



Operation Better Start

Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Intensive Site

“The connection with our program and the NIH was really invaluable to us. It was almost as if giving our efforts the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. That was really important because you want to have outside validation of all the work you’re doing and to have that from the National Institutes of Health [NIH] was super.”

Description

Operation Better Start is a unique partnership of diverse clinical disciplines working together to provide a coordinated framework of services to children, adolescents, and their families. The goal of the program is to achieve positive changes in long-term health through an emphasis on healthy lifestyles, personal empowerment, and coordination of services between health care providers. By combining the clinical components of the Operation Better Start program with the strong community partnerships of the Pittsfield Public School System, YMCA, Berkshire Nautilus, Berkshire WIC, and Berkshire County Headstart, Operation Better Start produced an innovative approach to provide youths and their families with education and activities for healthier living through *We Can!*

Key Site Successes:

- **We Can! Launch:** Pittsfield successfully launched its program with a press conference that had VIP speakers and attendees, including Karen Donato, Coordinator, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Obesity Education Initiative; the mayor of Pittsfield and other local politicians; and healthcare providers. Pittsfield was able to leverage this media event into a business plan that doubled the size of its program.
- **CATCH in the Pittsfield YMCA:** After bringing the CATCH program to several YMCA sites, the Pittsfield Family YMCA will seek grant funding to expand the implementation of CATCH to all of its after-school sites.
- **We Can! in Head Start:** The Berkshire County Head Start program recently completed its Federal Review process. The community collaboration and implementation on the *We Can!* Parent Curriculum was viewed as visionary.
- **CATCH in the Pittsfield Schools:** The Pittsfield public schools had such a positive experience using CATCH that they have already committed to continue its use in its after-school programs.
- **We Can! In the Primary Care Setting:** OBS was able to work with all the pediatric offices in the county to promote the *We Can!* message in the primary care setting. Over 35 providers were introduced to *We Can!* Educational information was provided for

distribution to families, and the *We Can!* message was welcomed and supported by the medical community.

Community Outreach

Pittsfield was highly successful in getting its community involved with *We Can!* The site held four community events, including its official launch, generated media to publicize its programs and efforts, and utilized its strong connections and partnerships within the community.

Community Events

14th Annual World Breastfeeding Celebration (August 2005). Operation Better Start was one of 18 agencies represented at this event which attracted 500 people to the Common on First Street in Pittsfield to learn information on breastfeeding, health, and family services. Attendees participated in raffles with healthy snack giveaways, music, and a magic show.



Pittsfield's Own Neighborhood Block Party (September 2005). About 60 youths and 40 adults participated in this health fair with many community agencies. The day included games and music for participants.

Operation Better Start/*We Can!* Launch (October 2005). This media event, held at the Hillcrest Campus of the Berkshire Medical Center, officially introduced *We Can!* to the community. More than 50 individuals, including the mayor of Pittsfield, attended this event, which received a great amount of media attention.

Operation Better Start: Newest Trends in Medical Nutrition Therapy (January 2006). This educational activity for physicians, nurses, and nurse practitioners attracted 30 individuals who were introduced to the *We Can!* program and how to implement it. They also received continuing education units and continuing medical education units for the session.

Media Outreach

In support of the launch, Pittsfield utilized live read scripts from the Toolkit, pitched to local media, and prepared a press release for launch. The site received story placement with local Channel 9 News and newspaper articles and editorials in *The Berkshire Eagle* and *The Pittsfield Gazette* as well as publication in the SCOPE newsletter.

Partnerships

Before beginning *We Can!*, Operation Better Start site organizers had strong ties within the community. The site partnered with the **Berkshire WIC Program**, which helped recruit participants for the various curricula; the **Center for Ecological Technology**, which helped distribute materials; and the **Community Health Network**, which provided participants and materials. Operation Better Start was also able to rely on other existing partners such as the **Pittsfield Public School System**, the **YMCA**, **Berkshire Nautilus**, and **Berkshire County Headstart**.

