



Wisconsin's school breakfast campaign bears fruit, energizing student activity and learning

Susan Bostian Young

the Breakfast CHALLENGE

Photo courtesy of No Kid Hungry

The results of Wisconsin's campaign promoting the benefits of a healthy breakfast are in. The Wisconsin School Breakfast Challenge decreased student tardiness while increasing reimbursements to schools, student focus and administrative support for the School Breakfast Program.

Hunger Task Force, No Kid Hungry, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin sponsored the second annual challenge to help school districts give every student a great start to the day. From December 2019 through March 2020, 236 schools across Wisconsin competed to serve more breakfasts to students. Winning schools received cash prizes for increasing participation. No Kid

Hungry, a national campaign to end child hunger, also provided financial grants for equipment that enhanced or expanded breakfast service.

While easing the financial strain for families in need, school breakfast programs that maximize participation also ensure that financial resources from the breakfast program benefit all students.

St. Anthony's 2nd Street School in Milwaukee, the winner of the "Colby" category for school districts with greater than 875 students, saw average daily participation in the school breakfast program rise from 20% of its students from December 2018 through February 2019 to 58% during the same time period the following year. St. Anthony's breakfast reimbursement also increased 38% for the challenge period.

"I am very excited about this achievement, as it was a challenge," Food Service Director Lizbeth Maturin said. "We implemented Breakfast After the Bell so the students who arrived later had the opportunity of having breakfast."

Breakfast After the Bell helps older students who tend to sleep later, arrive to school independently, and move around the halls when changing classes. St. Anthony's made meals more accessible, trained food service staff to communicate more, informed students what was offered for breakfast every day, and encouraged them to enjoy a healthy breakfast in the classroom.

"Research shows there are academic and nutritional benefits to eating breakfast," State Superintendent of Public Instruction Carolyn

WISCONSIN SCHOOL BREAKFAST CHALLENGE WINNERS

CATEGORY	DISTRICT	SCHOOL	% POINT INCREASE	PRIZE
COLBY WINNER	St. Anthony School District	St. Anthony 2nd Street	38	\$1,000
COLBY RUNNER-UP	Appleton Area School District	Franklin Elementary School	37	\$750
SWISS WINNER	Hillsboro School District	Hillsboro Elementary School	36	\$1,000
SWISS RUNNER-UP	Clayton School District	Clayton Elementary School	33	\$750
MOZZARELLA WINNER	DL Hines Preparatory Academy of Excellence	DL Hines College Prep Academy of Excellence	4	\$1,000
CHEDDAR WINNER	Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School	Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School	38	\$1,000
CHEDDAR RUNNER-UP	Gibraltar School District	Gibraltar Elementary School	17	\$750
BIG CHEESE WINNER	Stevens Point Area School District	P.J. Jacobs Junior High School	10	\$1,000
BIG CHEESE RUNNER-UP	Wausau School District	John Muir Middle School	1	\$750

COLBY: District enrollment greater than 875 students

SWISS: District enrollment between 275 and 875 students

MOZZARELLA: District enrollment less than 275 students

CHEDDAR: Districts implementing a new breakfast program in 2019-20

BIG CHEESE: An optional bonus category for all participating schools. Schools had the chance to do various breakfast-related activities and the top two schools were awarded based on the amount of points earned (participation data was not included in the analysis).

Winners in each category were determined based on the growth in the percentage of the student body participating in breakfast. The analysis compared the average daily participation from December 2018 through February 2019 to the participation from December 2019 through February 2020. Data was provided by the DPI and analyzed by No Kid Hungry.

Stanford Taylor wrote in support of the challenge in an October 2019 letter. “Students who eat a healthy school breakfast have significantly higher scores in math, increased attendance, improved behavior and decreased tardiness.”

The elementary schools in Hillsboro and Clayton won in the “Swiss” category for districts with between 275 and 875 enrolled students, for an increase in breakfast participation during the challenge.

“The Second Chance Breakfast gave children the opportunity to eat if they were late to school or were not hungry when they first arrived,” Hillsboro School District Food Service Director Carolyn Kannenberg said.

