

Collaborative Programming Boosts Nutrition Education



When setting a goal to increase variety in childrens' diet, we often mean exposing them to an expanded array of fruits and vegetables. This can be a particular challenge among children of lower income families, who tend to consume fewer fruits and vegetables.¹ Cost can be a deterrent², especially if a parent or caregiver is unsure whether the child will eat the particular fruit or vegetable.

Schools are an ideal environment for exposing children to unfamiliar fruits and vegetables. Parents do not have to pay from their limited budgets for first tastes of foods that may be rejected. The mere availability of fruits and vegetables in school can motivate children to eat them.³ Children have shown a willingness to eat fruit that is offered on the cafeteria lunch line.⁴

"Recipes for a Healthy Mind" combined two established programs in a Michigan elementary school district, one promoting reading and the other promoting nutrition, into an event that exposed children to an expanded variety of foods.

RECIPES FOR A HEALTHY MIND

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Two elementary school programs—Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) and Team Nutrition—each were required to conduct at least one event each during the school year. The goal of RIF was to encourage young children to read. Team Nutrition aimed to teach students to make food and physical activity choices for a healthy lifestyle. "Recipes for a Healthy Mind" combined these two events into one project. The objectives of the project, conducted in three different elementary schools, were to expose children to a greater variety of foods, to increase

teacher awareness of how to integrate nutrition education into the school's literacy and other programs, and to involve parents in school nutrition education projects.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for "Recipes for a Healthy Mind" was students (K-3), teachers, and parent volunteers at three South Haven (Michigan) schools. The project reached a total of 692 students, 60 teachers, and 115 parent volunteers.

RATIONALE FOR THE INTERVENTION

Over half the students (grades K-3) in the South Haven School District participate in the free/reduced-cost school meals program. Because of the low socioeconomic status of the students in the community, books and healthful foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables often are seen as luxuries rather than necessities. Parents and caregivers may be unwilling to purchase and prepare unfamiliar foods because if the family does not like the food, money will have been wasted and little will be left to purchase foods the family will eat.⁵

METHODOLOGY

To meet overall program goals for RIF, children in participating grades chose a free paperback book three times a year. The free books were funded through the combined efforts of the Federal Inexpensive Book Distribution Program, along with local chapters of United Way, Kiwanis, and the American Association of University Women. Each child also was required to take part in motivational activities that fit the particular theme of the book distribution.

A three-phase model was used to implement the "Recipes for a Healthy Mind" program at the three schools. In the planning phase, a parent volunteer coordinator, teachers, the school food service



director, the RIF coordinator, and an extension consultant were named to a planning committee. The committee developed objectives, chose food-related children's books, and created lesson plans. The media were contacted to promote the program, and parents were invited to participate in the classrooms. Food-related books were read in each classroom by parent volunteers, food-related activities were conducted, and food-tasting parties for students and parents were held during the implementation phase. These activities, too, were promoted to the media. The evaluation phase gathered feedback from students, teachers, the planning committee, and participating parents.

RESULTS

Results were difficult to measure because the program took place over a short period of time and included a one-time tasting. Nonetheless, program objectives were met. Children were exposed to a greater variety of foods and were willing to taste new foods. Teachers reported being satisfied with the lesson plans, professional assistance, and relevance of this project to other subject areas already being taught in the classroom. Parents reported that they enjoyed reading to the students, assisting with nutrition education activities, and participating in tasting parties.

PROGRAM BUDGET

Program costs were funded by the Federal Inexpensive Book Program and Michigan Team Nutrition mini-grants. "Recipes for a Healthy Mind" reached a total of 1,007 individuals (students, teachers, family members) at a cost of \$1.66 each, for a total program cost of \$1,672.00.

LESSONS LEARNED

"Teachers and food service support are essential for successful nutrition education programs. The teacher member of the planning committee helps to inform and motivate the other teachers. The school food service director provides nutrition information and practical assistance in purchasing foods for special events."

— Melinda M. Graham
Reading Is Fundamental



QUESTIONS

- Which factor is a major deterrent to fruit and vegetable consumption among children of lower income families?**
 - Lack of freshness
 - Smell
 - Availability
 - Cost
- Why are schools the ideal environment for exposing children to unfamiliar fruits and vegetables?**
 - Lunch monitors force children to eat
 - Children may be more willing to try foods served in the cafeteria
 - Schools can offer greater variety
 - Children won't know what they're eating
- Which was not an objective of the "Recipes for a Healthy Mind?"**
 - To expose children to a greater variety of foods
 - To increase teacher awareness of how to integrate nutrition education into existing programs
 - To involve parents in school nutrition education projects
 - To create a school cookbook
- How were low socioeconomic status families in the South Haven School District likely to view books and healthful foods?**
 - As luxuries rather than necessities
 - As priorities in the family budget
 - As something the school district should provide
 - As unnecessary items
- What was essential to the success of the "Recipes for a Healthy Mind" program?**
 - Enthusiastic students
 - Parent volunteers
 - Teacher and food service involvement
 - Adequate funding

ANSWERS:
1.d 2.b 3.d 4.a 5.c

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