

## NEWS RELEASE

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

By Heather Harvey

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 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 previously. 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% 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.

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, 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.

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 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.

[FOR COUNTIES THAT HAVE SCHOOLS WHO RECEIVED A GRANT THIS YEAR, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO REMOVE THE NEXT PARAGRAPH AND ADD IN PERSONAL COMMENTS FROM YOUR COUNTY AND/OR SCHOOL DISTRICT].

Last school year, Jane Acheson, food service director at Arbor-Vitae Woodruff School, received a grant from DPI to improve her breakfast program. “The grant really helped us to incorporate ideas and input from students and teachers into what they wanted for breakfast”, commented Acheson. “We purchased breakfast carts so that students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades

could have access to breakfast after first period in their wing of the school, without having to come into the cafeteria.” Because of the changes, participation in the School Breakfast Program at Arbor-Vitae Woodruff doubled on some days.

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, principle, and school board and voice your opinions. “We (DPI) can provide technical support and help to schools who are interested in starting the program. Schools just need to ask.” says Peterman.

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