

The West Virginia Feed to Achieve Act

1. How long has this program operated (month and year of initiation)?

The Feed to Achieve Act has been in effect for 1 year and 1 month and was signed into law by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin April 2013.

2. Describe the program:

(a) Why was it created? What problem(s) or issues was it designed to address?

Child Nutrition Programs improve nutritional health and academic performance, reduce behavior problems, prevent obesity, introduce children to new and local foods, improve the school climate and help decrease families' food budgets.

Food insecurity in children is associated with nutrient deficiencies, increased risk for obesity, poor health, behavior problems, decreased social skills, and academic failure. School-age children from food insecure households have lower grades, more anxiety and aggression, and higher absenteeism and tardiness. Child Nutrition Programs are the most nutritious and consistent way to alleviate childhood food insecurity. Recognizing these programs provide a necessary safety net to our children, WV schools are working hard to increase participation in their programs by improving the meal quality, offering multiple delivery systems, and by incorporating more local foods into their menus. Additionally, more and more schools are starting to offer after school snack and supper programs and are partnering with community organizations to provide nutritious food for children to take home for weekend meals.

Approximately 173,000 children in WV qualify for free or reduced price school meals and 21.1% of all West Virginia children live in households that are food insecure. This means they lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Many West Virginia schools are implementing programs that provide free breakfast or free breakfast and lunch to all students. Despite these efforts, many of the children at the greatest risk do not participate in the school meals program for fear that they will be labeled by their peers as needy.

To address the issue of childhood hunger in the state, the West Virginia Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 663 in April 2013, creating the West Virginia Feed to Achieve Act. The bill sponsored by Senator John R. Unger was signed into law by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin. It focuses on improving the nutrition, physical activity and health of West Virginia's children. The new law became effective in April 2013 and requires total implementation to be phased in no later than the beginning of the 2015 school year. This progressive piece of legislation is the first of its kind in the nation. It requires all WV public schools to implement innovative meal delivery systems and provide students a minimum of two nutritious meals and, where feasible, at no cost.

The inspiration for Feed to Achieve came to West Virginia Senate Majority Leader John Unger while visiting a third grade class at Berkeley Heights Elementary School in Martinsburg, WV. Senator Unger began an interactive exercise with the students to explain how a bill becomes a law. He asked the students, "If you could change one thing in this school, what would it be?" He heard responses that he expected to hear from a group of third graders like "a longer recess" but the response that caught his attention was from a little boy who said "I'd like to have a second lunch." When Senator Unger asked this young man why he would support having a second lunch he responded that if he had an extra lunch at school then it would mean there would be food left at home so his brother and his parents could eat. After hearing such a startling response from such a young child, Senator Unger asked the rest of the class how many of them were in the same situation as the little boy. Hands went up all around the classroom and it was at that moment that the good Senator knew something more must be done to feed the children of West Virginia.

(b) Why is it a new and creative approach or method?

The Feed to Achieve Act was collaboratively developed by Senator John R. Unger II and the WV Office of Child Nutrition (OCN). Because of the collaborative spirit between Senator Unger and the OCN, this legislation builds upon existing child nutrition programs already in place throughout the state (i.e. National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, Summer Feeding Program, Farm to School, and backpack program). This ensured that the legislation required no additional operational costs since the programs contained in the bill are already operating and funded through a combination of state, federal and private foundation funds. West Virginia is the first state in the nation to pass and implement such a progressive law that puts children's health and nutrition in the forefront of education. With this law, Senator John R. Unger II and the West Virginia Legislature recognized the connection between student health and academic success.

The WV Legislature found that every child in school needs to have nutritious meals in order to achieve his or her potential and that a hungry child is less likely to be attentive to the lessons being taught. The primary intent of the new law is to ensure that every student in West Virginia is afforded the opportunity to receive a minimum of two nutritious meals per day. This legislation placed the nutritional needs of children at the forefront and aligns school breakfast and lunch with the rest of the instructional day; a bold and innovative move to support children's needs to improve overall academic achievement.

(c) What are the specific activities and operations of the program?

The entire bill and current activities relate to the bill can be summarized into five major areas of focus:

1. A provision requiring all schools to adopt innovative meal delivery systems that ensure all students are given an adequate opportunity to eat breakfast. These approved systems shall include, but are not limited to, Grab-And-Go Breakfasts, Breakfast in the Classroom or Breakfast After First Period. During the current 2013-2014 school year, approximately 75% of schools are offering innovative breakfast strategies with a state average of 42% participation in school breakfast throughout WV schools; this success is

due to the implementation of the Feed to Achieve Act by the West Virginia Office of Child Nutrition.

2. A requirement for the Department of Education and each county board of education to establish a fund that is restricted solely for the receipt and expenditure of gifts, grants and bequests for the purpose of providing additional or supplemental funds to increase participation in the nutrition programs outlined in the Feed to Achieve initiative. Currently all fifty-five counties in WV have established Feed to Achieve Fund accounts, as well as one state level account. This fund creates a mechanism for counties to receive contributions and donations from the public and private sectors, which are tax deductible. Funders may direct the use of their donation by selecting the school and nutrition program they would like their contribution to be allocated toward. These include: National School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch, Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, Community Gardens, Farm to School, Backpack Program, Summer Feeding Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

3. The Feed to Achieve initiative, when implemented in conjunction with the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, allows county boards of education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students without having to secure additional funds. During SY 2014 more than 330 schools in 38 counties currently offer free breakfast and lunch under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Schools are eligible to participate in CEP if at least 40 percent of the student body is eligible for free meals. Schools are reimbursed from USDA based on a prescribed claiming percentage. To ensure that CEP is implemented in accordance with federal law the WV Office of Child Nutrition utilizes a web based interface system, PRIMERO, to not only identify those children that are eligible for free meals but to also monitor participation in both the breakfast and lunch program. By having a web-based system identify students that are eligible for free meals, WV has been able to implement CEP to its full advantage and qualify every school possible, therefore feeding more students free breakfast and lunch. This system also affords WV the opportunity to measure changes in meal participation at the school, county and state levels and monitor those changes from year to year. It is important to note that PRIMERO was already implemented in WV public schools prior to the Feed to Achieve Act and therefore, with regards to tracking meal participation data, no additional technology was needed to measure the impact of the legislation.

