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The ratio of pediatric obesity has reached epidemic proportions. Children of Latino ethnicity demonstrate higher rates than their non-Latino cohorts. An even more vulnerable group is the children of Latino migrant farmworkers with obesity findings even greater than their Latino peers. Attention has been given to return children to a healthy weight through national campaigns, school-based programs, and innovative research endeavors. To promote effectiveness of these interventions cultural appropriateness is a vital component of research design.

Dr. Kilanowski’s community-based program of research has focused on the Latino children of migrant farmworkers. Research interventions have been conducted in a Michigan summer Migrant Education Program where classroom learning on healthy eating and physical activity have been combined with hands-on learning. Here, middle-school students were challenged to create infomercials on these health promotion topics from storyboard-to-filming-to-editing.

Focus groups in Michigan and Ohio with migrant mothers inspired the creation of a comic book, “Small changes, Big results,” that was used as a teaching tool to modify family lifestyle to help achieve healthy weight. In addition, healthy eating interventions for mothers about children were brought to the migrant camp. Audio-enhanced hand-held technology was used to enable non-English speakers to become active research participants in data collection on food security, acculturation, and children’s food frequency. Culturally sensitive, hands-on learning methods instructed mothers on lessons to improve their children’s nutrition.

Furthermore, students in the Migrant Education Program have learned about agricultural and age-appropriate safety. Here again, middle-school students created instructional safety videos that were shown to younger grades in peer education. Students used photovoice to capture images for the video on migrant camp safety. Research has been funded through a KL2, P-30, ANF, STTI, CWRU-FBP, and the Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation.

Dr. Kilanowski is currently studying the ecological risks and protectors of healthy weight in Latino immigrants.