

Using Innovative Breakfast Options to Promote Student Health

Fremont High School - Oakland, CA

2014

WHY IS SCHOOL BREAKFAST IMPORTANT?

Adequate nutrition is essential to a student's health and ability to focus in the classroom, and breakfast is especially important. Students who eat breakfast regularly score better on tests and have better grades, and school breakfast programs can reduce absenteeism and tardiness. At Fremont High School, school Wellness Champions (health educators from the school-based health center) worked with youth leaders on campus to identify issues impacting students' wellbeing. Breakfast, or lack thereof, was a main concern: less than one in ten students were taking advantage of the free breakfast served before school and many students were stopping at the local corner store each morning to pick up a bag of chips and a sugary drink because they couldn't make it to the cafeteria before school started. Wellness Champions and students decided to work together to find a solution to Fremont High's unhealthy breakfast situation.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 9th-12th grade
- 727 students
- 83% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals

Ethnicity:

- 54% Hispanic/Latino
- 29% African American
- 9% Other
- 8% Asian

ACTION STEPS

In an effort to create a healthy, appealing and easily accessible breakfast for students, Wellness Champions and youth leaders partnered with Oakland Unified School District Nutrition Services, Fremont cafeteria staff, and Breakfast First (a program devoted to ensuring that all students are served optimally nutritious breakfasts) to introduce a free Grab n' Go breakfast program consisting of healthy, pre-packaged meals that students could quickly pick up in the school quad on the way to their first class. Wellness Champions initiated the breakfast conversation with school staff and administrators by emphasizing the important link between healthy eating and school performance; Breakfast First helped by providing research describing why it's important for students to eat in the morning, highlighting that students are more likely to eat breakfast when it's available more than once per morning. Youth leaders worked with the Nutrition Services staff to taste test and select the most appealing breakfast options, and also to market the Grab n' Go breakfast program to the rest of the student body. Grab n' Go was so successful that



Wellness Champions decided to implement a Second Chance breakfast, allowing students to pick up a bag breakfast between first and second period, and providing another opportunity for students to get needed morning nutrition.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Initially, not all Fremont High School staff were in favor of Grab n' Go breakfast. By talking with school administrators, students and cafeteria staff, the Wellness Champions were able to garner support to move the program forward. Second Chance breakfast had even more resistance than Grab n' Go; staff worried about interruptions to instructional time, wasted food, and excess trash, but Wellness Champions were able to overcome concerns and maintain Second Chance breakfast. When a garbage problem arose, Wellness Champions worked with students and teachers, who quickly educated one another on the importance of putting breakfast trash in the garbage cans to keep the campus clean. Negotiations are underway to adjust the bell schedule to provide a few extra minutes for students to grab their breakfast between classes.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

According to a Fremont Wellness Champion, instituting "Grab n' Go and Second Chance have [had] the biggest and lasting impact" of all of the school's nutrition activities. In the first year of the Grab n' Go program alone, the percentage of students eating the school breakfast increased from 8% to 25%. The first year of the combined Grab n' Go and Second Chance breakfast achieved over 50% participation among students. Although participation dropped to 30% when students were required to enter their ID number to get breakfast (this took extra time and slowed students down), the participation rate is still high for a high school breakfast program. Most importantly, students are realizing benefits from

"Teachers loved Second Chance—more than 80% wanted it. People get that this is making a difference."

Wellness Champion

Grab n' Go and Second Chance breakfast: they're less likely to be late to school, they aren't eating high fat, high sugar junk food for breakfast, and they don't end up in the health clinic with stomach aches due to hunger.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

One of the most important strategies to successfully implement a Grab n' Go or Second Chance breakfast program is buy-in from the entire school community: cafeteria staff, the Principal, teachers, and especially students. Presenting school administration and teachers with concrete data on the importance of breakfast helps to generate initial buy-in for a breakfast program; seeing the improvement in students' behavior and grades helps sustain the support from teachers and staff necessary to maintaining a breakfast program. Engaging youth in the process of designing the program, selecting the breakfast foods and marketing Grab n' Go and/or Second Chance generates student interest and excitement that leads to breakfast program success.

For More Information:

Michelle Oppen
Program Manager, Wellness
Health & Wellness Unit
Family, Schools, and Community Partnerships
Oakland Unified School District
michelle.oppen@ousd.k12.ca.us
510-273-1676

The Oakland Unified School District Wellness Champion Program is funded by S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

Prepared by Ad Lucem Consulting
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