

Group Protocol for Nutrition Education Group for Students Ages 10-14 Identified as Suffering  
from Malnutrition and Poor School Performance

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### Section One

Undernutrition, malnutrition, or poor nutrition have negative effects on a child's ability to be successful at school. The difficulties include but are not limited to decreased cognitive performance, impaired social functioning, decreased academic performance, hypoglycemia, and issues with BMI (Edward & Cheeley, 2016; Ihab, A.N., Rohana, A.J., & Manan; W.M.W., 2015, Seynoum, D., Tsegaye, R., & Tesfaye, A., 2019). While Federal guidelines require that school meals offer fresh fruits and vegetables, students often refuse to consume the foods partly because they need to be educated about the importance of healthy eating habits and be given strategies to help increase healthy food intake (Edwards & Cheeley, 2016). The nutrition education group will provide the needed intervention to help increase students understanding of the importance of nutrition now and as they grow. The group will be for children ages 10-14 lasting 90 minutes, once a week for 6 weeks at the Academic Center for Excellence in Orange County, Florida. It will be composed of males and females who are identified through school records including but not limited to behavioral referrals, progress reports, being a recipient of free or reduced meals, participation in the MTSS process and school medical records (visits to the nurse, medication on file, etc.). A pre and post group questionnaire will be developed by the group facilitator and school administrator to assess progress. The questionnaire will include versions for parents, teachers, and/or a medical provider. There are 8 subjective indicators community nurses can screen for: thin or very thin in appearance, loose fitting clothes/jewelry, history of unplanned weight loss, change in appetite, feeding or swallowing difficulties, dry mouth/dry skin/dull eyes, low mood, no food in the house and self-neglect (Anderson, 2016). Parents and children can respond to questions about food insecurity, exercise, meals, and food choices. Teachers and/or administrators can provide information regarding behaviors and academic performance. Before acceptance into the group, the facilitator will meet with the child and the parent in person or via

video conferencing with the purpose of identifying the explicit contract. It is important the family understand their reasons for participating in the group. As the group progresses, the facilitator will also be working to identify the implicit contract for the purposes of helping determine if the student/family will continue with what is learned in the group once it is over (Cummings & Cummings, 2013). For effective outcomes, the group will have 10 members (Gladding, S.T., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, G.N.,1994; Kivlighan, D.M., Jr., Paquin, J.D., & Hsu, Y-K. K., 2014). Prior to acceptance into the group, members will receive a one-page document outlining the purpose of the group, topics for each week, objectives, rules, session times, length of sessions, location, types of participants and guest speakers arranged to speak. (Gladding, S.T., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, G.N.,1994). To gain clearance to enter the group, parents of the identified child must sign the consent and agree to participate in weeks 1, 3 and 6.

## Section Two

The 6-week group agenda will follow the identified format:

- Arrival: participants will be at the location of the group no later than 3:30p on Thursday afternoons. School ends at 3p
- Check-in: 3:30-350p Students will check in with the group, facilitator will conduct an ice breaker and, after week 1, will ask group members to volunteer their experiences about the weekly challenge
- Review: 3:50-4:00p Facilitator will review the previous week's content
- Discussion: 4:00-4:35p Facilitator or guest speaker will engage group in a discussion about the week's topic

- Wrap up and weekly challenge: 4:35-5:00p Facilitator will wrap up the week's discussion and review the weekly challenge. Questions can be answered related to the challenge and/or follow up information provided for the topic of discussion

The group will require in-person participation as well as challenges completed by the next group. Incentives will be provided by community businesses. In addition, those participating will receive a bag full of nutritious groceries and other supplies needed, such as Ziploc bags to store food properly, from one of the community's business sponsors; Second Harvest Food Bank, Parramore Project Hope, Parramore Education Innovation District, or Center for Higher Education Innovation at UCF (S. Currie, personal communication, April 24, 2020). The group will be facilitated by a social worker, family support worker, mental health counselor or other identified qualified members of the community school partnership. Experts invited will be a nutritionist or dietician, a chef, a farmer or produce worker, a pediatric nurse or pediatrician, a physical education teacher and/or a school administrator.

