

Elementary school students learn the benefits of eating breakfast

The Situation

Children receive many benefits from eating breakfast. Research has shown that eating breakfast can help improve math, reading, and standardized test scores. Breakfast helps children pay attention, perform problem-solving tasks, and improves memory. Additionally, children who eat breakfast are more likely to behave well in school and get along with their peers than those who do not. Children who eat breakfast are likely to have fewer absences and incidents of tardiness than those who do not. By eating breakfast, students get more of important nutrients, vitamins and minerals such as calcium, dietary fiber, folate, and protein.

However, most children don't eat breakfast all the time, according to surveys conducted by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. They found that 42 percent of Caucasian and Hispanic children don't eat breakfast all the time, and 59 percent of African American children don't eat breakfast all the time.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension Educators developed a program, "Be Your Best with Breakfast," to teach elementary-age students the importance of breakfast and to motivate them to eat breakfast daily.

Children learned that breakfast means to break the 10-14 hour fast they have every night while they sleep. After reviewing the food groups, students were taught that a complete breakfast is made of foods from at least three different food groups. They learned about several complete breakfasts that could be prepared in less than five minutes. Younger students listened to [The Hatseller and the Monkeys](#), a children's book in which the main character learns the importance of eating breakfast. Older students



Be Your Best with Breakfast presented by Marnie Spencer.

evaluated a breakfast they had eaten recently and planned a complete breakfast. Each student received a full page set of magnets provided by the Idaho Dairy Council that contained motivational messages to promote daily breakfast consumption.

Over 3,100 students were taught in two Franklin County and eight Bingham County elementary schools and on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Students were from ethnically-diverse backgrounds. Nineteen percent of the students were Hispanic, 10 percent were American Indian, and almost one percent was Black.

Program Outcomes

Students in grades 3-5 completed a quiz before the class and immediately after the class. The number (N) of students answering varied from 999-1145 depending on the question. A McNemar's Crosstabs test was

used to determine if pre-quiz and post-quiz scores were significantly different. Results are shown on the table.

	% correct Pre-evaluation	% correct Post-evaluation	N
Knew that breakfast is the most important meal of the day *	91%	93%	1145
Knew that they should you eat breakfast every day	94%	96%	1135
Do/will eat breakfast every day**	82%	92%	1133
Knew that breakfast should include foods from at least 3 food groups **	52%	82%	1135
Were able to write a sample complete breakfast **	51%	69%	999

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

The Future

Healthy lifestyle education programs for youth will continue to be taught in elementary schools and in out-of-school settings. Other topics that will be taught include eating mindfully, choosing healthy snacks, using ChooseMyPlate as a resource for making food choices, and choosing grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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