



WASHINGTON STATE
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EXTENSION



FOOD \$ENSE: NUTRITION EDUCATION IN COWLITZ COUNTY

BY THE NUMBERS

- 1,440 youth participated in the program. 21% were Hispanic, 2% were Native American, and 2% were Pacific Islander or Asian.
- Parents of the 1,440 youth acknowledged receiving the parent educational newsletter and responded back to us that they read them and used some of the information.
- 5 of 7 elementary schools in the Longview School District have a free and reduced lunch population of 59%-89%.
- 3 of 7 elementary schools in the Kelso School District have a free and reduced lunch population of 51%-95%.
- In the 2016 school year, to date, 1,815 youth participated in this program.

2016

ISSUE

In 2015, 15.8% of Washington's population received basic food assistance. Cowlitz County ranks third in the state with 25% of its population receiving food assistance. Having limited income puts these families at risk for consuming foods with low nutritional quality and getting less physical activity. Consequently, they are at increased risk for nutritional-related health issues including obesity and chronic disease. Youth in these families are not getting adequate nutrition or meals that help them perform well in school. In schools with a high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced meals, attendance and test scores suffer. At 8 of the 14 elementary schools in Cowlitz County, 50% or more of the population receives free or reduced breakfasts and lunches. In 3 schools the rates are between 91% and 95%.

RESPONSE

Food \$ense in Cowlitz County is funded through a SNAP-Ed federal grant. Two nutrition educators work in 7 elementary schools teaching a series of 6 lessons to youth in grades K-5. Topics include the basic food groups, importance of eating healthy, selecting healthy foods, food safety, hand washing, importance of physical activity, and opportunities to taste new foods. Educators emphasize increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk, and decreased consumption of high-fat, high-sugar foods. Additional messages emphasize portion size and the importance of physical activity. Parents of all participating youth are provided a weekly newsletter that covers similar topics to teach them about healthy eating, making healthy food choices, and encouraging them to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. There are suggested activities that parents and youth can do together such as snack recipes, physical activities, and fruit and vegetable challenges.

Outside the classroom education, nutrition educators visit the lunchroom to interact with youth about their food choices at lunch. They display a poster with the MyPlate lunch tray image. The school lunch menu for each day is written in the appropriate food group areas on the tray sections to show them how they can get a balanced lunch that day. Parents are offered a series of classes with tips about shopping on a limited budget and making healthy food choices for their families.



QUOTES

"Our family enjoyed learning about the importance of eating healthy foods and what it does for our bodies. Understanding this motivated our kids to eat more fruits and vegetables." - Elementary school student

"My family decided we aren't going to watch TV a lot and me and my mom will go to the gym or do something active together." - A third grader, who reported that she is exercising more, watching less TV, eating vegetables she doesn't like, and drinking more water.

"I hear the kids talking about food groups and which ones may be missing from lunch that day, or celebrating [kids] who have and eat all the food groups at lunch." - Elementary school teacher

PARTNERS

Kelso School District (Barnes, Beacon Hill, Caitlin, and Wallace Elementary Schools), Longview School District (Mint Valley, Northlake, and Olympic Elementary Schools), ESD 112 STEPS Program, and Cowlitz River Club

IMPACTS

In 2015, 1,440 families were impacted by the Food \$ense program in Cowlitz County. Changes in behavior that occurred as a result of our programs in the schools include:

- 454 families use food labels to compare the nutrition content of food;
- 1,440 youth consume fruits and vegetables every day;
- 435 youth now eat breakfast daily before going to school;
- 318 youth now participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week;
- 1,440 wash their hands before eating; and
- 485 wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.

275 parents report the following changes in behavior occurred after reading the parent newsletter and hearing about what their children learned in class:

- 206 eat more meals together as a family;
- 175 use MyPlate for selecting healthy snacks and meals;
- 275 tried new recipes using new foods;
- 217 eat more fruits and vegetables every day; and
- 185 read nutrition labels more often when choosing foods.

Classroom teachers report that students are eating more fruits and vegetables at lunch and fewer processed snack foods, and they are choosing white milk over chocolate milk. Teachers are modeling good food choices and have adopted one or more of the nutrition practices.

In one school, a Student Nutrition Advisory Panel (SNAP) was created with 3rd through 5th graders. They worked on projects that encourage healthy food selections and more physical activity. The group sponsored a healthy yogurt snack and salad contest. The winning recipe was featured on the school menu.



Food \$ense

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