

Family Living Programs Focusing on School Breakfast

Situation

Research shows that children who eat breakfast demonstrate an increased ability to learn and improved academic performance. Studies have also shown that eating breakfast improved behavior, decreases the risk of being overweight and improves the quality of a child's diet. Many children in Wisconsin, however, skip breakfast on a daily basis. This might be due to limited household income, lack of time and/or children's ever changing appetites. Indeed, one of the reasons cited by children for skipping breakfast was that they were not hungry first thing in the morning.

In 2004, Wisconsin ranked last in the nation on measures of low-income student participation in school breakfast programs; only 29% of low-income students in Wisconsin participate in school breakfast programs. Additionally, Wisconsin ranks second to last in the number of schools offering breakfast. Only 58% of Wisconsin schools that offer school lunch also offering a school breakfast program.

Response

The University of Wisconsin-Extension has partnered with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), since 2004, to assist schools with school breakfast programs and to collaborate on work related to the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast grants. As a result of this partnership various projects such as the ones described below were developed and completed.

- From 2004 to the present, 186 new school breakfast programs were created and 373 school breakfast programs were improved using the funds from the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants.
- The Wisconsin School Breakfast website was developed which includes research based information, resources and showcases schools with successful school breakfast programs. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/food/schoolbreakfast/index.cfm>
- A brochure for parents, both in English and in Spanish, extolling the benefits of breakfast and informing them of the school breakfast program. This was developed and made available online through the Wisconsin School Breakfast website. These brochures are also distributed to various schools and used at conferences, workshops etc.
- The first Wisconsin School Breakfast Conference was organized in the October 2006 for grantees with great success. Based on findings from the first conference, a second Wisconsin School Breakfast Conference was planned for October of 2007.
- A listserv and a series of Wisline Web sessions were developed as means to provide support and information to grantees.
- A school food service survey was developed and administered for two consecutive years to better capture the needs of school food service personnel as they relate to school breakfast programs.

Outcomes

Strides are being made to increase school and student participation in school breakfast programs in the state of Wisconsin. This is evidenced by the fact that Wisconsin had the highest increase in participation in the nation in the 2005-2006 school year, both in the number of schools participating in the program (24.2%) and in the number of low income students participating (14.2%). In the 2006-07 academic year, 110 school districts received breakfast grants which were distributed to 142 schools for breakfast program improvement and to 74 schools for breakfast program startup. Applicants included school principals, school food service directors, school nurses, etc. In many cases applicants applied for the funds to be used in several schools in their school district. These overall increases are due in part to the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants that have helped schools implement and improve school breakfast programs. Indeed, from its inception in 2001 and by the end of the 2006-07 academic year, the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants have resulted in 433 new school breakfast programs and 373 sites that improved their programs.

The Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants are supported by the collaboration of the University of Wisconsin–Extension and the Department of Public Instruction and by the development of press releases, resources that provide support to schools, the Wisconsin School Breakfast website and other accomplishments. Efforts are also focused to increase awareness of the benefits of breakfast and school breakfast programs by networking with other organizations.

School Breakfast Program Success 2006-07

Schools were surveyed to learn about successes related to school breakfast programs during the 2006-07 academic year. The 2006-07 Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grant survey responses were positive in regard to the success of breakfast programs and to the influence of the grants in general. About half of the survey respondents indicated they used the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants to start a new breakfast program. Respondents were asked to rate the success of the school breakfast programs

- Eighty-four percent (84%) cited increased student support as a successful or very successful outcome as a result of offering a school breakfast program
- Eighty-eight percent (88%) indicated an increase in average daily participation as a successful or very successful outcome as a result of offering a school breakfast program. Sixty-five (65%) percent of the respondents, who indicated they experienced an increase in average daily participation, saw an increase of greater than 10%. Sixty-eight (68%) percent of respondents that experienced such an increase attribute it directly to the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants they received that year.
- Over three quarter (77%) of respondents indicated their successes would have been hard, very hard or impossible to accomplish without the Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants.
- In terms of garnering support for their school breakfast programs, over half of the respondents indicated that more support from teachers would have made the implementation or improvement of their school breakfast program easier. Nearly half indicated that 1) more marketing ideas and materials would have helped (47%) and that 2) more parental support would have been useful (46%).

- The majority of the respondents (75%) indicated that the October 2006 Breakfast Conference, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Department of Public Instruction had been of importance to them in the past. Close to half of the respondents indicated that both of these organizations' websites were of importance to them.
- The creation of an online breakfast newsletter is currently being developed which will be distributed through the various school nutrition listservs and available through the University of Wisconsin-Extension (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/food/schoolbreakfast/newsletter.cfm>) website. Since marketing and information pertaining to school breakfast programs were cited as being of significant importance in the survey, the newsletter would serve as an ideal medium to make these resources available to school personnel. Preliminary plans include developing three online publications (Fall, Winter and Spring) that will be electronically accessible to school personnel. Announcements of the newsletters will be made by email to all school food service authorities via a list of contacts from the Department of Public Instruction and through state and national listservs for greater reach.

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