Parent and Youth Curricula

We Can! Energize Our Families: Curriculum for Parents and Caregivers

Operation Better Start implemented the *We Can!* Parent Curriculum seven times between October 2005 and June 2006, with the majority in the spring of 2006. Forty-nine individuals, including 45 women and four men, attended the implementation in various locations including a school, a YMCA, a family home basement, Even Start, and Head Start. As the facilitator noted, “*the Parent Curriculum was the most difficult to implement until we learned where to access the parents.*” Initially they attempted to coordinate the scheduling of the parent classes with the CATCH program. However, the parents said they wanted to watch their children doing the CATCH program rather than take a class themselves at the same time. The parent program was initially scheduled twice a week for a three-week period but scheduling varied with each implementation to meet the needs of attendees.

An analysis of 44 respondent surveys found statistically significant increases in **energy balance knowledge** and **attitudes, healthy eating behaviors, healthy food behaviors, and physical activity behaviors**. Parents reported increased knowledge of the principles of energy balance and also said that maintaining energy balance was easy and important to do. Parents also reported increases in healthy eating behaviors including acting as a role model, making healthier foods more easily available, and setting rules about food and eating in one’s family. They also said they read nutrition labels more often and made foods high in fat and sugar less available. Parents also reported encouraging and participating in physical activity personally or with their family more often.

Although not statistically significant, the analyses also suggested positive movement toward *We Can!* objectives related to **portion size attitudes and behaviors; healthy eating attitudes; physical activity knowledge and attitudes; and screen time knowledge and behaviors**.

Parent Curriculum Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)
Gender		Age		Adults in Household	
Males	9 (4)	18-25	30 (13)	1	30 (13)
Females	91 (40)	26-35	18 (8)	2 or more	70 (31)
Race		36-45	16 (7)	Education Level	
Asian	2 (1)	46-55	11 (5)	Less than high school	16 (7)
Caucasian	87 (39)	55+	11 (5)	High school graduate	23 (10)
Other	2 (1)			Some college	21 (9)
		Ethnicity		College degree	18 (8)
		Hispanic	5 (2)	Some graduate school	14 (6)
		Non-Hispanic	93 (41)	Graduate Degree	9 (4)

N = 44

Summary of Parent Curriculum Findings

Measure	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Difference	Percent Change	t Value	df	p
Energy Balance Knowledge	2.00	2.28	.27	14%	2.31*	40	< .05
Energy Balance Attitudes	7.10	7.66	.55	8%	3.30*	37	< .05
Portion Size Knowledge	1.98	1.89	-.07	-4%	-.50	41	.62
Portion Size Attitudes	4.20	4.35	.16	4%	1.23	43	.23
Portion Size Behaviors	7.44	7.60	.22	3%	1.30	40	.20
Healthy Eating Knowledge	2.86	2.71	-.12	-5%	-1.22	40	.23
Healthy Eating Attitudes	12.40	12.81	.46	4%	1.27	40	.21
Healthy Eating Behaviors	20.46	21.33	1.00	5%	1.99*	38	.05
Healthy Food Behaviors	10.60	11.32	.83	8%	3.51*	40	< .05
Physical Activity Knowledge	2.43	2.47	.05	2%	.39	40	.70
Physical Activity Attitudes	22.54	22.98	.22	1%	.51	36	.62
Physical Activity Behaviors	18.76	19.66	.50	3%	2.02*	33	.05
Screen Time Knowledge	2.54	2.60	.05	2%	.39	39	.70
Screen Time Attitudes	13.21	13.20	-.11	-1%	-.55	36	.59
Screen Time Behaviors	14.03	14.74	.09	1%	1.36	33	.18

*Statistically significant finding

CATCH Kids Club

Pittsfield implemented the CATCH curricula six times with existing after-school programs at the Pittsfield YMCA and local elementary schools. Initially the programming was twice a week, to test the interest and the implementation. It grew to five days a week based on interest and participation. A total of 108 students—57 girls and 51 boys—participated in the implementations and reported especially liking the physical activity component.

