

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2103 June 20

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## **BE BRIGHTER WITH BREAKFAST SECONDARY SCHOOL INITIATIVE**

### *Recommendation*

*It is recommended that Report No. 086-13 re Be Brighter with Breakfast Initiative be received for information.*

### **Key Points**

- Children and youth who eat breakfast perform better academically.
- As children get older breakfast consumption declines: by grade 10, 59% of girls and 50% of males do not eat breakfast daily.
- Be Brighter with Breakfast is a comprehensive school health approach aimed at improving breakfast eating patterns among secondary school youth through education, supportive environments, community partnerships and youth engagement strategies.

### **Background**

Education is an important social determinant of health. Children and youth who succeed academically and graduate from secondary school are less likely to live in poverty and more likely to be successful working citizens. Healthy eating patterns in childhood and adolescence promote optimal health, growth and intellectual development. Children and youth who eat breakfast perform better academically. In a 2008 Toronto study, students who ate morning meals at least three days during a school week achieved higher grades and higher ratings on learning skills compared to students who eat morning meals on fewer days or who never eat breakfast. In terms of learning skills, students who ate morning meals were better able to perform independent work, had better initiative, improved problem solving abilities, and improved class participation. School staff and administrators reported that eating morning meals resulted in improvements in student behaviours, attitude, reduced tardiness, less disciplinary problems and a better ability for students to stay on task. This research appears to support that eating breakfast can be linked to student success and academic achievement.

### **Secondary School Breakfast Initiative**

Even though eating breakfast is associated with positive outcomes the literature shows that as children get older breakfast consumption declines: by grade 10, 60% of girls didn't eat breakfast daily. The Young Adult Team launched a breakfast initiative in secondary schools in Middlesex-London called *Be Brighter with Breakfast*. The three main reasons for the development of this program were related to the literature, statistical decline in healthy eating among adolescents and the nurse's assessment of teen behaviours in secondary schools. The initiative was developed to ensure consistent messaging across participating schools. Schools in Middlesex-London were approached regarding their readiness to participate. Of the thirty-three secondary sites nine agreed to participate in the comprehensive initiative that would occur over the next four years.

## **Be Brighter with Breakfast Strategies and Activities**

This initiative applies a comprehensive healthy schools approach to the entire school population with targeted education and skill building aimed at grade 9's in these schools. It is the intent of the team to provide activities in the schools using a youth engagement approach while tracking the knowledge and behavior of the grade nines as they move through this educational process during the next four years.

Public Health Nurses began this initiative by administering a short poll in October 2012 to grade 9's about their breakfast eating habits. The poll will be re-administered before the end of this school year with the same cohort. A comprehensive *Be Brighter with Breakfast* resource guide has been developed and consists of a backgrounder used to engage schools, a standardized presentation to educate about breakfast, curriculum supports for teachers, standardized announcements, posters, a health wall, and a compilation of youth engagement activities that can be adapted and used by various student groups to implement school wide events.

Youth engagement has been a key component of this initiative. This process harnessed youth creativity to develop school wide activities that have promoted the importance of breakfast, activities such as breakfast grams, recipe contests, promoting breakfast programs, and video development. The production of four videos by youth from three local secondary schools with messaging about the importance of eating breakfast will be used in the 2013/2014 school year.

### **Next Steps**

Of the grade 9 students surveyed prior to the implementation of *Be Brighter with Breakfast* strategies and activities, 59% stated they ate a breakfast while 41% stated they did not eat breakfast. However of the 59% that ate breakfast only 42% of them stated they ate 3 of 4 foods groups at breakfast. There is a need to increase the amount of students that eat breakfast and that eat a healthy breakfast.

Statistics and qualitative data have been collected throughout the school year related to this initiative and the analyzing of this data and the results will be important to inform the next phases of this initiative. Additional activities will build on the work of the 2012/2013 school year and it is anticipated that data garnered over the coming year will speak to the effectiveness of the program initiatives.

This report was prepared by Ms. Christine Callaghan, Registered Dietitian, and Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team.

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<p><b>This report addresses</b> the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Foundational Standard - 4, 8; Chronic Disease Prevention - 1, 7, 8, and 11.</p>
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