



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PANTRY PACKS' HEARTWARMING NUTRITIONAL JOURNEY A Leap Towards Healthier Weekends for Students

In a close-knit community where every child's health is a priority, the Lake Washington Schools Foundation's Pantry Packs team, driven by compassion and a deep sense of responsibility, recently embarked on a heartwarming journey. Their goal was simple yet profound: to ensure the food packs students took home every weekend were not just filling, but nutritionally enriching.

Background

Under the dedicated leadership of volunteer leaders Robyn Ashton, Allison Dunmire, Jennifer Martyn, Colleen Rutherford, Erin Schadt, and Shannon Schill, the Pantry Packs program provides vital weekend nourishment to students in need within the Lake Washington School District. Powered by community volunteers and donations to the LWSF, this program ensures the distribution of food packs to address the crucial hunger gap during weekends.

In the first quarter of the 2023-24 school year, the Pantry Packs program purchased, assembled, and distributed almost 14,000 weekend food packs to hundreds of students in the district.

Reassessing Nutritional Contents

Recently, program leader Shannon Schill undertook a comprehensive analysis of the nutritional values of each item in the food packs.

Shannon's analysis led to some interesting insights. In line with the latest FDA nutritional guidelines, the Pantry Packs team, always prioritizing nutrition, was pleased to find their packs scored highly against these standards. The FDA emphasizes reducing Saturated Fat, Sodium, and Added Sugar, and increasing Fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium.

The team discovered that their packs were already below the recommended limits for Sugar and Saturated Fat. However, due to the necessity of using shelf-stable prepackaged foods, they were over the maximum for Sodium and under the minimum for Fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium.

Nutritional Improvements and Adjustments

To address these challenges, efforts were directed towards enhancing pack contents, considering these findings as well as the kid-friendliness and cost-effectiveness of new food options.

For 2024, the team has implemented the following changes:

- Added an additional fruit option by rotating popcorn into the snack category, improving Fiber, Calcium, and Potassium while lowering Sodium.
- Switched to higher Fiber and lower Sodium options for oatmeal, granola bars, and snacks.
- Included more Tuna pouch options, a great source of Vitamin D.
- Exploring ways to incorporate more refried beans and legumes for their high Fiber, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium content.

Furthermore, the team has updated their Amazon Wish List with more nutritious options based on their research. The generous food donations received have enabled them to make improvements in all these areas.

"Seeing the tangible results of our Pantry Packs team's dedication to enhancing the nutritional value of our food packs fills me with immense pride," says LWSF Executive Director Katy Philips. "We're not just addressing food insecurity; we're providing a foundation for healthier, happier futures. Every pack we distribute is a reflection of our unwavering commitment to support the well-being of every student we reach. The journey to improve our packs is ongoing, and each step forward is a step towards nurturing our community's most valuable asset – our children."

More Than Just Food

This journey of the Pantry Packs team is a testament to the power of community, care, and commitment.

Each weekend, as students carry home these packs, they are not just carrying food; they are bringing home the love and dedication of a community dedicated to their nourishment and well-being. Pantry Packs is more than a program; it's a heartwarming story of nourishing young lives, one weekend at a time.

You can learn more about our Pantry Packs program at www.lwsf.org/our-work/pantry-packs.

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The Lake Washington Schools Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that all students in the Lake Washington School District have access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Through fundraising and community support, the foundation aims to remove barriers, build connections, enhance learning, and build connections to enable all students to succeed academically and personally.

LWSF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, tax identification number 55-0891792.