



Institute for Community Health

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Evolution of the health and fitness “report card”: A community's journey to promote healthy weight.

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Objectives: Nationally, schools are considering or adopting a health “report card”. Providing families with individual level data may help change student and parent behaviors and stem the tide of obesity and inactivity. Follow-up by school personnel may also help link families to services. Communities benefit from surveillance of fitness, and BMI data which provides valuable information for program evaluation. Cambridge, MA has used the “report card” model and school-health family “follow-up” for 5 years. This presentation will discuss experience to date including feedback and new challenges.

Intervention: The Cambridge Public Schools have a multi-ethnic urban population with 38% at-risk of, or overweight. In 2001, a system-wide health report card and a targeted school nurse “follow-up” with “at-risk” families was piloted. Five years later, the annual “reports” and family “follow-up” have changed format, content, and implementation strategies based on evaluation data and feedback from parents, students, school personnel, and school nurses.

Results: The 2006 “report” is now shorter, of lower reading level, uses graphics, and has shifted ownership from researchers to school personnel. The family “follow-up” has changed from a targeted response with at-risk families to an approach that includes the entire school community and provides nutrition counseling services for at-risk families. Additional work is necessary to make the “report” and “follow-up” culturally and linguistically appropriate for the Cambridge population.

Discussion: Using and learning from the health “report card” should be an ongoing process that adapts and changes based on community input. The “Cambridge experience” may help direct other community's interventions.