An analysis of 33 respondent surveys found statistically significant increases in healthy eating behaviors such as **food knowledge** and **healthy eating behaviors: reducing fat, eating fruit and vegetables, and reading labels**. Following completion of CATCH youths reported limiting intake of high-fat foods and energy-dense foods, more often choosing to eat beans, fruits and vegetables, and more frequently reading nutrition labels.

The analysis also suggested positive movement toward *We Can!* objectives related to **food attitudes: self-efficacy** and **intentions to drink skim milk; physical activity attitudes and behaviors; and decreased screen time behaviors: weekend TV viewing**.

CATCH Curriculum Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)
Gender		Grade		Age	
Males	36 (12)	Second	21 (7)	8	36 (12)
Females	64 (21)	Third	33 (11)	9	21 (7)
Race		Fourth	21 (7)	10	30 (10)
African American	12 (4)	Fifth	24 (8)	11	9 (13)
Caucasian	85 (28)			13	3 (1)
Hispanic	3 (1)				

N = 44

Summary of Parent Curriculum Findings

Measure	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Difference	% Change	t Value	df	p
Food Knowledge	22.13	20.67	-1.68	-8%	-2.02*	27	.05
Food Attitudes: Self-Efficacy	14.32	14.52	.45	3%	.58	28	.57
Food Attitudes: Intentions to Reduce Fat	9.48	9.39	-.13	-1%	-.40	30	.70
Food Attitudes: Intentions to Drink Skim Milk	1.24	1.29	.03	2%	.27	30	.79
Healthy Eating Behaviors: Reducing Fat	.65	1.45	.74	114%	2.92*	30	< .05
Healthy Eating Behaviors: Eating Fiber	1.85	1.76	-.09	-5%	-.32	32	.75
Healthy Eating Behaviors: Eating Fruits and Vegetables	9.24	10.19	1.03	11%	2.61*	31	< .05
Healthy Eating Behaviors: Reading Labels	.58	.94	.36	62%	2.43*	32	< .05
Physical Activity Attitudes	6.79	7.06	.21	3%	.54	27	.59
Physical Activity Behavior	.85	.85	.00	0%	.00	32	1.00
Screen Time Behaviors: Weekday TV Viewing	4.09	4.27	.25	6%	.66	31	.51
Screen Time Behaviors: Weekend TV Viewing	4.55	4.27	-.18	-4%	-.44	32	.66
Screen Time Behaviors: Weekday Video Gaming	1.48	1.59	.09	6%	.26	31	.80
Screen Time Behaviors: Weekend Video Gaming	1.42	1.58	.15	11%	.46	32	.65

*Statistically significant finding

S.M.A.R.T.

Developed by child health and behavior researchers, Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television (S.M.A.R.T.) is a 3rd and 4th grade classroom curriculum designed to motivate children to reduce screen time. Intended to be used over the course of the school year, S.M.A.R.T. includes all the lesson plans and tools needed to implement the program. It was successfully tested with elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. Operation Better Start implemented S.M.A.R.T. once at the Williams Elementary School. The implementation reached 19 students including 11 girls and eight boys.

An analysis of 16 respondent surveys found statistically significant decreases in **screen time behaviors**. At the end of the S.M.A.R.T. program students reported spending less time watching TV, videos/DVDs and playing video games. The analysis also suggested positive movement toward *We Can!* objectives related to **physical activity behaviors**; however, this was not statistically significant.

S.M.A.R.T. Curriculum Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)	Characteristics	% (n)
Gender		Grade		Age	
Males	44 (7)	Third	100 (16)	8	94 (15)
Females	56 (9)			9	6 (1)
Race					
African American	6 (1)				
Caucasian	94 (15)				

N= 16

S.M.A.R.T. Summary Findings

Measure	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Difference	Percent Change	t Value	df	p
Physical Activity Behaviors	6.19	6.87	.53	9%	.34	14	.74
Screen Time Behaviors	31.92	23.63	-7.83	-25%	-2.35*	11	< .05

*Statistically significant finding

