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Nutrition Education Implementation Pathways

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A practice-oriented guide, adapted from ongoing research across medical schools

A more detailed analytical treatment of these findings is in preparation for peer-reviewed publication.

Two complementary frameworks

Normative pathway (Kern & AAMC)

- "Build the ideal curriculum from scratch"
- Formal needs assessment & objective writing
- A coordinated, longitudinal thread
- Often high funding needs (materials, experts)
- Thorough, standardized, evidence-based design

Real-world pathway (observed)

- "Build on structures already in place"
- Identifying openings in the existing schedule
- An opportunistic thread woven into courses
- Often low funding needs (repurposed resources)
- High likelihood of actually being implemented

Every school follows a different pathway

Successful initiatives emerge through different entry points depending on local resources, leadership, opportunities, and institutional context. The goal is not to reproduce another school's curriculum, but to identify a pathway that fits one's own environment.

Detailed comparison across dimensions

	Normative implementation framework	Real-world implementation
Purpose	Guide curriculum development	Understand how implementation actually unfolds
Nature	Prescriptive	Descriptive
Sequence	Linear	Non-linear, multiple entry points
Starting point	Formal needs assessment	Local opportunity, resource, or champion
Primary focus	Educational design	Organizational change
Logic	Planned	Emergent
Leadership	Formal governance	Faculty champions + institutional support
Resources	Assumed available	Variable, often improvised
Barriers	Not central to the model	Central to the process
Adaptation	Limited once designed	Continuous
Outcome	A curriculum	A sustainable, institutionalized practice

The six implementation entry points

Clinician-champion

Begins with a clinician's firsthand experience of an educational gap.

Institutional opportunity

Begins when institutional change opens a window.

Existing resource

Begins by adapting a resource the school already has.

Community partnership

Begins with community programs that migrate into the curriculum.

Interprofessional collaboration

Begins with cross-professional teaching partnerships.

Research & evaluation

Begins with scholarship that builds evidence and legitimacy.

Barriers common across pathways

Time & workload

- No protected faculty time
- Scheduling conflicts
- Curriculum overload

Funding & resources

- Lack of dedicated funding
- Cost of local adaptation
- Facility access

Culture & perception

- Seen as peripheral
- Faculty skepticism
- Professional silos

Leadership & governance

- Competing priorities
- Leadership turnover
- Lack of clear ownership

Coordination & sustainability

- Coordinating stakeholders
- Sustaining partnerships
- Champion dependence

Evaluation

- Limited evaluation capacity
- Lack of longitudinal data
- Limited time for scholarship

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