4. The Department of Education and county boards of education are charged with forming or expanding partnerships with the federal and state departments of agriculture and health, local master gardeners, county extension agents or other experts in the field of agriculture or gardening. These collaborations may assist in the development of community gardens, farm to school programs and other programs that teach students how to grow, produce and provide healthy food to the students. The WV Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition currently has a strong capacity built in all programs listed above.

5. The Feed to Achieve Act requires the Office of Child Nutrition to report annually to the WV Legislature on the impact and implementation of the Act. This presents the OCN

with a unique opportunity to educate policy makers and recommend future innovative policies to support nutrition programs and childhood hunger.

(d) What equipment, technology and/or software are used to operate and administer the program?

**See answer (c3) regarding WV's web-based interface system – PRIMERO*

Every WV school is equipped with an electronic point of service (POS) system for the national school breakfast and lunch programs. Each school level POS is housed in a shared database at the state level and allows WV Department of Education access to real time POS data, percentage needy per county/ school/ individual levels, participation rates daily/ weekly/ monthly /yearly, and has allowed data collection for the Feed to Achieve Act.

(e) What are the annual operational costs of the program? How is it funded?

Because the Feed to Achieve law is aligned so closely with the child nutrition programs already being operated within the state of West Virginia, its initial implementation has required no extra financial support from the legislature or foundations however; the State Department of Education and each county board of education has established a fund that is restricted solely for the receipt and expenditure of gifts, grants and bequests for the purpose of providing additional or supplemental funds to increase participation in the nutrition programs outlined in the Feed to Achieve initiative. The programs included in the Feed to Achieve Act and that will be supported by donated funding are: National School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch, Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, Community Gardens, Farm to School, Backpack Program, Summer Feeding Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. West Virginia is currently collaborating with several large companies who are interested in funding the initiatives within the Feed to Achieve Law.

(f) Has the program been effective at addressing the problem or issue?

Several WV schools began implementing Feed to Achieve upon passage, specifically in the area of breakfast delivery systems. These approved systems include, but are not limited to, Grab-And-Go Breakfasts, Breakfast in the Classroom or Breakfast After First Period. Several schools have reported decreases in discipline and psychological problems, decreases in visits to school nurses, decreases in tardiness, increases in student attentiveness, increases in attendance, and improved learning environments. These positive outcomes are further supported through comprehensive healthy schools policies that include quality nutrition, integrating physical activity during the school day, and teaching children about the importance of embracing a healthy active lifestyle. Meal participation rates have increased significantly. In less than a year WV has seen its breakfast participation rates go from 37% to over 42%. Principals and teachers are reporting these programs are some of the best they have ever implemented in their classrooms.

Under the Feed to Achieve Act, over half of WV county school systems have implemented farm to school partnerships/activities. In WV, "Farm to School" encompasses efforts that bring locally produced foods into school cafeterias, hands-on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes. This integration of food related education into the regular standards-based curriculum encourages Agricultural Education students to consider farming as

a career option. WV schools have spent over 1 million dollars in the last two years on local products. Counties submit copies of invoices for local products to the OCN for tracking purposes. This allows the OCN to measure changes in the amount of local products being purchased.

(g) What measurable impact has the program had?

West Virginia has increased breakfast participation by 5% in less than one year due to the implementation of the Feed to Achieve Act. This is approximately 14,060 more students eating breakfast than in the prior year. West Virginia has also purchased over 1 million dollars of local foods for students to eat during their school breakfast and lunch programs.

3. Did the program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number, and email address.

Yes, the Feed to Achieve Act originated in West Virginia and is a progressive piece of legislation that is the first of its kind in the nation. Senator John R. Unger II is to be commended for his leadership and commitment to improving the health of WV's children. Senator Unger is the innovator of this Law

4. Are you aware of similar programs in other states?

Currently we are unaware of any similar program in other states; however we believe that the Feed to Achieve Legislation could be implemented seamlessly in other states. USDA sponsored child nutrition programs are currently being operated in every state; therefore legislation such as Feed to Achieve could be implemented and sustained without any additional operational funds. State Legislatures that are interested in implementing Feed to Achieve need to collaborate with agencies administering USDA child nutrition programs to ensure successful implementation. Additionally, close relationships must be developed and sustained between

state agencies, legislatures and grassroots organizations to allow for successful implementation and to assist in obtaining public support of the initiative.

5. Is the program transferable to other states? What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter when attempting to adopt this program?

West Virginia is a small, poor state and the state's agencies have a history of working collaboratively to support, build upon successes and break through barriers. If other states do not work closely between agencies, (i.e. Department of Health and Human Resources, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture and State Government), an initiative such as the Feed to Achieve Act and the activities within it will be too large for one governmental agency to implement. Each state will also need the governmental agency that implements the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs to have a significant training and implementation presence with the food service directors at the local level in order to successfully implement the innovative breakfast strategies in each school.