

# Kosciusko County Lunch Bus

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Did you know thousands of children in our local school corporations rely on free or reduced-priced breakfasts and lunches when school is in session? Have you ever wondered what these children do for meals during the long summer break, specifically the children living in rural areas?

According to Marci Franks, WCS Food Service Director, the percentage of students who are eligible for free & reduced meals has increased over the last ten years from 28% to 49%. (Franks, November 4, 2012). Current K-12 enrollments and free & reduced lunch percentages are:

<b>School Corporation</b>	<b>2012-13 Enrollment</b>	<b>Free &amp; Reduced Lunch Percentage</b>
Tippecanoe Valley	1979	56.54%
Warsaw Community	7004	49.80%
Wawasee Community	3112	47.62%

Fortunately, programs have been developed to assist these children during the summer months. The Summer Food Service Program for Children (SFSP) was created to serve nutritious meals when the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program meals are not available. To ensure all children receive proper nutrition throughout the year, SFSP reimburses organizations that prepare and serve meals to eligible children during the summer and school vacation periods. (Summer Food Service Program, 2013)

The US Department of Agriculture along with the Indiana Department of Education provide two meals per day, per child to children 18 years of age and under in areas where at least half of the children are eligible for free or reduced-

price school meals. Sites can serve breakfast and lunch or breakfast and supper. A snack can be served in place of a meal.

All school corporations in our county do reach out and offer summer meals in certain locations. In 2012, all three school corporations in Kosciusko County served meals in various locations. Wawasee Community School Corporation sponsored sites at Enchanted Hills Park, Milford School, North Webster Elementary School, North Webster United Methodist Church, and Syracuse Elementary School. Tippecanoe Valley School Corporation served meals at Tippecanoe Valley High School and Mentone Elementary School. Warsaw Community Schools sponsored sites at Edgewood Middle School, Warsaw High School, Center Lake Park, Lucerne Park, Washington Elementary School, Merrywood Mobile Home Park in Winona Lake and Winona Lake Park. The school corporations' efforts have made a positive impact on the children in need of meals during the long summer months. Last year alone, WCS Food Services department served 5,779 lunches at Center Lake and Lucerne Park. However, one question remains, what about those children who lack transportation to one of the free meal sites?

Our mission, in the proposed program, is to deliver meals to the children in our community who lack transportation to the facilities where free meals are currently being provided – thus the creation of the “Kosciusko County Lunch Bus Program”.

Our team's goal is to merge the school corporations' summer meal services together into one county-wide program = One Team One Goal (OTOG) approach.

Using this approach will assure a county-wide impact; as demographically it will cover the rural areas heavily populated with children living in low-income households.

In our research of “a lunch bus program”, we found that in 2012 Fayette County, Indiana piloted a program where a food truck delivered meals to children in need. After speaking with Siobhan Carey, the Food Director of Fayette County, and hearing the impact they had on their community with their food truck, it was evident that the program our team was dreaming about could be developed to serve our local children. (Carey)

Using Ms. Carey’s inspiration, the Kosciusko County Lunch Bus Program concept began to materialize. Our vision is to acquire a Lunch Bus for each school district in Kosciusko County. The buses would feature a retrofitted interior with booth-style seating where children can eat, a retractable awning on the exterior will offer shade for those children who choose to eat outside. The buses will also be equipped with built-in coolers to safely deliver the meals, a built-in generator for electricity, and music for the children to enjoy. Estimated cost for the proposed project is \$25,000 - \$30,000 per bus.

A lunch bus day would begin with a stop at the food service office to pick up the meals for the day. Two trained volunteers will be on the bus to ensure the set guidelines are followed. The lunch bus will have designated times for each stop. The approximate times per stop will be 30 – 40 minutes. Once all the children have consumed their lunches and the site is cleaned, the lunch bus will proceed to its

next stop. This process will continue at each stop, Monday through Friday, throughout the scheduled duration of the program.

For sustainability, we are partnering with local school corporations, service organizations and leaders of local businesses. To date, our team has met with staff members from Tippecanoe Valley Schools, Warsaw Community Schools, Wawasee Community Schools and Grace College. We have shared our proposed program with local service organizations such as the Claypool Lions Club and Kiwanis. In addition, we have met with business leaders from Grace Brethren Church, Kosciusko Area Bus Service, Westhaven Estates and Hideaway Hills Mobile Home Park and have spoken with Kerlin Motor Sales.

The ultimate vision for the Kosciusko County Lunch Bus will take time to build and develop, but the need is immediate and important. Therefore, we are proposing a pilot program for the 2013 summer months.

The pilot program would be held at two locations, Hideaway Hills Mobile Home Park (Warsaw) and Westhaven Estates (Tippecanoe Valley). If possible, we would also expand the current program at Merrywood Mobile Home Park from two days per week to five days per week. The pilot would run for approximately seven weeks beginning Thursday, June 6 through Tuesday, July 30, with the exception of July 1 – July 5. Warsaw Community Schools will supply the state funded meals for each location and provide the state-regulated training for all the volunteers; at no cost.

Kosciusko Area Bus Service, Grace College, Warsaw Community Schools, Tippecanoe Valley Schools, Claypool Lions, and Kiwanis have been contacted for the use of a van and potential volunteers. Once we have secured a van, and confirmed the number of volunteers acquired, we will be able to determine the number of days that can be offered at each site.

The pilot process will require two volunteers to pick up the meals at the food service office and deliver them to each meal site. Two additional trained volunteers will be at each location to ensure the state regulated guidelines are followed. These guidelines mandate that meals are consumed on-site by a child 18 years old or younger and any food not eaten is thrown away; with the exception of one fruit or one vegetable which can be taken home. In addition, adults will be able to purchase meals for a nominal fee of \$3.25. (Summer Food Service Program Guidelines) Each site will be set up like a picnic area with blankets and/or tents so that the volunteers can monitor the children as they consume their lunch. Once the van finishes delivering all the meals, the van will return to each site, pick up the coolers, clean up the site, and return any unused items to the food service office.

Receiving the \$1000 Jean Northenor Award would allow the pilot program to take flight by purchasing tents, portable coolers, blankets, and tables. To expand the pilot program into the ultimate vision of a Kosciusko County Lunch Bus program, additional subsidies and revenue sources will need to be pursued. Funding, for the buses, is necessary to allow the program to reach its full potential;

therefore will be sought from corporate sponsors, Kosciusko County Community Foundation, K21 Foundation, and United Way.

It takes one day to make a difference in the lives of our children. Only through continued effort and support can we provide for and protect our young treasures as we lay the foundation for the future leaders of our community.



## Works Cited

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