

Topic Area: School Nutrition

Abstract Title: Identification of benefits and barriers to the implementation of school breakfast programs: The role of parental perception
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Introduction: School breakfast programs (SBPs) can help reduce the incidence of breakfast skipping. Caregivers have an influential role in a child's eating behaviours and food choices, meaning that it is possible that caregiver perceptions about the program could determine whether or not children participate.

Objective: To obtain caregivers' perspectives on (1) benefits of and barriers to the current SBP operation in Halifax, NS; (2) effectiveness of the current breakfast program operations; and to propose recommendations to improve the delivery of school breakfast programs in Halifax.

Methods: A single focus group comprised of two subgroups was conducted with parents of school-aged children who regularly participate in a SBP (n=4) and those who do not participate on a regular basis (n=4). A student researcher facilitated the focus group using a focus group guide. Audio transcripts of the session were examined and interpreted by two student researchers.

Results: Caregivers of children who attended the SBP frequently displayed a greater understanding of the operation of SBP compared to the caregivers whose kids did not attend regularly (51% vs 15% of responses). Of those who identified as not actively participating in SBP, 57% of responses suggested that caregivers/children may not attend because no program is available, or they are unaware that there is one available. Caregivers identified that there is a need for more communication between SBPs and caregivers. Caregivers provided insight on stigmatism present in schools and it can be decreased.

Conclusion: Continuing to educate parents about SBPs could increase the likelihood that caregivers will access this service. Caregivers should be provided with information about how to access the program. Standardization of SBPs across a region could be a method of improving the delivery of SBPs, eliminating stigma, and increasing the attendance at SBP's.

Significance: This study can serve as the basis of larger more rigorous SBPs.