



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## FOOD \$ENSE: NUTRITION EDUCATION IN CLARK COUNTY

### BY THE NUMBERS

- 4,519 youth participated: 15% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 3% African American, 2% Native American, and 2% Pacific Islander.
- Parents of the 1,484 youth acknowledged receiving the parent educational newsletter and responded that they read them and used some of the information.
- In 3 of 9 Clark County school districts, 30 of the 43 elementary schools have a free and reduced lunch population of 52%-89%.

### 2016 ISSUE

In 2015, 16.2% of Washington's population received basic food assistance. Clark County ranks 6th in the state for the highest number of people living in poverty. Only 26% of Clark County residents eat fruits and vegetables every day and 53.6% engage in regular daily physical activity. Though the population is fairly active, 25.8% of Clark County's population is obese and 35.5% are overweight. Consequently, they are at increased risk for nutrition-related health issues and chronic disease. Compared to other income levels, low-income families consume fewer fruits, vegetables, and low-fat milk, and more high-fat foods, sweetened beverages, and other non-nutritive foods. Many lack the skills to select and prepare healthful foods within their income. In schools with a high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced meals, attendance and test scores suffer. Thirty of 43 elementary schools in 3 of Clark County's 9 school districts have between 52% and 89% of the students receiving free or reduce breakfast and lunches.

### RESPONSE

Food \$ense in Clark County is funded through a SNAP-Ed federal grant. Nine nutrition educators work in 17 elementary schools and one middle school, teaching a series of 6 lessons to youth in grades K-8. Topics include the basic food groups, importance of eating healthy, selecting healthy foods, food safety, hand washing, importance of physical activity, and tasting new foods. Educators emphasize increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat milk, and decreased consumption of high-fat, high-sugar foods. Additional messages focus on portion size and the importance of physical activity. Parents of the youth are provided with a weekly newsletter that covers similar topics. 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, nutrition educators visit lunchrooms to interact with youth about their food choices and encourage them to eat their fruits and vegetables and drink low-fat milk instead of chocolate milk. They display the MyPlate lunch tray image with the school lunch menu written in the appropriate food group areas on the tray sections to show students how they can get a balanced meal. Farm to Fork is a field trip opportunity that connects 5th graders that are learning about where their food comes from with a food production experience. Through local grant funding and school support, 6 schools brought students to The Heritage Farm to learn about how food grows, the food production system, and local food access. Plans are underway to make this an annual event for 5th graders.



## QUOTES

“We eat healthier snacks, eat seasonal fruits, and moderated our way of eating. We read every label for nutrition information. My daughter likes the new foods tasted in class and we make them at home all the time. We now walk for 45 minutes each day for mother-daughter time.” - Parent

“We eat better. We drink more water, eat more vegetables, and exercise together as a family” - Parent

Multiple teachers said they hear their students talking about the nutrition objectives after class, and the students also discuss nutrition when they’re eating breakfast or lunch.

## PARTNERS

Evergreen School District, Washougal School District, Clark County Food Bank, Share House, 5 Family Resource Centers in Evergreen School District

## IMPACTS

In 2015, 4,519 youth and their families were impacted by the Food \$ense program in Clark County. Changes in behavior that occurred as a result of Food \$ense programs in the schools included:

- 3,750 youth understand the relationship between eating healthy foods and their health;
- 3,931 families use food labels to compare the nutrition content of food;
- 3,389 youth consume fruits and vegetables every day;
- 1,130 youth now eat breakfast that includes 3 food groups daily before going to school;
- 1,084 youth now participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week;
- 4,519 youth wash their hands before eating; and
- 1,335 youth wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.

1,117 parents of youth in the classrooms reported that the following changes in behavior occurred in their families after reading the parent newsletter and hearing about what their children learned in class:

- 755 families increased their physical activity each week;
- 802 eat more meals together as a family;
- 644 use MyPlate for selecting healthy snacks and meals;
- 878 families eat more fruits and vegetables every day; and
- 992 read nutrition labels more often when choosing foods.

In 2016, to date, Food \$ense has worked with 5,225 youth in the schools. In addition, Food \$ense is reaching out to more than 200 families at food pantries, teaching them how to use food found in their food boxes. They are tasting new food combinations and planning to make the recipes when they get home.



# Food \$ense

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