

Bloomington School pilots breakfast in the classroom to improve learning

October 2015 – Bloomington – Staff from Westwood Elementary School partnered with the Division of Public Health to determine if the school could improve learning by increasing student participation in its breakfast program. District teachers had identified hunger as one of the top barriers to learning in a recent survey. To remove the barrier, Westwood staff pilot tested a classroom breakfast program in which students would eat a healthy breakfast with their classmates. The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), Minnesota Department of Health, backed the study. SHIP supports healthy school foods to reduce chronic disease risk factors.



Breakfast at Westwood Elementary School

Children came to school hungry

“Some of our teachers said children were coming to school without breakfast and asking when their next meal would be,” said Principal, Carolyn Hartwigsen. “Undernourished children often have low energy, are irritable and have difficulty concentrating. We wanted to do something that could make a difference for these students.”

Program to prevent hunger studied for effect on learning

Staff from Westwood Elementary, Division of Public Health and Bloomington School District conducted a School Breakfast Program study from

January through May 2015. They compared students who did and did not have classroom breakfast for attendance, tardiness, nurse visits, behavior and academic performance.

Though study organizers deemed the length of the study inadequate to show a correlation between hunger and academic achievement, teachers observed unexpected positive results. One classroom noted a 27 percent improvement in student absence and tardiness. Following is a sample of teachers’ comments.

“I noticed students really looked out for each other. They made sure everyone got their breakfast and if they didn’t they let me know. They wanted to share more with each other.”

“Students started out the day in a more friendly manner with quiet conversation . . . Students seemed to get along better since no academics were involved at this time.”

“I did have one student who would “save” food to take home to share with his mom and grandma. If he saw kids going to the trash can with an uneaten apple, he would politely ask if he could have it. This one child and how he benefited from having breakfast daily made this whole project worthwhile.”

One teacher’s comment touched at the heart of the breakfast program: “I knew that each child was starting the day off without hunger.” It’s about every child starting school well-fed and ready to learn.

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