



Wisconsin's School Breakfast programs have statewide impact

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 a healthier body mass index. Children who eat breakfast consistently demonstrate an increased ability to learn, as well as improved behavior and performance in the classroom.

Despite the numerous benefits associated with eating breakfast, many children in Wisconsin miss breakfast daily due to lack of time, appetite or limited household income. One way to ensure that children have a healthy start to their day is through participation in school breakfast.

Response

The University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Programs has worked with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) since 2004 to address issues regarding implementation and participation in school breakfast. Increasing the number of schools offering a breakfast program has been a high-priority goal. UW-Extension and 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 tested school breakfast outreach materials to schools across the state. UW-Extension and DPI also collaborated on awarding small Nutrition

Enhancement Grant funds to encourage more schools to start or improve existing 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. Ten conferences have been offered since 2006, most co-sponsored or supported by organizations such as the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board.

Close to 200 people attended the latest conference, Healthy Food for All, held in Neenah in 2014. The conference goal was to connect the efforts of food service directors to enhance food security and health for children through school breakfast programs with the broader health and wellness community. Attendees cited networking with diverse stakeholders, linking work to other opportunities, and learning about a variety of topics addressing many aspects of food insecurity, as benefits of attending the conference.

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, including a school breakfast video that targeted parent outreach. The video was a collaborative effort between the DPI, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, UW Clearinghouse

“...I feel more prepared to engage in conversation with the food manager in each [school] district to discuss the 2014-15 USDA requirements! Thank you for an amazing conference!”

—County public health nurse who attended Healthy Food for All

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and UW-Extension. The video is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHR7eECbKaE.

Information to enhance School Breakfast Programs 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. Over 400 Wisconsin School Breakfast listserv members also receive the Breakfast Scoop, an online breakfast newsletter created in 2007. The newsletter highlights national and local information about school nutrition, is published three times a year, and available on the Wisconsin School Breakfast Program blog.

The greatest numbers of students participate in school breakfast when there is a breakfast in the classroom or breakfast-after-the-bell program in place. To help local food service directors interested in starting such a program, a Wisconsin Breakfast In the Classroom Toolkit was created in 2013.

Outcomes

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

The latest data from the 2012-13 school year indicates that 74% of schools in Wisconsin that serve school lunch also offer breakfast, compared to 90% of schools nationally. In terms of low-income student participation, 44% of Wisconsin's low-income students participate in the program compared to 52% of low-income children nationally.

In the 2010-11 school year, the state achieved double-digit growth in the number of low-income students participating in the program (10.6%) and was in the top two performing states for showing the greatest percent change in the number of schools participating in the school breakfast program.

In the 2009-10 school year, Wisconsin was in the top six states in the nation to show greatest percent change in the number of schools with a school breakfast program.

Wisconsin schools have shown steady increases in the number of schools participating in school breakfast programs. Starting in the 2004-05 school year, the number of schools participating in school breakfast was 26.5%. Wisconsin has continued an upward trend of student and school participation through 2012-13, with 74% of schools taking part in school breakfast programs.

Allocations of nutrition enhancement breakfast grants lead to 49 different school districts receiving grants, which were distributed to 33 schools for breakfast program startup and 63 schools for breakfast program improvements or equipment.

The Federal Nutrition Enhancement Breakfast Grants were supported by the collaboration of UW-Extension and the DPI. The development of press releases, resources for schools, the Wisconsin School Breakfast website and DPI's website help schools create breakfast programs. Partnerships with other state agencies focus on increasing awareness of the benefits of breakfast and working with additional organizations to increase the number of schools that offer school breakfast in Wisconsin.

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University of Wisconsin, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties cooperating.

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