“To get them to come for breakfast required help from the teaching staff,” Clayton Food Service Manager Diane

Swiontek said. “As the students got off the bus, they were directed to come to the commons instead of running out to play.”

National School Breakfast Week, sponsored by the School Nutrition Association, coincided with the last week of the challenge. SNA provides themed materials each year for schools to plan and promote their breakfast celebrations. Adding these elements of fun to school breakfast increases participation.

“Breakfast week helps too,” Swiontek explained. “We play trivia games with prizes. The students’ names are entered each time they eat breakfast.”

Creating a fun, engaging and educational meal service motivates students to get to school in time to enjoy healthy, nutritious breakfasts.

Breakfast After the Bell is the most successful breakfast service model employed by challenge winners. It is no coincidence that Governor Tony Evers, in a letter to school administrators, encouraged all schools “to adopt Breakfast After the Bell for their students.”

To help students start the school day ready to learn, DL Hines Prep School in Milwaukee began serving Breakfast After the Bell. The school won the “Mozzarella” category for districts with fewer than 275 students. Launita Dawson, administrative professional at DL Hines, said its implementation “was one of the main changes that assisted in our ability to serve more students for breakfast. The administrators found that when the students are rushed in the morning, due to any number of reasons, it often

According to a 2015 survey of School Nutrition Association members, 96% said their student participation increases during National School Breakfast Week. **SNA website:** schoolnutrition.org/meetings/events/nsbw/2020/about



alters the student's focus. Allowing them to receive breakfast minimized any agitation and assisted in their ability to have a positive day."

Carrie Willer is principal of Franklin Elementary School in the Appleton Area School District, a school that saw breakfast participation rise by 37 percentage points. She says teachers had questions at the outset.

Would serving breakfast in the classroom be messy, gumming up carpets and books? Would it take too much time? Instead, she and her staff were pleasantly surprised by the positive effect that eating breakfast together had on learning.

Children came to class from the playground more quickly when they

knew food was waiting. They were less distracted when they were full. And they stopped repeatedly asking when lunch would be.

To emphasize the importance of administrative support in school breakfast program success, the DPI's School Nutrition Team devised a new feature for the 2019-20 Challenge: The Big Cheese. This bonus category, open to all schools, awarded points for activities during National School Breakfast Week that promoted the program and engaged principals, school board members and superintendents by inviting them to eat breakfast at school and to post on social media in support of school breakfast.

P.J. Jacobs Junior High School in Stevens Point jumped on the chal-

lenge. Principal Dan Dobratz sent out a letter to all families introducing their new Second Chance Breakfast, sang on morning announcements to excite students, posted on social media in support of the school breakfast program and joined students for breakfast. P.J. Jacobs won the Big Cheese category and increased participation by 10% during the challenge.

"Increasing breakfast participation is a win for both kids and schools," according to the Hunger Task Force. The organization hosted the challenge website that featured a free toolkit for schools. It includes resources, statistics, letters of support and serving ideas. Having worked for more than 40 years



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towards universal school breakfast, Hunger Task Force speaks to the benefits of school breakfast to children and the ways in which school breakfast programs make financial sense for schools.

In Wisconsin, schools that participate in the National School Breakfast Program receive federal and state reimbursements for every qualifying breakfast served to students. Many schools that already participate in the National School Lunch Program can successfully implement a breakfast program, which generates extra revenue with little additional labor costs.

“The most surprising thing I took note of was how this program leveled the playing field,” Stevens



Principal Dan Dobratz promoting breakfast at P.J. Jacobs Middle School.

Point Area School District food service supervisor Crystal Orley said. “I was expecting the participation of students signed up for free and reduced-priced lunches to significantly increase. Those numbers did increase, but more noticeably, kids with a normal pay status skyrocketed ... To me, this was an indication that there is a need for all students

across the board to be able to have access to food after the school day has started and before lunch, not just students from low-income families, and this should be taken into consideration by all districts contemplating this program.” ■

Susan Bostian Young is on the School Nutrition Team at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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