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Iowa Experiment Correlates Protein Snacks to Improved Behavior
Low-Glycemic Index Snacks a Better Choice for High-Risk Students

Park Ridge, IL (February xx, 2017) – Protein-based snacks such as hard-boiled eggs could lead to improved classroom behavior, according to a group of educators in Davenport, Iowa. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Scott County, worked closely with staff at the Davenport Full Service Community School to develop and launch a pilot project during the 2015-2016 school year called the “Protein Intervention.”

In order to test a hypothesis that protein-based snacks could help improve classroom behavior, one school in the district launched the program as a test. It substituted protein-based snacks, such as hard-boiled eggs, string cheese or yogurt, for the carbohydrate snacks typically given to hungry students visiting the school nurse. Students were allowed to choose among the protein-based snacks available, with the overwhelming majority preferring hard-boiled eggs. The school nurse kept track of the students’ visit, snack choice, date and time.

When staff tabulated data relating protein snack consumption to behavioral referrals, the results were striking. At the end of the school year, students who received more than three protein snacks *and* had more than five behavioral referrals were included in the data set. Data showed that only 11.5 percent of these students’ behavioral referrals occurred on days when they received the protein intervention. The other 88.5 percent of these students’ behavioral referrals occurred on days when they did not visit the nurse and request protein. The school’s report states:

“We have hypothesized that this staggering difference results from alleviation of hunger with a high protein, low glycemic index food that offers healthy, sustained energy with minimal blood sugar fluctuations.”

Davenport’s Full Service Community Schools, part of the overall district, serve a student population who are considered more at-risk than other parts of the community. One large risk factor encompassed within these schools is lower socioeconomic status. Full Service Community Schools bring community services and programs to school buildings in order to prevent and alleviate challenges that students and their families face. These schools work in partnership with other community organizations and services to improve the quality of life for students, their families and the community.

Schools often serve snacks to student populations who are food insecure. Yet the type of snacks schools typically offered to hungry students, such as crackers, cereal, granola bars or fruit snacks, while inexpensive and shelf-stable, are high on the glycemic index scale. These snacks exacerbate student’s blood sugar fluctuations and according to the report, can

contribute to the challenging behaviors witnessed by teachers in schools with a high-risk student population.

“Hard-boiled eggs are the perfect choice for a program like the *Protein Intervention*. Eggs contain less than one gram of carbohydrate and as such, do not influence blood glucose. In addition, eggs are a nutrient-rich food with one large egg containing six grams of high-quality protein and varying levels of 13 vitamins and minerals,” said Tia M. Rains, Ph.D., Executive Director, Egg Nutrition Center, the scientific research arm of the American Egg Board. “We look forward to results from other schools implementing the protein intervention program with their students to see if similar benefits are observed.”

The staff who participated in the Protein Intervention state they believe “with a systematic and sustained effort of offering protein within high need schools, behavior issues can be reduced, which ensures less time spent out of the classroom and a higher likelihood of academic achievement.”

Staff calculated that for \$1,000, one school could be supplied with the food needed for a year’s worth of Protein Intervention. In response, the Iowa Egg Council has funded the Protein Intervention project for an entire year for one of the five schools within the Davenport Full Service Community School system.

“We’re proud of the efforts of the Davenport Full Service Community Schools to alleviate hunger and educate the children in our community. No child should have to go hungry during the school day,” said Katie Nola, Director of Consumer Affairs, Iowa Egg Council.

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