



# Program Impact

## **Chefs for Kids**

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension collaborated with the American Culinary Federation (ACF) Chefs of Las Vegas to develop nutrition education curricula that promotes health practices engendering lifelong healthy lifestyles in children. These practices can lower risk for heart disease and other chronic diseases. Chefs for Kids is an in-school nutrition education program for primary grade children in at-risk elementary schools in Clark and Washoe counties in Nevada. The program consists of two parts: an intensive, second-grade curriculum (Choose Well, Be Well) and a first-grade curriculum (Adventures with Chefs for Kids). The first-grade curriculum introduces the food groups to children and focuses on food for strength, growth, health and energy. The weekly second-grade program helps children make healthy choices from the foods that are available to them. Also, they learn the value of physical activity and of strong food-safety practices.

### **Issue:**

Childhood and adolescence are the critical periods for development of good health practices. Many health behaviors established in childhood persist into adulthood. Because many chronic diseases are attributable to poor diet, physical inactivity and weight, it is essential to start good health practices as early as possible. Proper nutrition is essential to a child's physical, mental and cognitive development.

Although strong programs to build healthful eating and physical activity practices reduce the burden of chronic disease, there are very few programs teaching nutrition practices to children. Chefs for Kids fills this gap, teaching first- and second-grade students the basic skills needed to make these healthful choices.

Individuals (including children) from lower socio-economic status are more likely to be obese or overweight than those of higher socio-economic status. As a group, Mexican American boys tend to have a higher incidence of overweight than non-Hispanic white or non-Hispanic black boys; and non-Hispanic black girls tend to have a higher prevalence of overweight than Mexican American or non-Hispanic white girls. Nevada consistently ranks among those states with the poorest self-reported eating and activity practices.

### **What we've done:**

Every week, Chefs for Kids educators teach children about healthy food combinations, choosing foods that provide the greatest benefit to their bodies, and the importance of physical activity. The curriculum reflects the essential experiences necessary for first- and second-graders, as outlined in the standards of the Nevada Department of Education. The curriculum integrates several disciplines into the nutrition lessons, including mathematics, reading, physical education and art. Chefs for Kids ensures that children receive instruction in healthful nutrition practices based on the most current research. Monthly challenges and topical newsletters, written in both English and Spanish, are given to families to expand instruction into the home.

Chefs for Kids volunteers donate more than 3,000 hours yearly to prepare breakfasts for the children and raise funds to support the program. The Chefs for Kids Program has reached more than 54,200

students since its inception 26 years ago. The second-grade program is offered in 13 schools in Clark County and two schools in Washoe County. The first-grade program is taught in approximately 20 schools reaching over 2,000 students each year.

## **Impact:**

### **In the second-grade program:**

- More than 83 percent of students demonstrate proper hand washing procedures as taught in the hand-washing lessons.
- Nearly 93 percent of students in the program are able to list two activities considered part of an active lifestyle according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015. Additionally, 97 percent of students set a goal to either increase active play time, or to decrease time spent playing video games or watching TV.
- Students scored an average of 86 percent on a healthy food categorization assessment and 84 percent could identify at least one benefit obtained from eating food from any of the food groups.
- The program significantly increases the number of students who improve their snack food choices from the beginning to the end of the nutrition intervention. Results showed that, before the intervention, 517 students (42%) chose three snacks rated as less healthful; while following the intervention, only 182 students (15%) chose three snacks rated as less healthful.

### **In the first-grade program:**

- General nutrition knowledge improved significantly with children obtaining a mean score of 80% on the post-test as compared to the pre-test (61%).

## **Partners:**

Chefs for Kids Foundation, ACF Chefs Las Vegas, USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Clark County School District, Washoe County School District, Private Donations

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