

Wisconsin's School Breakfast Program boosts children's health and academic success



“As a nutrition professional working with schools, I thank you for creating a tool with timely and helpful information that we can use when working with cooks, managers, directors, principals and school administrators.”

—Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction public health nutritionist's comment on the Breakfast Scoop online newsletter

Situation

Research shows that children who eat breakfast demonstrate an increased ability to learn and perform better academically. Studies also reveal that eating breakfast improves a child's behavior and mood, decreases their risk of being overweight and enhances the overall quality of their diet.

Many children in Wisconsin, however, often skip breakfast for a variety of reasons—lack of time, lack of appetite or limited household income.

School breakfast programs are one way to ensure that children get a nutritionally healthy start to their day. Regardless of household income, any school-age child can participate in a school breakfast program if one is available in their school.

Since 2004, the University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Programs and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) have partnered to work on school breakfast issues. In 2004, Wisconsin ranked last in the nation in the number of low-income students who participated in school breakfast with only 29% of low-income students taking part.

Only 58% of Wisconsin schools that offered lunch even offered a school breakfast program.

Response

To ensure that more Wisconsin children receive the proven benefits that come from eating a healthy breakfast, the UW-Extension and the DPI joined forces to: 1) Help schools with breakfast programs increase their student participation; and 2) Support other schools in starting breakfast programs. In addition, UW-Extension and DPI collaborated on work related to Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast grants. Below are a few examples of their efforts.

- The *Breakfast Scoop*, an online breakfast newsletter first published in late 2007, was created in response to a need expressed by Wisconsin school food service directors for more resources about school breakfast. The *Scoop* has continued to expand its reach, and in 2008, was added as a resource in the Food and Nutrition Information Center at the National Agricultural Library, as well as the American Dietetic Association Knowledge Center. The *Breakfast Scoop* is published and distributed three times a year through the Wisconsin School Breakfast listserv, Wisconsin School Breakfast website and DPI's School Nutrition website. It is available online at:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/food/schoolbreakfast/newsletter.cfm>



- The Wisconsin School Breakfast electronic listserv was created; membership has increased five-fold since its inception in 2007 and continues to grow.
- New partnerships and collaborations have increased dissemination of evidence-based information about school breakfast programs to diverse audiences, such as school board members, teachers, parents, community groups and more. A partnership among four organizations resulted in joint sponsorship for a School Breakfast Program Conference held in March 2009.
- Increased presence at conferences such as the Wisconsin Association of School Board Officers and the Wisconsin Educational Association Council, Wisconsin Dietetic Association, and the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin have resulted in call backs and speaking requests to present information about school breakfast programs in Wisconsin.

Outcomes

Combined efforts of the UW-Extension, DPI, schools and other organizations, along with support from Nutrition Enhancement Grants, have contributed to the growth of school breakfast programs across the state. For example:

- In the 2005-2006 school year, Wisconsin had the nation's highest increase in participation, both in the number of schools participating in the program (24.2%) and in the number of low-income students participating (14.2%).

- Wisconsin reported that more than 58% of schools that offered school lunch also offered school breakfast. While the state ranked 50th in the nation in the total number of schools participating in a school breakfast program, the increased rates of participation highlighted progress.
- In 2006-2007, Wisconsin again had the highest increase in the nation in low-income student school breakfast participation (25.3%) and showed an increase in the number of schools participating. Reports indicate that more than 60% of schools with school lunch programs also offered school breakfast.
- Data show that nearly 36% of low-income students participating in school lunch also take part in school breakfast.
- In the 2007-2008 school year, Wisconsin was in the top five states in the nation to show increases in low-income student participation in school breakfast programs (an increase of 8.1%).
- The percent of schools that offer school lunch and school breakfast continues to rise. Sixty-two percent of schools participating in school lunch also take part in school breakfast, although Wisconsin ranks 50th in school participation. Increases in low-income student participation place Wisconsin 43rd in the nation.
- In the 2008-2009 school year, 64 school districts received breakfast grants that were disbursed to 96 schools to improve their breakfast programs and to 39 schools to start new programs.

The Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants have played a major role in helping schools implement and improve their school breakfast programs. From their inception in 2001 to the present school year, Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants have resulted in 472 new school breakfast programs and 469 sites that improved their programs.

UW-Extension, working in concert with the DPI and other partners, is committed to improving the health and school success of the state's school-age children through education and outreach, and to demonstrating that school breakfast programs are a wise investment for Wisconsin.

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