



Feeding Our Future Program: Enhancing Student Success and Well-being

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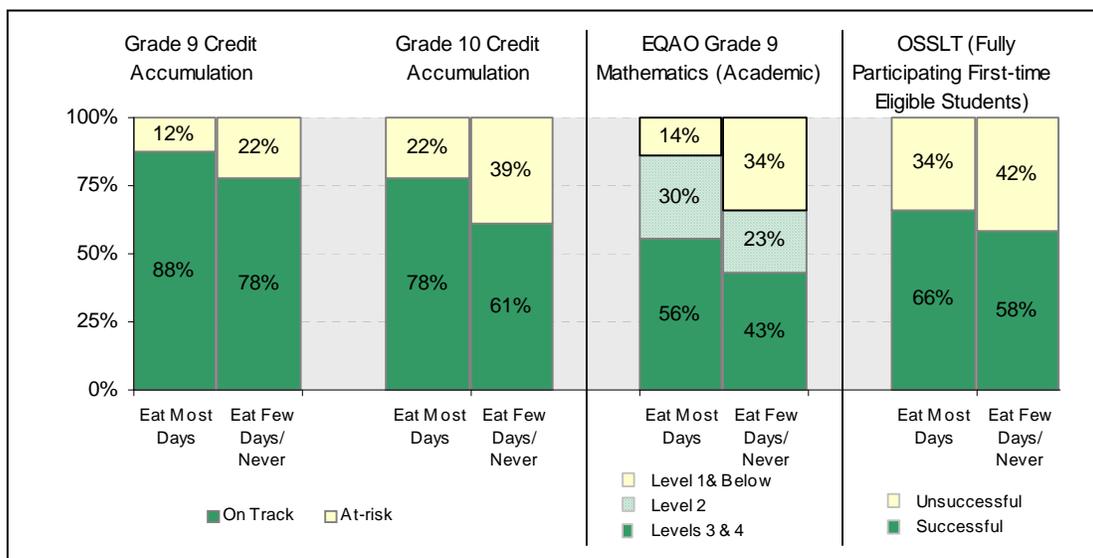
The Feeding Our Future program is a free, universal morning meal pilot program. Initiated in 2008, this program aims to provide a healthy morning meal for about 6,000 students in four middle schools (Grades 6 to 8) and three secondary schools located in the Jane and Finch area.¹ Interim findings from the evaluation of this program show that students who eat morning meals at least three days during a school week are more likely to be on-track for academic success and are healthier compared to students who eat morning meals on fewer days or who never eat them.² This suggests that school breakfast programs providing access to a healthy morning meal to all students can be a valuable intervention measure to facilitate student success and well-being.

The findings presented here are based on a student survey that was conducted at the end of the second year of the program (Spring 2010) and the students' achievement data collected in the Toronto District School Board's Student Information System.

Academic Achievement

To measure the relationship between academic achievement and eating a morning meal, survey responses from secondary school students who participated in the program were matched with the students' achievement data. Students who ate morning meals on most days during a school week were on-track for graduation by accumulating sufficient credits, achieved better scores in Mathematics, and were less likely to be at-risk than were those who ate morning meals on fewer days during the school week or who never ate in the morning.³

Figure 1: Secondary School Student Academic Achievement (2009-10) and Eating in the Morning During the School Week



On-track: Grade 9 students accumulating seven or more credits, Grade 10 students accumulating fifteen or more credits.
At-risk: Grade 9 students accumulating six or fewer credits, Grade 10 students accumulating fourteen or fewer credits.

¹ For more information about the Feeding Our Future program see http://www.studentsuccess.ca/feeding_our_future.html
² This includes eating before coming to school or at school, or both.
³ Causal pathways relating to the variables presented here are multi-factorial and complex; caution is advised when interpreting the causality of these results.

Research has shown that accumulating seven or more credits by the end of Grade 9 and fifteen or more credits by the end of Grade 10 are powerful predictors of graduation.⁴ The differences in credit accumulation among Grade 10 students is particularly noticeable: more than three quarters (78%) of the Grade 10 students who ate morning meals on most days were on-track for graduation, having accumulated fifteen or more credits, compared to fewer than two thirds (61%) of students who ate morning meals on only a few days or not at all (see Figure 1).

