“Healthy Cooking for Busy Moms” Workshops

Nutrition, Food Safety, Stretching the Food Dollar, Label Reading, Food Preparation Techniques

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**Overview:**

The Head Start program is a prime audience for Better Living for Texans nutrition education in Hopkins County, with programs being held on a regular basis throughout the school year for parents and children. A Head Start staff member requested a cooking school to provide young mothers with a hands-on experience to reinforce concepts learned throughout the year.

Dates for two sessions were scheduled and notices were sent home to Head Start parents through the school, asking parents to contact the school to sign up. The workshops were also announced in the Better Living for Texans newsletter, which is sent to all Head Start families. The Early Childhood Learning Center Parent Center was the site for the workshops.

**The Workshops:**

Recipes using various preparation methods were selected for two complete menus and ingredients were purchased prior to each workshop. On the day of the workshops, tables were set up for ingredients and supplies, such as bowls, measuring utensils, spoons, etc. Recipes were laminated and posted at each work table.

The facility had a full kitchen, complete with oven, microwave, refrigerator, disposal, and sinks. A seating area, complete with tables, chairs, and audio-visual equipment served as the educational and dining area. Educational components were selected to go with each session. Visuals for each session included exhibits using food models, displays, and other items.

* The first session focused on hand & kitchen hygiene, safe food handling and the “temperature danger zone”. The UV disclosure center and Glo Germ® were used to reinforce the importance of proper hand-washing. Refrigerator and food thermometers were distributed. In addition, how to read a recipe and correct measuring techniques were reviewed.
* The second session focused on reading a nutrition label and fast food fats. Visuals were prepared showing the amounts of fats in various fast food items.
* “MyPlate” was discussed at both sessions.

Following the educational portion of the workshops, participants were divided into four groups. Each group, with assistance from Extension volunteers, prepared two recipes for the menu. When all recipes were completed, a buffet was set up to provide participants the opportunity to sample each dish. A discussion followed, allowing participants to tell about the preparation techniques and how the dish fits into the MyPlate system.

A booklet was distributed to each participant containing handouts applicable to the topics covered and the recipes used. These also provided contact information for the Extension Office.

**Volunteers & Collaborators**

Extension agents from neighboring counties and Master Wellness Volunteers assisted with the actual workshops. In addition, coordinators for the Transforming North Texas initiative were on hand to assist. An interpreter was available to help in communicating with the Hispanic moms.

The Family & Consumer Sciences Committee funded the purchase of ingredients. East Region Program Director, Susan Ballabina, and East Region BLT Coordinator, Annie Tinsley, each attended a workshop to observe.

**Results**

Registration was limited to 30 participants for each session. Direct observation and verbal feedback were used as evaluation tools. 100% of the participants indicated that they enjoyed the workshop and tried a new food and/or combination of ingredients. 100% also indicated that they would practice label reading and use a food thermometer to check for proper internal temperatures of foods.

**Future Implications/ Interpretation**

Head Start staff has requested four cooking schools during the 2013-2014 school year. Interpretation included Commissioners’ Court reports, newspaper photos and write-ups, posted on the Hopkins County Family & Consumer Sciences Facebook page, and TExAS system. The workshops will be included in the 2013 “Making a Difference” booklet, as well.