

## News Release

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### **Schools receive grants to bring breakfast to students**

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Your mother was right. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. However, many Wisconsin students are not starting their day off with breakfast. As part of a grant from the USDA, the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs and the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) are collaborating on a plan to ensure that more Wisconsin students start the day off with a healthy breakfast.

At the start of this year, over 60 schools in 42 school districts across the state received grants to start a School Breakfast Program. That means over 24,000 students will now have access to breakfast at their school who did not have access to breakfast before. Schools can use grant funds to purchase new equipment needed to serve breakfast, update facilities, and promote the new program, among other things.

The benefits of breakfast for children are numerous. "Children who eat breakfast are more likely to meet their nutrient needs, do better on tests, are better behaved in class and are less likely to be overweight." says Heather Harvey, Nutrition Specialist at UW-Extension.

Despite the many benefits of breakfast, breakfast eating has decreased over the past 40 years. Currently, only 14 percent of teenagers eat breakfast every school day. "If children aren't eating breakfast before class, they will not be fully prepared to learn." says Harvey.

UW-Extension educators and DPI are working to make sure students and their parents know the benefits of a healthy breakfast. They would also like all students to have access to the federal School Breakfast Program, as one option to eating breakfast each school day. They work with schools to ensure that schools have the necessary resources and support to participate in the School Breakfast Program. One way this is happening is through small grants to school districts to help them start or improve their School Breakfast Program. Manitowoc County received a Kohl Breakfast Grant for the 2005-2006 school year.

In addition to schools that received money to start a School Breakfast Program, 126 schools in 53 different school districts already serving breakfast, received grant money to improve their program. Schools are using the grant money to expand their breakfast program to meet the unique needs of their students. Many of these schools will use the money to purchase new equipment such as food carts to serve students outside of the cafeteria or wagons to transport food to classrooms so that students can eat breakfast in the classroom at the start of the day.

However, schools do not need a grant to start the School Breakfast Program. "Many schools can work within their existing resources to offer this program to students," says Susan Peterman of DPI. "It may take some creativity and rescheduling, but it is worth it to see students eating breakfast who weren't eating before." Schools also do not need to wait until next year to begin

serving breakfast. Schools can begin participating in the program at any time during the school year.

If you are not sure if your child's school participates in the School Breakfast Program, call the school and ask. If the school does not offer the program, talk with the food service director, PTA, principal, and/or school board members and voice your opinions. DPI can provide technical support and help to schools who are interested in starting the program. Schools just need to ask.

One thing is certain. More students in Wisconsin will have access to the most important meal of the day this school year.

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