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A little healthy competition makes for a successful healthy food drive

AT A GLANCE

Eat Smart Idaho brings the concept of a competitive healthy food drive to middle schoolers, donations 100% spot on, school-based pantries and families in need reap the benefits.

The Situation

Over 68% of Idaho's food insecure families qualify for food pantry assistance. A food pantry is an individual site that distributes food directly to those in need. Food pantries obtain food through a member agency of a food bank which helps collect product from the food industry and food donations from food drives.

Many families in our area are willing to donate food to local pantries to assist families in need, however, much of the food donated is highly processed, high in sodium and sugar, and low in fiber and protein. Donations included top ramen, canned spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, and sugar cereals. Many of these donated foods are un-filling and contribute and/or exacerbate the many health problems seen in low income families.

Providing education to families willing to donate and empowering them to give healthier donations changes access to healthy foods for many low income families. Research has shown when more high fiber, high-protein, low sugar foods are donated families who need emergency food assistance feel fuller for longer.

Our Response

School based healthy food drives are a great way to get youth involved in their communities by teaching them



A middle school in Coeur d'Alene participates in a fun, healthy food drive competition between homeroom classrooms.

about emergency food assistance, the struggle of hunger many families in our area face every day, and why it is important to change the culture of food donations to healthier options.

The northern Eat Smart Idaho program partnered with Canfield Middle School in the Coeur d'Alene School District to host a healthy, competitive food drive to support Eat Smart Idaho (ESI) school-based pantries. ESI hosts several healthy food drives each year and has found when the food drive is fun, competitive, educates donors on specifically what to donate, and encompasses the spirit of empathy, the food drive will be successful. The *Canfield Cares Healthy Food Drive* was all that and more. Forty classrooms were paired together and competed head-to-head to bring in

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healthy food. Two competing classrooms were given one food to donate. All donated food was collected the morning of April 28, 2021 as students were arriving in their classrooms. The food drive was promoted in classrooms two weeks prior, along with take home handouts, daily reminder announcements, school website promotion, hallway posters and email reminders. The “one-time” delivery allowed for more perishable foods to be donated as they were quickly taken to the school-based pantries and were refrigerated in Dairy West donated refrigeration units that ESI previously had helped these pantries acquire. To make the healthy food drive a success, support from ESI included:

- Meeting with the teaching staff, coordinating the food drive, and encouraging them to host a “healthy” food drive and supporting this idea with health promotion evidence-based information.
- Meeting with school-based pantries to identify the highest need healthy foods for their clients.
- Presenting to all teaching staff about the impact of donating healthy options, food insecurity and the hunger-obesity paradox.
- Presenting to grades 6-8 students on what it means to donate healthy and why.
- Developing promotional flyers for each classroom as well as posters for the hallways. Materials were also promoted on the school’s website.
- Coordinating the delivery of boxes to the school site to help with collection of donated food.
- Coordinating the pick-up of healthy food donations by the partnering school-based pantries.

Program Outcomes

The Canfield Cares Healthy Food Drive brought in over 1100 pounds of healthy food. One hundred percent of the foods donated met the healthy food criteria.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Survey comment from a school-based pantry manager:

“This was a very successful food drive. Shelly is very friendly and a go-getter. We worked together to identify our biggest needs and we got exactly what we wanted. One of the most important pieces was giving the students specific items and brands of what we wanted to get the healthiest option. Other food drives I have been a part of have been a random free-for-all of items. People often donate what is cheap and items in the back of their pantry. People want to give and seem to donate exactly what is asked if you are specific. I will definitely partner with Eat Smart Idaho again.”

Survey comments from school administration and teachers:

“I used to think a successful food drive was based on the number of items donated. Now I think it is based on the number of healthy items donated. This food drive was very successful!”

“One of my favorite parts in working with Eat Smart Idaho was the effort placed on providing our students an opportunity to help in their community.”

“Shelly is an amazing resource. Her presentations to our staff and to our students created the buy in for our staff and student body. In addition, her coordination to have the fresh food picked up the morning of our food drive and her effort in acquiring all the boxes, made it run smoothly.”

“Promoting healthy foods as donations helped change the types of foods that we have normally seen. In the past, people just clean the leftovers out of their cupboards to donate. I think people assume that people who are struggling eat mac & cheese and top ramen.”

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Eat Smart Idaho administrative team on Healthy Pantry/Healthy Food Drive project: Shelly Johnson, Annie Roe, Kristin Hansen, Joey Peutz and Siew Guan-Lee.