

S.C. FitnessGram Project
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Mission: Public and private partners will collaborate to use a common platform to measure and monitor students' health-related fitness for policy and program planning to improve the health of South Carolina.

Goals:

- Provide health-related fitness information to students and parents
- Use data to track and monitor trends and changes in student fitness
- Use fitness data to inform K-12 curricular decisions at the classroom, school, district and state level
- Use fitness data to inform policies related to K-12 Physical Education Standards and time allocations

Background:

S.C. lacks a surveillance system to collect health and academic data on school-aged youth. Health data sets are available for high school students, (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey), and the Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System for children birth to 5 years old participating in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. This data is not generalizable to the general child population.

Use of a FitnessGram state data system will enable S.C. to: Collect data and address gaps, support the S.C. Obesity Action Plan, provide body composition (BMI) information and fitness level for the purpose of planning and implementing evidence-based program at the local, school, district, and state level, and conduct future program planning, secure and/or direct limited resources to areas of greatest need.

Significance of S.C. FitnessGram:

Having access to student fitness information will provide the needed aggregate information about the status of students' health-related fitness so state agencies can monitor progress in reducing childhood obesity. Student health-related fitness data can be correlated with student academic indicators to help make the case that including time for physical education and physical activity in the school day is related to improving academic outcomes for students. Analysis with student demographic information may also help us identify some of the underlying social and economic issues that may impact childhood obesity. The collaborative nature of this project could lead to further partnerships at the state and local level that have a focus on students' well-being.

Links to concepts learned in your program:

I regularly use the skills and concepts I have learned in my Health Communication Certificate courses and Master's in Mass Communication courses. I have more confidence in critically evaluating health information as well as writing and disseminating health information with specific target audiences in mind.

Methods/Procedures:

To test our communication tactics among our target audiences, we first pre-tested our materials with Richland County parents. We used a convenience sample at the Richland County Health Department to conduct one-on-one interviews to receive feedback on parent materials. We revised our materials to reflect the insight we gained from our interviews. We sent out an online survey to 150 South Carolina public school teachers and received 40 responses. For this survey, we requested feedback on the teacher materials for full implementation for the 2015-2016 school year. From these responses, we tailored the materials accordingly.

Results:

Our statewide communications plan will launch in August 2015, for the 2015-2016 school year, so we do not yet have results to report.

Discussion:

Based on the communication audit of states with similar fitness programs, we established a communications toolkit would be best to disseminate this information to out targeted audiences. When creating these materials, it is important to keep in mind plain language for our targeted audiences. By using plain language, we would be able to appeal to a wider audience. Also, testing materials with the targeted audience is of utmost importance to ensure the correct message is being portrayed. By testing these materials, we gained a deeper insight into our target audience before disseminating these materials. Lastly, with many different stakeholders in this project, it is essential to keep all stakeholders happy and on the same page.