

NSPRA This Week – Tip of the Week

January 31, 2012

West Des Moines Community School District Booster Pak

Below is the snapshot of a 2010-2011 NSPRA Golden Achievement Award-winning entry from Lauri Pyatt, school/community relations specialist for West Des Moines (Iowa) Community Schools. She can be reached at pyattl@wdmcs.org.

Research

- Cited research that states how hunger affects learning.
 - In 2010, the *Journal of School Health* reported on a study of the effects of good and bad nutrition among 5,000 children by the University of Alberta (Canada), which found that daily supplements, beyond just breakfast, played an important role in growth, health and performance.
 - This study backed up reports on diet and school performance and the findings were outlined in the Reuters article “Healthy Diet Means Better School Performance.”
- Reviewed free and reduced lunch statistics and observed an upward trend over the past several years.
- Classroom behavior and attendance issues were being seen at the building level with a suspicion that those behaviors were partially affected by hunger.
- A community profile showed that there were no weekend congregate meal sites in the western suburbs (where the school district is located).
- Interviewed community leaders overseeing programs focused on reducing childhood hunger.

Analysis/Planning

- The superintendent determined the need for a weekend food program and established the program as part of the West Des Moines Community Schools Foundation.
- The Booster Pak committee worked with the office of school/community relations to create marketing and fundraising materials.
 - Black and white printing with a simple folder minimized costs; any money spent on marketing materials would mean less food purchased for students.
 - These materials were used in meetings with local businesses and organizations during the fundraising process.
- Working with school district vendors and local businesses, the committee was able to identify low-cost food sources to fill the backpacks.
- A pilot program was conducted at Phenix Elementary, the elementary school with the highest percentage of at-risk students. The program served 75 students for eight weeks at the end of the 2009-10 school year.

- Because of the pilot's success, a plan was created and executed to expand the program into other buildings in the district in the fall of 2010.

Communication/Implementation

- Brochures and marketing packets raised awareness and solicited the support of local businesses and community groups.
- Building-level administrators communicate program responsibilities and assisted in identifying eligible students.
- The committee recruited volunteers by talking with individuals and community groups about how they could help.
- Parents were invited to register their children in the program through letters and phone calls from building administrators.
- Booster Pak currently serves 180 students in three buildings. The program is expected to expand to five more buildings and 150 more students by April, 2011.

Evaluation

- Financially, the program has raised more than \$50,000.
- The program's 20 volunteers have served more than 250 man hours.
- The Booster Pak program has distributed more than 3,000 packs to participating district students.
- Working with district administrators, the committee is gathering attendance, test score and anecdotal data to determine the impact of the program on learning and classroom behavior.
- Parents and students are surveyed to determine if the program is meeting their needs.
- Feedback from families has included:
 - Students excited to know they'll have food to eat over the weekend.
 - Parents noting how it has helped their child's confidence by feeling they are helping their family.
 - Teachers noting how responsible students are at bringing their backpacks on Fridays so they can receive their food pack.

For more information and to learn more about the National School Public Relations Association, please visit www.nspra.org.