The topic for week 1: Why do I wanna be healthy? A dietician, nutritionist, pediatric nurse, or pediatrician is invited to speak to the parents and children about the importance of eating healthy. According to Das, J.K, Lassi, Z.S., Hoodboy, Z., & Salam, R.A. (2018) "improving the nutritional status of adolescents can help break the vicious cycle of intergenerational malnutrition." Furthermore, adequate nutrition for children and adolescents is linked to the health of future generations (Das, J.K, Lassi, Z.S., Hoodboy, Z., & Salam, R.A., 2018). Weekly challenge: Alternative recipe for favorite foods. For example, cauliflower rice and mashing sweet potatoes.

The topic of week 2: How to make fresh produce last longer. A farmer or produce worker from a fresh market will be invited to talk to the students about how to pick and store fresh

produce. A video link will be sent to parents with similar information and a document will be sent home as well. Weekly challenge: practice storing fresh produce- identify pros and barriers.

Week 3's topic: A family that cooks together is healthier. A chef is invited to talk to parents and children about food prepping and cooking together. He/she will discuss the benefits of preparing and cooking meals as a family and working as a team when people have busy schedules. Weekly challenge: prepping and cooking a meal as a family.

The topic for week 4: Let's get moving. A physical education teacher or personal trainer will be invited to discuss the importance of moving to help improve health. He/she will discuss indoor and outdoor exercises families can engage in together or individually. Weekly challenge: increase physical activity (will be provided a list of in-door and outdoor activities).

For week 5, the topic will be "what's gonna stop me?" This group will be led by the group's facilitator. As the group nears conclusion, the participants will explore barriers identified and ways to overcome them. Weekly challenge: identify 2 strategies to overcome the barriers identified in group.

The topic for week 6: To infinity and beyond. This group will also be led by group facilitator. All participants and their parents will be engaged in a discussion about what has changed for them. They will complete a brief post- group questionnaire similar to the pre- group questionnaire and they will also be asked to complete a survey about the effectiveness of the group and their perception of physical, emotional, and behavioral changes in the child.

The school nurse will also conduct a post-assessment of the 8 subjective indicators identified earlier. Participants will be encouraged to share their strategies to maintain momentum and continue to eat healthy and engage in exercise. Each family will also be provided a list of

resources they can continue to use. This will be provided as a hard copy and each member will receive a text with a link to the document. School personnel will also have the information for future reference. Follow-ups will be conducted at the 4, 8- and 12-month mark by school personnel using the post- questionnaire.

### Section Three

Having children and their parents participate in a nutrition education group on a school campus using in-person, text, video links and other media to provide information about getting healthy and staying healthy will have a positive impact on academic performance as well as reduce the likelihood of an unhealthy adult. Additional funds will not be needed to facilitate the group because it will take place during regular after school activities paid for by community sponsors. The group facilitator will be provided through the community partnership school's mental health partner or other trained personnel and the guest speakers will be encouraged to volunteer their time.

According to Orange County Public Schools 2019-2020 Tentative Budget Summary (2019), \$5,169,478 will be spent on mental health assistance, \$49,765,773 will be spent on supplemental academic instruction, \$9,398,082 will be spent on supplemental reading instruction, and \$2,834,035 will be spent on what is called the turnaround school supplement. When children have proper nutrition, they are healthier. They perform better in school, at home and in the community. According to Edwards & Cheeley (2016), proper nutrition is an asset to positive youth development and successful student performance. In addition, Wright, L., Palak, G., & Kumiko, Y. (2018), reported intervention programs aimed at bringing healthy food into food deserts and educating community families about the importance of nutrition and healthy eating helped improved the ability to maintain a healthy weight and proper nutritional health. Improved

access to food means improved youth development and student performance which leads to less money spent on supplemental instruction and mental health assistance. Therefore, decreasing the amount of money the school board needs to allocate to those services.

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