

Wisconsin's school breakfast programs have statewide impact



“The school breakfast conference was a great example of the type of training and education that school nutrition professionals can use to improve breakfast programming in their schools.”

--Jon Janowski, Director of Advocacy, Hunger Task Force

Situation

Research continues to highlight the benefits of eating breakfast. Studies show that both children and adults who eat breakfast are better able to maintain a healthy weight and have a healthier body mass index. Children who eat breakfast consistently demonstrate an increased ability to learn as well as improved behavior, mood and academic performance.

Despite the numerous benefits associated with eating breakfast, many children in Wisconsin skip breakfast on a daily basis due to lack of time, appetite or limited household income. One way to ensure that children benefit from a healthy start to their day is to participate in school breakfast. However, the limited availability of school breakfast programs in Wisconsin is an issue that continues to be of highest importance for the state. In 2004, Wisconsin ranked second to last in the number of schools offering breakfast, with only 58% of Wisconsin schools that offered school lunch also offering a school breakfast program. In addition, 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 participated in school breakfast programs.

While schools often cited start-up and labor costs as barriers for starting a program, they also indicated that lack of awareness about the program and its benefits among teachers, administrators, parents and other school staff often led to a lack of support for the program.

Response

University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Programs has worked with the Department of Public Instruction since 2004 to address school breakfast issues. Since then,

increasing the number of schools offering a breakfast program has been a high-priority goal. UW-Extension and the DPI joined forces to increase awareness of the research-supported nutritional and academic benefits of eating a healthy breakfast, as well as develop and share various types of evidence-based school breakfast outreach materials to schools across the state. In addition, UW-Extension and DPI collaborated on work related to the Nutrition Enhancement grants which encourage more schools to apply for start-up funds for new School Breakfast Programs.

- UW-Extension hosted several conferences and workshops to help professionals network with others and hear experiences related to other Wisconsin breakfast programs. Many attendees commented they were of great value to them. Eight conferences have been offered since 2006, half of which were co-sponsored by organizations such as the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board.
- Nearly 350 people attended the three school breakfast conferences held across the state in 2010. Other efforts focused on conducting nine grant writing workshops that provided school nutrition professionals training they needed to apply and submit grants to expand their breakfast programs.
- In an effort to expand communication and increase access to school breakfast information to a wider audience, a variety of social media resources were created. The Wisconsin School Breakfast Program blog collects information about



breakfast research, best practices, and more. The Wisconsin School Breakfast Program Facebook page provides another venue for news and events.

- Information from the Wisconsin School Breakfast Program is also available through a listserv and online newsletter. The Wisconsin School Breakfast listserv is a quick way for schools to post and receive answers to their school breakfast questions from peers across the state. The 450 Wisconsin School Breakfast listserv members also receive the Breakfast Scoop, an online breakfast newsletter created in 2007. The newsletter, which highlights articles about breakfast and school nutrition, is published three times a year and is also available on the Wisconsin School Breakfast Program blog and the DPI's school nutrition website.

Outcomes

Continued efforts from UW-Extension and other partner organizations as well as support from the Nutrition Enhancement Grants have resulted in consistent increases in school and student participation in the school breakfast program.

- The latest data from the 2009-10 school year indicates that 65.8% of schools in Wisconsin that serve school lunch also offer the school breakfast program, compared to 87.1% of schools nationally. In terms of low-income student participation, 40.3% of Wisconsin's low-income students participate in the program compared to 47.2% of low-income children nationwide.
- In the 2009-10 school year, the state was in the top five performing states for greatest percent change in the number of low-income students participating in the program and top six

performing states for showing greatest percent change in the number of schools participating in the school breakfast program.

- In the 2008-09 school year, Wisconsin was in the top 10 states in the nation to show greatest percent change in the number of schools with a school breakfast program.
- Wisconsin schools showed remarkable increases in the number of schools and low-income students participating in school breakfast programs between 2005-2008. In the 2005-06 school year, Wisconsin had the highest increase in both the number of schools and low-income students participating in school breakfast in the nation and continued an upward trend of student participation through 2008.

In the most recent allocations of nutrition enhancement breakfast grants, 49 different school districts received grants which were distributed to 33 schools for breakfast program startup and 47 schools for breakfast program improvement.

The Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants are supported by the collaboration of UW-Extension and the Department of Public Instruction and by the development of press releases, support resources for schools, the Wisconsin School Breakfast website and other accomplishments. Partnerships with multiple state agencies also enhance breakfast promotion across the state. Efforts continue to focus on working with schools to review the cost/benefit of school breakfast programs, increasing awareness of the benefit of breakfast and working with additional organizations to increase the number of schools that offer school breakfast in Wisconsin.

For more information, contact

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“The School Breakfast Programs conference was not only a great source of information but also inspired me to try new things in my program.”

--*Food service director, Eleva-Strum School District*

