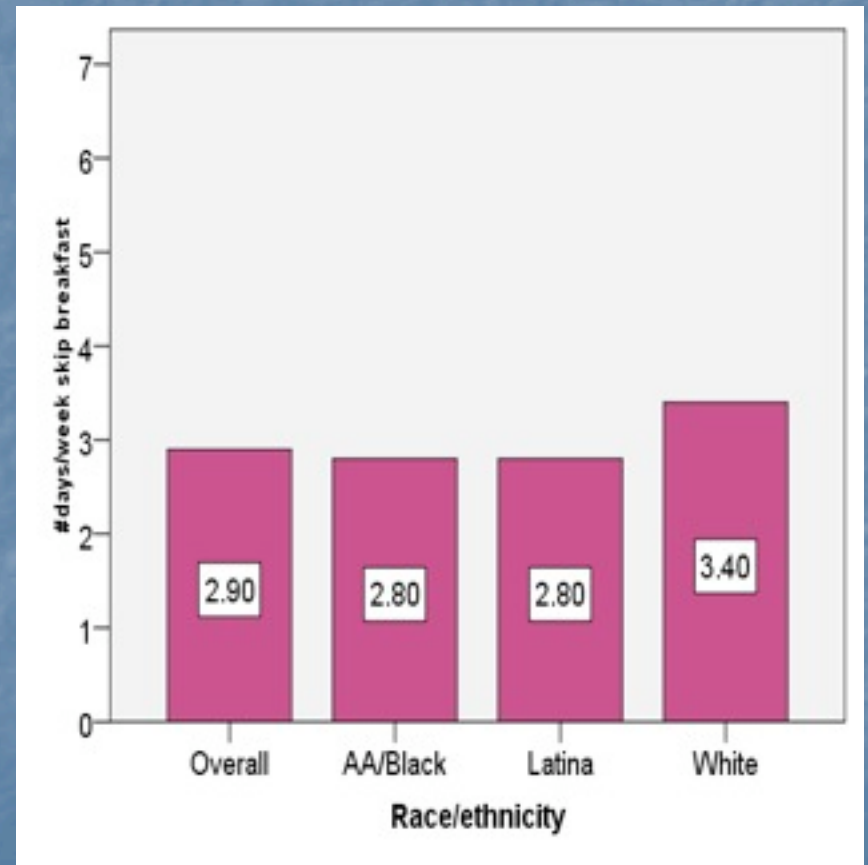
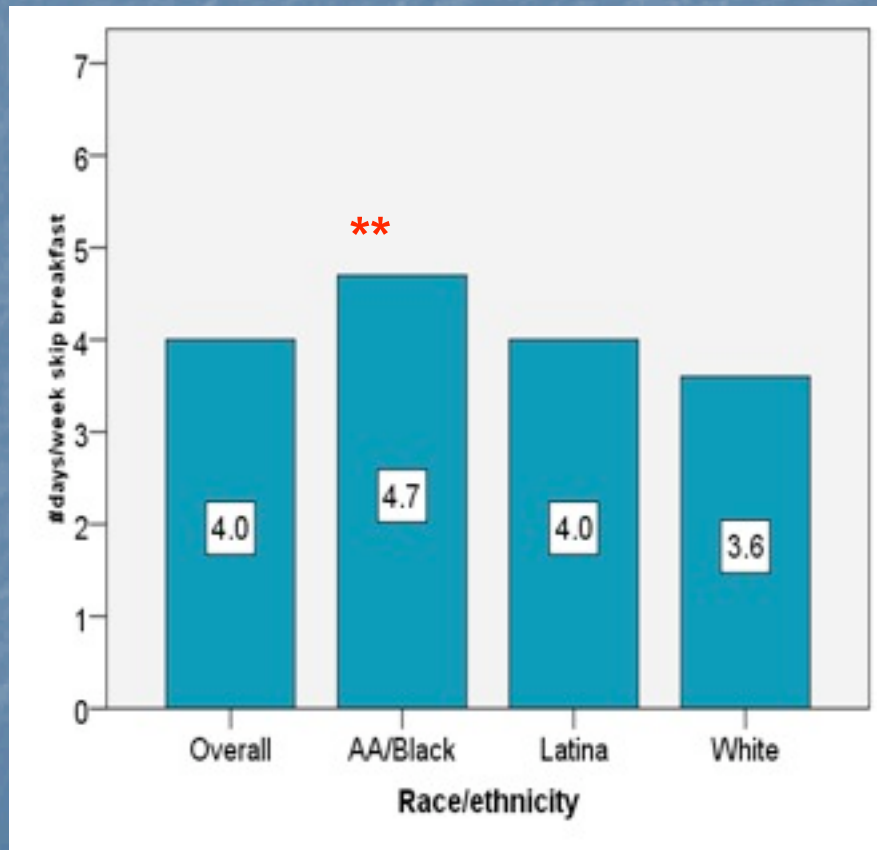


Soda

Weight related behaviors - Eating behaviors

Days/week skip breakfast *

Days/week eat dinner with family



****AA adolescents more often skip Breakfast (F=2.7, p=.05)**



Next Steps: Focus group questions arising from grade 9 survey results

- How to increase health behaviors without promoting negative body image?
- What types of physical activities would be enjoyable/acceptable given cultural and developmental preferences?
- How to make gym class more acceptable?
- Continue to work with the students to identify the best ways to communicate nutritional information to this audience.



Salud America! The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

- National program of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: direction & technical assistance from Institute for Health Promotion Research at University of Texas San Antonio
- 20 grantees in U.S. in learning community
- Research objective: Use Community participatory processes that encourage Latino teens & families to discuss their needs and define action strategies to address childhood obesity..
- Focus groups and interviews, innovative CBPR approaches (Photovoices)



What's Next? Salud America

A Mid-course Evaluation:

- Latinas are attracted to Healthy Tomorrows and give high ratings to all activities but that has not translated into consistent participation and engagement
- A primary purpose of the Salud America evaluation is to understand and overcome barriers to consistent engagement by Latina teens and increase their level of physical activity.
- Provide partners (YWCA, NB High School, NB Spanish Speaking Center) with useful information that they can apply to performance improvements within and collaborations between their organizations



Conclusions/Lessons

- **Focus Groups :**
 - Provide valuable insights into teen preferences for preventive care and medical home.
 - Build trust and foster leadership skills.
 - Forge new community partnerships and recruit parents.
 - Provide a comfortable forum.
 - Don't have to be a one time event!





Conclusions/Lessons Learned

- Be patient. Don't expect overnight success.
- Leadership styles differ.
- Partner with respected faculty members who can help to promote your message.
- Offer a portfolio of options rather than a single intervention; be flexible in adding new programs (and dropping ones that don't work).
- Cultivate a small group of adolescent leaders.
- Let teens grow the program by marketing it to peers.





Thank you.
Your questions?

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