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 Committee
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Westbury School District’s “Breakfast on the Go” Program Gets Students Ready to Learn

The Westbury School District in Westbury, NY began the Universal Breakfast Program as a pilot program in March, 2009, with the goal of providing students with the proper nourishment to start their school day. The connection between nutrition and optimal learning has become increasingly clear, and the Westbury School District’s commitment to this program is part of our overall mission to educate the whole child and help every child succeed. With the current pilot program, at the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten levels, students are served a hot and cold breakfast in their classrooms, while at the Elementary and Secondary levels, students who wish to participate eat a hot or cold breakfast in their school cafeteria. (Students are led by school staff directly from the bus to eat breakfast.) Currently, at the Pre-K and Kindergarten levels, approximately 570 breakfasts are served daily, while at the Elementary level, 431 out of 1632 students participate, and at the Secondary level, 300 out of 1900 students participate. We will implement the “Breakfast on the Go” program in November, 2009, with the goal of making breakfast accessible to every student. Under this program, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students will continue to eat breakfast in their classrooms, while Elementary levels students will receive a bagged or boxed breakfast upon exiting their school bus, to eat in the classrooms, and students at the Secondary level will arrive by school bus 15 minutes earlier to allow more time to eat breakfast in their school cafeteria.

Westbury Schools	Traditional Breakfast	“In the Classroom” Breakfast
Pre K – K	Served hot and cold; exit bus and go to classroom; aides assist with delivered bag breakfast; 570 served	Served hot and cold; exit bus and go to classroom; aides assist with delivered bag breakfast; 570 served
Elementary grades 1-5	Students who wish to participate eat in the cafeteria; 431 of 1632 served	Box/bag breakfast is delivered to the classroom; <u>All 1632 served</u>
Middle School Grades 6-8	Students who wish to participate eat in the cafeteria; 125 of 800 served	Box/bag breakfast is picked up before going to the classroom; <u>All 800 served</u>
High School Grades 9-12	Students who wish to participate eat in the cafeteria; 175 of 1100 served	All students participate and have greater choices in the cafeteria; <u>1100 served</u> ; Transportation scheduled for flexibility 15 minuets earlier creating a relaxed atmosphere

Background

In 2004, a Wellness Committee was established with representatives from each of the district's six schools. An obesity study was performed at our High School by the school nurse that indicated that the majority of our high school students were overweight. To address the healthy eating solutions, the Superintendent, High School Nurse and I decided on a specific course of action. A Nutrition Committee was established with the overall idea to affect a paradigm shift in the foods served and selected in the school cafeterias and vending machines through awareness and a district-wide commitment to helping students and the community move away from carbohydrates, which turn to sugars in the digestive process, to foods that enhance activity and concentration. The idea of sustaining a balance in metabolism to permit sustained concentration and endurance for more effective and efficient student achievement in the physical and the academic areas is the heart of the purpose.

We first set our goals and did so by being one of the first to implement our District Wellness policy in accordance with the re-authorization act of 2004. Our next ingredient was to communicate. We achieved this by forming a district wide nutrition committee which consists of representatives from each of our schools, District Administrators, Students, as well as members of our community. This committee was charged with the task of monitoring the existing program, implementing any new programs and communicating our goals throughout the community. The committee also solicited new and exiting ways to introduce good nutrition as well as the importance of physical fitness and its part in making the body healthy. The group also reached out to local hospitals and organizations to help educate our families about proper nutrition.

Family nutrition information nights are being held. Parents participate in interactive workshops conducted by medical professionals through a partnership with The Institute for Healthcare Disparities at Nassau University Medical Center. A demonstration using cultural foods to prepare healthy meals and samples of health snacks, as well as cookbooks in English and Spanish are provided.

Demographics

Student population – 4,200 Pre-K – 12, at four elementary schools, one middle school, and on high school – 61% Hispanic, 35.4% Black, 2% White, 1.1% Asian, .3% Multiracial, .2% American Indian or Alaskan Native

Free & Reduced Lunch – 84%

District Attendance – 94%

Graduation Rate – 91% of which 80% are New York State Regents Diplomas

The district employs 43 people in their Nutrition Program.

Daily breakfasts served have increased from 985 to 1,240.

Action Plan

We began by looking at food choices in our cafeteria. It started with the most important need of the day, breakfast. The Committee's Action Plan was the following:

- Data collection: The Committee Members visited each of the schools to observe the food choices available and children's eating habits.
- Invitations to vendors to present samples of more nutritious choices.
- Visiting schools to share recommendations with staff for changing the school breakfast menu, to not only replace drinks and snacks with more nutritious ones but to:
 - Replace white flour bagels with whole wheat bagels, multigrain muffins and non-sugar cereals.
 - Reduce the portion sizes of high content carbohydrate foods, and
 - Add fresh fruit selections.
- Announcing a teacher led class contest to create a nutritional value chart for the cafeteria display to promote nutritional awareness.
- Drafting a Wellness Policy which includes nutritional guidelines.
- Drafting a policy on Food Services Choices for approval by the Board of Education that would permit district-wide implementation of the recommended changes.
- Recognizing each school that makes substantial changes in eating habits and exercise.
- Recognizing the community member responsible for brining this endeavor to the attention of the local Lion's Club and Rotary Club who responded by supplying the involved grade levels with bushels of apples for field day.

Summary

School nurses report that there has been a substantial increase in the awareness that nutrition has on being healthy and student performance. The district's population is 84% free and reduced lunch (denoting the percentage of families living at or below the poverty level). The majority of the students are English Language Learners. District data shows an improvement in the ELA and math scores of this population on the New York State Assessments. Academic intervention strategies are coupled with the Healthy Choices Initiative resulting in this improvement. Traditionally, students are more alert and participatory in the morning classes in large measure due to the impact that the healthy choices make on their metabolism from the breakfast. The secondary teachers see an improvement in the attendance rates in the afternoon classes and in the class participation of students in these classes.

All constituents agree that there has been a significant emphasis placed on food choices and exercise by the schools; that teachers are embedding discussion about nutritional ingredients and their effects on performance in their instruction; that Parent Workshops and Newsletters contain information on the components of Healthy Lifestyles: food choices and exercise; that administrators and teachers are making better choices as a result of serving as role models for the students and community, and that staff and parents are designing after-school support groups (exercise and diet clubs) for themselves and students.

In an effort to promote nutrition awareness and further demonstrate Westbury's commitment to the education of children on the importance of balanced nutrition and its direct correlation to learning, we implemented a pilot breakfast program. This program known as a "Universal Breakfast" provides a free "on the go" breakfast to each student in each school. This program was very successful and confirms our goal to provide accessibility to all students. Students are encouraged to arrive to school early to eat a healthy breakfast prior to the start of the instructional program so that they can be "fit" for learning.

Recommendations

To make this program more feasible for school districts, our recommendations to Congress are the following:

1. Give school districts more commodity foods that can be used in preparing breakfast meals.
2. Increase the per-meal reimbursement to school districts, as a financial incentive to school districts, and to make the program more financially feasible.

Ref: The literature is rich with reference to the effects of proper eating habits on school children's intelligence and academic performance (Bogden, J.F. *Fit, healthy, and ready to learn: a school health policy guide*. Alexandria, Va.: NASBE, 2000; Schoenthaler, S. Abstracts of early papers on the effects of vitamin mineral supplementation on IQ and behavior. *Personality and Individual Difference* 1991). There is also substantial evidence of the effects of improper diets on school achievement (American School Food association. Impact of hunger and malnutrition on student achievement. *School Board Food Service Research Review* 1989).