

State-Wide Impact of a School-Based Family Engagement Strategy to Influence “Food Hero” Health Behaviors at Home

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Background

The federally funded Oregon Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) utilizes social marketing to influence individual/family behaviors and affect higher levels of the socio-ecological model through policy, systems and environmental change activities. Food Hero (FH) aims to increase fruit and vegetable (FV) intake/access among low-income Oregon families.

When FH works with schools, an aim is to increase healthy behaviors at school and at home. The objective of the Spring Break bingo (SBB) project is to engage students and families in positive health behaviors at home during spring break and then promote/model the results at school after spring break. In 2017 SBB was developed in Spanish/English and piloted at 4 elementary schools, located 2-15 miles apart in 2 counties.

Methods

In 2018, the project was updated based on results of the pilot. For example, a question about sibling participation was made more prominent, increased preplanning by instructors to increase response rate, and the option for a school/district report to celebrate collective successes was added. The card included 25 tasks covering healthy eating (14), physical activity (7), and less screen time (3). A group of tasks (11) included health behaviors promoted within Food Hero. All tasks were designed to be achievable by low-income families.

SBB was piloted in 53 elementary schools (all $\geq 50\%$ free/reduced school meal enrollment). A card was given to students the week before spring break (n= 14,171). Parents were asked to initial a task (bingo square) when completed. Students who completed ≥ 5 tasks and returned the cards to their classroom teacher ≤ 10 days after spring break received a cutting board to reinforce their efforts.

Results

- 1292 cards returned (7% Spanish, 93% English)
- 53 schools participated (93% elementary), from 24 of 36 (67%) Oregon counties
- 43% completed the card with a sibling; 36% completed the card alone
- Median age: 8 years (range 4 - 13y)
- 45% of schools achieved a return rate $\geq 10\%$ (range = 10-75%); those with the highest rate were 1) rural schools with <400 students and/or 2) schools where surveys were distributed to select classrooms versus schoolwide

Spring Break 2018

Food Hero Health Behaviors Reported

- ✓ 1202 breakfasts eaten
- ✓ 1143 family dinners eaten together
- ✓ 965 students ate a cup of fruit for a snack
- ✓ 836 students ate 1 cup of vegetables
- ✓ 735 students helped set the table
- ✓ 688 students helped plan a dinner
- ✓ 705 students shared a fruit with a friend
- ✓ 622 students helped cook a dinner
- ✓ 535 students made a smoothie with a fruit or vegetable
- ✓ 516 students went grocery shopping and picked out a new vegetable
- ✓ 244 parents/kids visited FoodHero.org together



Conclusions and Implications

This second pilot study resulted in the delivery of positive health behavior messages into the homes of hundreds of Oregon families and supports continued development of SBB. Plus, families across Oregon reported they engaged in positive health behaviors over Spring Break.

Results suggest further refinement, including:

- continued work to increase the number of reported behaviors, i.e., promote cards more comprehensively and earlier in the year, consider focusing on targeted classrooms, and add incentives for the classrooms who return the most cards (e.g. extra recess).
- rewording of some tasks so they better report collective successes.



Access Spring Break Bingo: www.foodhero.org/community-toolkit
 Contact Us: Food.Hero@oregonstate.edu