Remarkable differences are seen in the standardized Mathematics test scores for Grade 9 students in the Academic Course.⁵ In the assessment of Mathematics by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the majority of students (56%) who ate a morning meal most days in a school week achieved or exceeded the provincial standard (Levels 3 and 4) compared to just less than half (43%) of students who ate a morning meal on only a few days or not at all. Fewer students (14%) who ate morning meals at least three days in a school week were at-risk (achieving Level 1 and below), compared to just over one third (34%) of those who ate morning meals only one to two days or who never ate them. Somewhat similar trends can be seen for credit accumulation among Grade 9 students and for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) results (see Figure 1).

Perceived Health

Perceived health is an individual's perception of his or her overall health and is widely used as an indicator of overall health status and well-being.⁶ Students who completed the survey (4,050) from the participating middle and secondary schools were asked to rate their health in comparison to the previous school year and in comparison to other students their age.⁷ Students who ate morning meals on most days during a school week were more likely to rate their health as excellent or good and to indicate that their health had improved since the last school year.

Figure 2: Health in Comparison to Others

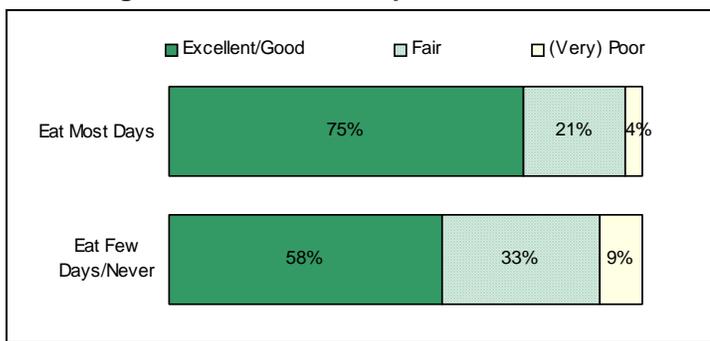
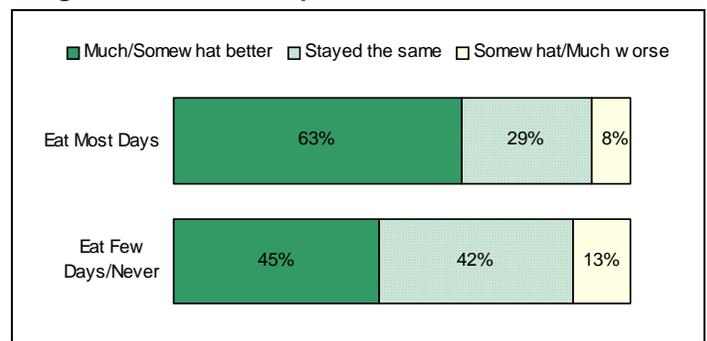


Figure 3: Health Compared to Previous School Year



Three quarters (75%) of students who ate morning meals on most days in a school week rated their health as excellent or good compared to only 58% of those who ate in the morning on only one to two days or who never ate in the morning (see Figure 2). When students were asked to rate their health in comparison to the previous school year, the majority (63%) of the students who ate morning meals at least three days during a school week rated their health as better than the previous school year, whereas only less than half (45%) of those who ate in the morning only one to two days or who never ate in the morning rated their health as improved (see Figure 3).

These findings suggest that universal school breakfast programs, such as the Feeding Our Future program, can enhance student success and well-being.

Questions or comments? Contact Eshwar.Muthuswamy@tdsb.on.ca

⁴ See: Brown, R. (2010). **The Grade 9 Cohort of Fall 2004**. Toronto: Toronto District School Board.

⁵ The majority of Grade 9 students take the Academic course. For students in the Applied course no differences were observed.

⁶ For more information on perceived health, see the Statistics Canada website: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2011001/article/11465-eng.htm>

⁷ The overall survey return rate was 76%.