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Effective Management and Implementation of a Coordinated Health Program – The STEPS SNAP-Ed Experience

Purpose: Coordinated health programs have been proposed for more than four decades to improve the health of children in school settings. Although a challenging task, it has the potential to touch many lives, especially those from impoverished communities (Darlington, Violon, & Jourdan, 2018). The South Texas Early Prevention Studies (STEPS) aim to positively impact the community of the Rio Grande Valley, a population known to have a high rate of obesity, by implementing a comprehensive and proactive approach with various components within a preschool students' life. The project's goal has been to plant a seed at an early age for an aspired outcome of preventing chronic diseases, increase physical activity, and the dietary intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Best practices are shared on successful management of the STEPS SNAPS-Ed project and effective implementation of the Bienestar coordinated school health program.

Description: Effective programs begin with effective project marketing. The first phase of the STEPS SNAP-Ed project focused on recruitment for public health programs in low-income communities through marketing and promotion. To increase project promotion and accessibility for our target audience, the STEPS SNAP-Ed project employed different forms of media and communication channels. The summary of recruitment for the baseline period of the project had a total of 1103 consented preschool students out of 1479 enrolled between the two participating ISD's.

Effective data management supports effective project implementation and evaluation. Two systematic OneDrive folders were developed: one, to organize and separate the raw data collected by the data collection team, and two, for the data quality assurance done by the project staff. Data management was assessed through a personalized STEPS SNAP-Ed website used to host a plethora of information, including various resources and links that are paramount for the collection of data. Among the hosted links are REDCap projects that hold numerous data collection schemes. The REDCap data capture and management software was supremely effective, secure, and intrinsic to the STEPS SNAP-Ed research success.

Effective staff development reinforces effective program Implementation. To promote nutrition and physical activity, the STEPS SNAP-Ed project intensively monitored the implementation of the Bienestar Coordinated School Health Program, an evidence-based curriculum that integrates modern technology to enhance students' learning experience. Through ongoing staff development and detailed educational materials, the 179 school personnel involved from the participating ISDs successfully implemented the curriculum's material to 666 students and their families.

Partners: PSJA and La Joya ISD were the projects' collaborative stakeholders. Their roles included delivery of the health curriculum, collection of rosters for the participating classrooms, project recruitment, and delivery of the surveys; "Household Health Characteristics (HHC) and Family Demographics (FD). Funding of the project was provided by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

Looking Ahead: As the first period of the project has come to an end, the STEPS SNAP-Ed team looks forward to continuing its impact within the Rio Grande Valley community by spreading awareness and education on health and nutrition.