

Impact of Hybrid Health and Physical Education Curriculum on Eating Behaviors of Elementary Hispanic Students

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Rates of childhood obesity have increased significantly among Hispanics in the US in the last 30 years. Health practitioners have expressed concerns regarding the long-term impact of obesity on rates of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer in the Hispanic community (CDC, 2004; USDHHS, 2000). The Early Attitudes Towards Staying Strong (EATSS) curriculum was developed and integrated into a physical education program in a predominantly Hispanic school district in Texas. The EATSS curriculum emphasizes improving healthy eating behaviors. The EATSS intervention is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The purpose of the study was to determine if the EATSS curriculum significantly improved healthy dietary food choices, nutritional knowledge and self-efficacy of students and their families. Data were collected at two predominantly Hispanic (91%) Title I elementary schools from 187 low- income fifth grade students. The EATSS curriculum contained 14 lessons related to nutrition, each 30-40 minutes long. The curriculum lasted 14 weeks and contained three assignments that were completed at home by students with family involvement. Parents provided permission for student participation in the program. No significant positive changes were determined in healthy eating behaviors among students and families. Researchers concluded that improving healthy eating behaviors with Hispanic students and family members were impeded because the majority of students lived in multigenerational homes that interfered with consistent implementation of healthy dietary interventions. The majority of students reported overeating. The curriculum will be modified to address these limitations by creating new lesson plans that will specifically address healthy portion sizes.