Obesity Prevention success stories

Association of State Public Health Nutritionists

Diane Peck, MPH, RD
Alaska's Salad Bar Project

In 2012, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) launched a salad bars in schools campaign. Diane Peck, MPH, RD, a public health nutritionist with DHSS's Obesity Prevention and Control Program, brought together leaders in the Alaska Department of Education's Child Nutrition Program, the Department of Agriculture's Farm to School Program, and the state Parent Teacher Association to develop and implement this campaign.

The Alaska salad bar team achieved a tremendous amount. They launched a school video contest. They asked schools all over Alaska to produce a video about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables and highlighting a visit to their school salad bar. Students then voted on their favorite video. You can **watch the winning video** from Glacier Valley Elementary School.

The team conducted a survey of school food service staff to determine the biggest issues of concern in schools with and without salad bars. Seventy-five percent of school districts completed the survey. The team used these results to develop its training materials and training video.

The Alaska team developed a training video for school food service staff. The team also held three successful trainings for school food service directors. The trainings, held in three cities, focused on how to improve existing salad bar programs, how to implement a safe and cost-effective salad bar program, and how to apply for a salad bar through Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools. The state team created a **Salad Bar Blogspot** to house its wealth of salad bar resources, including fact sheets, manuals, videos, recipes and more.

Successes and Major Outcomes

Alaska's salad bar training reached 41 participants from 21 school districts and five residential child care institutions, which together serve 77,000 students. The **Alaska Salad Bars to Schools blogsite** received **6,939 hits between April and September 2012!** The **Kiana School salad bar video**, also developed as part of this project to highlight Alaska success stories, was featured on the White House Let's Move blogsite and, through 2012, was viewed 2,640 times on YouTube.

Pictured: Diane Peck, MPH, RD

About Diane

Diane has been a Public Health Nutritionist for Alaska Department of Health and Social Services for twelve years. Before working with the Department's Obesity Prevention and Control Program, she worked with the Family and Community Nutrition Program and was the 5 A Day Coordinator for Alaska. Diane's personal interests are food-focused — cooking, gardening and wild harvesting. She also helps support her husband's family farm in Missouri, and she always travels to the farm with a cooler to trade Alaska salmon for Missouri beef!

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The **Alaska School Salad Bars video** developed for the salad bar training was viewed 205 times on YouTube through 2012. The Alaska Public Information Team also submitted the video to the local Anchorage Municipal Channel. Channel 10's public information and educational programming reaches more than 109,000 households, with a market penetration of 70 percent in the Anchorage area. The video ran twice a day for one week. The station also runs videos many weeks after the initial run.

The team expanded on the many partnerships they created and formed a Fruit and Vegetable Bars in Alaska Schools work group to sustain the project. The work group presented the team's salad bar training at the 2013 Alaska School Nutrition Association annual meeting. The Alaska Division of Public Health has allocated additional funding to present additional salad bar trainings and to purchase salad bars for schools.

Challenges

The Alaska team found that many of the state's schools do not apply for Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools because one of the requirements is that school must serve over 100 National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meals per day. Many of Alaska's schools are very small and do not meet this requirement. Also, the website states that grant priority is given to schools that are Healthier US Schools Challenge awardees. While many of Alaska's schools are working on the Challenge, only seven have received that award.

To address this challenge, the state appropriated funds to provide schools with salad bars. The state's Child Nutrition and Obesity Prevention and Control programs awarded eleven schools mini-grants to purchase their salad bars. The state looked at the applicants' need, potential for impact, commitment to and implementation of the program.

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If you would like to find out more about Alaska's Salad Bar Project, you can contact Diane at **907-269-8447 or diane.peck@alaska.gov**.

The team also found that food costs and availability of food continue to be problematic for schools with salad bars. For schools that do not have salad bar programs, cost and availability are important perceived barriers, as are sanitation, menu planning and reimbursable meals. For schools with salad bars, sanitation, menu planning and reimbursement were not problematic.

The implementation of the new NSLP regulations was a major preoccupation in 2012, and many schools admitted that launching a new salad bar program was not a priority. The Alaska team and their partners did not have answers to school nutrition staff's questions about reimbursement. They would have liked to have had specific salad bar guidelines and materials to help schools understand how salad bars fit into the new regulations.

Findings and Lessons Learned

The Alaska team found that involving the schools resulted in a more interesting product that people wanted to see. The team received positive feedback on the training video, particularly for highlighting successful Alaska school salad bar programs. The team had not anticipated how popular the school videos would be. Their success shows the reach of social media.

The team's partnerships proved to be extremely important to the success of the project. The Farm to School Program was very enthusiastic about the project as a way to bring more local fresh produce to schools. Farm to School is very visible in schools with surveys, a listserv, and training and funding opportunities.

When the team asked the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Food Safety and Sanitation Program to review the safety and sanitation materials, program staff went above and beyond expectations. They adapted Minnesota's Safe Use of Salad Bars in Schools handout to include Alaska-specific information. They participated in the salad bar trainings and presented food safety information. They also developed their own Safety and Sanitation for School Food Service web page. The Food Safety and Sanitation Program had been looking for ways to improve their image with schools. This project provided them with an avenue to be seen as helpful and positive and not just the food safety enforcers.

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The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

As a public health nutritionist with the Alaska Obesity Prevention and Control Program, Diane Peck played a critical role. She organized and facilitated multiple agencies with different areas of expertise in school food service to focus on salad bars. Many of these agencies initially were not aware of the evidence that supports salad bars in schools. Diane provided the evidence to encourage and justify the agencies' time and resources on salad bars.

Diane worked with the Department of Education and the School Nutrition Association to provide accurate and appropriate information and to establish credibility with school food service directors and staff. She also used the evidence linking school salad bars with health outcomes to secure funding from DHSS to provide salad bars to eleven schools. Establishing relationships with other partners, such as Farm to School and food safety and sanitation agencies, further strengthened the program.

Reimbursement, sanitation and menu planning were not problems for schools that had salad bars.

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