

# impact

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## 4-H health advocates' nutrition and hydration project support high school athletes

### AT A GLANCE

4-H health advocates complete a two-year nutrition and hydration project with positive impacts for high school track and field athletes.

### The Situation

Nutrition and hydration are among the most basic of needs, and vulnerable students are impacted disproportionately by the lack of school-based resources. Caldwell School District is eligible for the USDA's community-level free lunch program with 76% of the students from limited-resourced families. Two 4-H health advocates saw a gap in the quantity and quality of the school lunch program, especially for athletes. While there are community-based food resources, students are often lacking nutritious snacks on event days.

### Our Response

University of Idaho (UI) Extension professionals mentored the 4-H health advocates in their True Leaders in Equity Institute (TLEI) project addressing nutrition and hydration practices of Caldwell High School (CHS) track and field athletes. In 2023, the project provided 60 athletes with healthy snack bags at four events. In 2024, 62 athletes received healthy snack bags at six events. Snack bags contained three nutrient-rich snacks, a food pantry resource card, nutrition fact card and an inspirational sticker. Each athlete received a quality water bottle to use at school and during events.



Caldwell High School athletes excited about their healthy snack bags from UI Extension 4-H Youth Development.

The health advocates and Extension mentors received UI Institutional Review Board approval for preseason and postseason surveys for CHS athletes. The surveys focused on student athletes' attention to their nutrition and hydration practices; perceptions of the impact of these practices on their well-being; and the level of perceived support from school staff to engage in healthy nutrition behaviors.

### Program Outcomes

A total of 39 athletes completed the preseason survey and 34 completed the postseason survey. The combined two-year results show the percentage of athletes responding to nutrition behaviors and frequency of eating various types of meals (Table 1.). Over half the athletes indicated that they pay attention to their daily

consumption of vegetables, fruits and water, as well as being active and encouraging others to be active. Slightly more than half pay attention to how many sugary drinks they consume (59% Yes or Usually). Less than half of the athletes indicated that they ate breakfast every day (29%) or most days (15%). The rest either ate breakfast on some days (46%) or never ate breakfast (10%).

Table 1: Attention paid to food/beverage/activity.

Pay attention daily to how much they: (N=39)	Yes	Usually	Not really	N
Eat fruit	22%	34%	34%	10%
Eat vegetables	16%	40%	34%	10%
Drink water	56%	19%	19%	6%
Drink sugary beverages	40%	19%	36%	5%
Being physically active	66%	26%	9%	-
Encourage others to be active with them	52%	38%	10%	-
How often athletes eat:	Every day	Most days	Some days	Never
Breakfast	29%	15%	46%	10%
Fast food	2%	-	92%	6%
School lunch	38%	18%	33%	11%

Athletes indicated that their track performance is tied to the type and amount of food they eat throughout the day (74%). Athletes also felt supported by coaches to make healthy food choices (89%).

The athletes ate snacks before (88%) and after (56%) competing, indicating that the students were hungry for snacks after school and after competing. The nutrition fact cards helped athletes (87%) learn new information. Most athletes (88%) also indicated that having a new water bottle helped them drink more water. Fifty-five percent indicated that they would not have

had nutritious snacks on event days without snack bags (Table 2).

Coaching staff noted positive impact on the athletes. “I loved the water bottles that were provided for the athletes last year and the times listed on them so that athlete could properly gauge their hydration levels throughout the day.” “The impact has been great as students who need access to food, especially to support their athletic performance, [it] was no longer a worry for them.”

Table 2: Effect of receiving snacks and a water bottle.

(N= 34)	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Strongly agree or agree
Helpful in supporting athletic performance	-	8%	92%
Had a positive impact on sport season	-	-	100%
Made me feel supported by peers	2%	15%	83%
Helped in drinking more water	2%	10%	88%
Learned new nutrition information	4%	9%	87%
Would not have had access to nutritious snack on event day	20%	24%	55%

Athletes (92%) indicated that the snack bags supported their performance and had a positive impact on their sport experience (100%). They also felt supported by their peers (83%) (Table 2). Athletes indicated that healthy food and water should be offered at school events and wanted to see healthier food choices offered during school lunch (98%).

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Special acknowledgement to Maylee McConnell-Soong and Keira Ferro, 4-H health advocates, for leading this project. TLEI was funded by the National 4-H Council in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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14-24-mtoomey-health-advocates • 6/24