School Breakfast Programs Essay, Research Paper

There are many benefits and many possible drawbacks for the participation in a federal school breakfast program. The USDA sponsors the federal school breakfast program. The relationship between hunger and the ability to learn are very closely related. Of the many benefits to a school breakfast program, one includes the assurance that the children are eating a balanced meal during the school day. In turn researchers believe that eating a balanced healthy breakfast leads children in enhancing attention and alertness, energy and motivation, concentration and self-discipline (Ragno, 1994).

Research has also shown possible drawbacks the breakfast program may lead to. These possible drawbacks include the assumption that children are not eating the breakfast provided by the school and in turn money would be wasted. Another concern for the breakfast program is the possibility that small amounts of children actually participate in the program, therefore the program would not be worth time, food, and energy spent in providing the breakfast.

The United States Department of Agriculture, (USDA), prioritizes school breakfast (Coles, 2000). The School Breakfast Program was just introduced in 1966. When introduced, the program was a temporary measure through the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. The basis for the implementation of this program was to accommodate children in areas where they had long bus rides to school and in areas where many mothers were in the work force.

Much of the research examining the federally sponsored USDA breakfast program shows that the benefits of participation greatly outweigh the drawbacks. Some of the benefits include assurance for students and others concerned, an increased awareness in the students during the school day, and significant influences in the student’s behaviors. The assumption that the students are wasting money due to lack of participation, may pose as a drawback, although research shows differently. This author wishes to recommend that district X participates in a USDA sponsored Federal School Breakfast Program.

Assurance for students and others concerned regarding the breakfast program mostly relies around the time consuming aspect of the program. An article in American Teacher stated that in many schools teachers expressed concerns about the logistics of the program, including the loss of instructional time. That concern soon faded. Teachers reported that breakfast was finished within the allotted time for homeroom. In addition classrooms remain clean, students cooperate, and show leadership (American Teacher, 1998). Students cooperate and show leadership in being allowed to eat their breakfast in the classroom and clean up after themselves. For today’s families, time and energy are at a premium in the morning. School breakfast can help those with busy life styles an can also play a significant role in reducing a growing national problem – hunger (Neifert, 1993).

Students over the years have shown that breakfast can start a child’s day off right. Recent studies show that breakfast actually helps children learn better, they also show that eating a nutritious breakfast improves children’s performance on cognitive test especially involving memory.

Student’s performance increased when

students ate breakfast. The teacher

of a classroom studied, believed that

student alertness and completion of

tasks increased during the breakfast

program. Additionally, the teacher

reported that the students had more

positive attitudes.

(Devaney & Stuart, 1998, p.114)

A study done on preschool aged children and their nutrient intake and pre-academic performance, showed that when children were denied breakfast they displayed less accuracy on a variety of task that measure problem solving skills (Worobey & Worobey, 1999). These findings show that not only is awareness increased in students during the school day, but also assurance for students, that they will perform better in school and assurance to other school personal. However some opponents believe that the breakfast program is an intrusion into family life and is not cost – effective for a school district (Saks, 1995). Money is yet another controversial issue when discussing the school breakfast program. The average cost for an elementary school student to eat breakfast is about 78 cents. The USDA School Breakfast Program provides cash reimbursements to schools for meals served, much as the school lunch program. Children eligible to receive a lunch at free or reduced price are also eligible to receive breakfast at the same rate (Coles, 2000). The preceding data shows that if a school district believes that their budget could not support a breakfast program, they will be reimbursed for most of their money spent.

Affects of the school breakfast program due to various amount of participation by the students are another controversial issue in which many questions arise. Studies have shown that where schools have participated in the program, the results show an increase in the average attendance and reduced rates of lateness to homeroom, and more importantly to class (Boujie, Smith & Janicke, 1999). This in turn means that there are many students who participate in the program.

Many research articles have shown significant influences in the students’ behaviors, which are thought to be the result of the breakfast program. Superintendents recognize the connection between nutrition and learning. They agreed that nutrition enhanced retention, learning ability and concentration. They also agreed that there is a connection between classroom behavior and nutrition (Wang, 1995). In the opposing point of view, a research report done by Sheryl Neeland found no statistically significant effects on test scores for the breakfast participants or the number of times the students were tardy (Neeland, 1993). However, in a teachers survey taken by Mary Ragno, participants indicated that the School Breakfast Program had a significant influence on children’s behavior, enhancing attention and alertness, energy, motivation, concentration and self-discipline (Ragno, 1994). Significant influences in a student’s behavior vary greatly. Each student is a unique individual and things influence him or her differently.

In conclusion the benefits and drawbacks to a federally sponsored USDA School Breakfast Program are wide and vary greatly in their differences. If School District X feels that the benefits will outweigh the drawbacks, then they should participate in the program. However, if they feel that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits, they should not participate. The sole reason for participation in the program should be based on the individual needs of the district and those of the children concerned.

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