



FEEST's Healthy Food Round Table

Results of the Snack Box Pilot Project at Evergreen High School (White Center, WA)

January 2020

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Contents

Executive Summary	3
The Project	4
What We Learned	5
Analysis & Conclusions	9
Acknowledgements	10



**FEEST youth build power to
improve the health of their schools
and communities.**

*For a detailed analysis of the data used in this
report, visit www.feestseattle.org*





Executive Summary

Who We Are

FEEST (Food Empowerment Education & Sustainability Team) works at the nexus of healthy food access, racial justice, and youth empowerment to create food justice in low income communities of color and develop leadership for lasting change in South King County, WA. We set the table for young people to change the landscape around health and equity in their families, schools, and neighborhoods while simultaneously advocating for systems and policy changes that increase access to healthy food and win youth voice with school decision makers.

FEEST began in 2008 as part of the King County Food and Fitness Initiative, seeking a community-driven approach to reversing health inequities in low income, racially diverse neighborhoods. Since then, FEEST youth have been changing

the way school districts run lunch programs and have systematized an information pipeline from students to school food policy makers.

FEEST's Student Advisory Council in Highline and Seattle Public Schools gives youth the opportunity to work directly with School District Nutrition Services to address improvements in school food, including more

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fresh and nutritious, better tasting food; more culturally relevant meals; more food made from scratch. FEEST youth leaders serve as emissaries between

school policymakers and the student body, raising the concerns of the student collective and likewise gaining support for the changes from the entire school.

The Project: Healthy Food Round Table

Part 1: Designing a Community Project

In September 2018, FEEST organized an intergenerational group of community stakeholders called the Healthy Food Round Table (HFRT) Committee. The purpose of the group was to gather community feedback about the barriers youth in White Center face in accessing healthy food in their community and schools. From the community feedback gathered, the group was able to identify cost and distance as the top barriers to accessing fresh produce in White Center. Based on this feedback, the group then identified solutions to increase young people’s consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The HFRT Committee gathered feedback from over 320 community members who identified schools as the place young people access the majority of their food. From this assessment, the committee found that young people are infrequently eating school lunch due to poor quality and taste of food, limited fresh food available, and little variety in lunch menu items; including a lack of culturally relevant meal options. Upon analyzing this feedback, the HFRT committee envisioned a short term solution of implementing a free CSA-style snack box for students at Evergreen High School (EHS), the most populated school in White Center.

Part 2: Implementing the Snack Box Pilot Project at Evergreen High School

In September 2019, FEEST launched the Snack Box Pilot Project at Evergreen High School. Every Monday, all 6th period classes received crates with enough fresh produce and nutritious fruit-based snack bars

for each student to have one piece per day. Approximately 40 6th period classrooms, 850-950 students, were served by the Healthy Food Round Table (HFRT) pilot snack program. The snack boxes were created in partnership with Lee’s Produce, who supplied a rotation of fruits including Mandarin oranges, plums, Bartlett pears, Asian pears, persimmons, Fuji apples, Red and Golden Delicious apples, Pink Lady apples, Honey Crisp apples, and Granny Smith Apples, which rotated as the seasons changed.

The HFRT Committee gathered feedback from 525 students and teachers after the Snack Box Pilot Project to determine whether the snack boxes increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. The

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feedback gathered from both teachers and students identified that the free snack box program at EHS not only increased youth consumption of produce, but positively impacted students’ ability to learn at school, and positively impacted the culture and community at EHS. After analyzing this feedback, our policy recommendations include:

SHORT TERM

- Implement weekly CSA-style snack boxes with fresh food items for students at all schools with high Free and Reduced Lunch rates.
- Increase availability of fresh fruits and vegetables at school salad bars to increase participation
- Enroll all eligible schools for Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to make school food free for all students.

LONG TERM

- Initiate kitchen renovations and staff training to reestablish scratch cooking in our schools.

Rooted in the feedback our committee received from students and teachers at Evergreen, we found that providing students with fresh, free and delicious food

69% of students surveyed reported a positive change in their ability to learn.

is a key ingredient for student success. When school meals and snacks provided to students are free and fresh, students feel a sense of security, increasing their likelihood to participate, collaborate and be present in the classroom.

In a community like White Center where there is an excessive number of fast food restaurants and gas stations, fresh food is not accessible. Our recommended changes to the school food system will begin to address the disinvestment of low income communities of color by proposing systemic solutions in school food.

What We Learned

486 students and 39 teachers, teacher assistants, and staff were surveyed post implementation of the snack boxes to share their experience of the program. From this data, we found the snack boxes positively impacted students' learning outcomes and EHS's school culture and community.

Impact on Learning

69% of students surveyed reported a positive change in their ability to learn. These included increased energy, focus, productivity, participation, and collaboration with their peers. 87% of teachers also reported the snack box positively impacting their classroom environment. 71% of teachers noted an increase in attentiveness, and 60% of teachers surveyed reported improvements in participation, engagement and overall behavior. Teachers and staff also noted that the classroom culture felt more positive, with notable increases in students' energy, activity, and joy. Both students and teachers reported that students are more likely to attend class and less likely to skip school to go find food.



Students said...

“Energizes me to make an effort in school education”
—Evan, Student

“I had always felt a little out of it and now, thanks to FEEST, I can eat something fresh every day.”
—Jordan, Student

“Snack boost helps you be more productive rather than being hungry or drowsy [which] distracts you in class.”
—Sean, Student

“The snacks make class more enjoyable to be in, so I’m more eager to participate.”
—Vyvyan, Student

“I feel a lot more positive and can actually focus on the work. It gives me energy to actually ask questions and stay after school to try and understand the work I don’t understand.”
—Perseus, Student

“I feel better because I’m not thinking about food anymore, I don’t have to worry about that. It’s about what is going on in class.”
—Ana, Student

“I am able to have the energy to show up to the last class and I am able to talk with my peers and work with them.”
—Angelica, Student

Teachers said...

"The students no longer complain about being hungry all the time and know they have access to food every day. Without students being hungry, there was less opting out and putting their heads down."

—Erik Kory, 6th Period Teacher at EHS

"No class time is spent on students with their head down because they are hungry, or students using the hall pass to try to find food during class. The snacks have completely removed the fundamental barrier of hunger that prevents student learning."

—Jeanette Eisenberg, 6th Period Teacher

"Hungry students have a harder time focusing and regulating their emotions. The snack boxes decreased students skipping to go buy snacks, increased alertness, and created a more positive environment."

—Erik Turnberg, 6th Period Teacher

"[FEEST's program was a] great supplement to what we already offer in our class. I think students really appreciated the fresh options. The healthy options also encouraged conversation and learning surrounding healthier snacking."

—Arleen Senas, 6th Period Teacher

Changes in School Culture and Community

Students and teachers also reported the positive impacts the snack program had on Evergreen High School's culture and community. Students reported feeling more cared for, more alive, and more likely to attend class. 65% of students surveyed reported feeling an improvement in their mood after eating a snack from the snack box, and 71% of teachers reported a

decrease in student hunger. From this data, we were able to conclude that providing students with fresh fruits and vegetables holistically impacts the health and well being of the entire school. When students are given the opportunity to eat fresh produce, they are excited and motivated to continue their school day, positively impacting the classroom and overall school environment. Selected quotes include:

"I was less hungry and more inclined to attend class"
-Ruby, EHS student

"Kids have been much more alive"
-Kyra, student

"I felt like they cared more about us and how we were feeling during school and our needs. I wasn't hungry and I did better in class."
-Yasmin, Student

"EHS and so many schools like it NEED this snack program. It has completely changed student engagement in the classroom and I'm so worried about student hunger returning after the snack program pilot ends."
-Jeanette Eisenberg, 6th Period Teacher

"I think it showed that the school actually cares about how we are eating and if we are eating."
- Cristian, Student

"It made me realize that the program does care about our well-being in staying healthy and energized throughout the day by providing these snacks."
-Crystal, Student

"I felt cared for."
-Vincent, Student

"I loved it. It made it way easier to be in school because I wasn't hungry."
-Jaydn, Student

"[There is] a sense of increased community as we shared food! One Friday, I brought in caramel sauce for apples, which the kids were all excited about! And Darwin cut up slices of persimmons for students to try! ... Something about having shared food really increased the sense of community, which helps kids feel safe, and thus they concentrate better, too!"
-Kristin Plischke, 6th Period Teacher

"I feel like it has helped build a more positive environment, as many found something they can relate and learn from each other."
-Diana, Student

"I feel like it was one of the best things they could've done for Evergreen"
-Aldo, Student

"Introducing the healthy food is a great idea. Hopefully this will translate into students making personal healthy food choices at home now and when they grow up. This will have a positive effect on their physical and mental health... Thank you for introducing this program. Hope this program will be spread to elementary and middle schools to catch them younger. Thanks."

-Venkata Kodatki, Teachers Assistant

"Please fund this. Students are enjoying the trial run of the program and their behavior has improved significantly in class. There is better group collaboration and peer-to-peer work."
-Gabriel Jimenez, 6th Period Teacher

Analysis and Conclusions

Students and teachers alike report that the program has already had a positive impact on students’ ability to learn and strengthened the Evergreen community overall. 100% of teachers, staff, and administration surveyed, and 98% of students surveyed would like to see the free snack program continue. A copy of a detailed summary of survey data is available from FEEST’s website.

This pilot project showed a clear connection between increasing students’ access to free fresh fruits and vegetables and a positive increase in students’ ability to learn, collaborate, retain information, and be fully present in class. When fresh fruits and vegetables are distributed for free at schools, it eliminates two access barriers for students: the cost of fresh food, and locations that are difficult to get to.

Free, fresh snacks are one way to increase students’ ability to learn, attendance, and participation in class, but we believe the most effective way to solve these issues is by ensuring that breakfast and lunch, are made from scratch each day from fresh ingredients, and are provided to students for free. Because most students, especially low income students of color, get two of their three meals for the day at school, providing free fresh breakfast and lunch would eliminate the need for a snack program because those two meals would be fulfilling students’ needs.

The three most effective solutions improve health equity, and learning outcomes for students are:

- Implementing scratch cooking at all schools. This includes renovating kitchens, providing proper kitchen equipment and training kitchen staff in how to cook from scratch.
- Making breakfast and lunch free for all students.

This can be accomplished by registering schools for Community Eligibility Provision, a program that provides fully-funded meals to schools that have 40% or more students who meet the program’s eligibility requirements.

- Increasing the availability and variety of hot meals and salad bar offerings, including authentically-made meals that reflect the diverse cultures of students in South King County.

Snack Policy:

- Expand the Snack Box Program to include Middle and High Schools in addition to the already existing Elementary School snack program in the Highline School District.

This pilot project has shown us that by implementing the above policy changes to increase youth access to fresh free food district wide, we’ll see a positive increase in students’ ability to learn, attentiveness, positive behavior, collaboration and participation within the classroom. We’ll also see a more positive culture

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and stronger sense of community in schools where these changes are made. We believe our proposed solutions are effective steps for improving health equity and learning outcomes for students, especially in low income and communities of color such as White Center, and more broadly in South King County.

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Healthy Food Round Table Committee

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