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## **Brighter Bites receives Walmart foundation grant**

October 21, 2020

Brighter Bites, a Houston-based nonprofit that provides underserved families with fresh produce and nutrition education to improve health outcomes, today announced it has received an additional \$1.5 million grant from the Walmart Foundation to expand programming in diverse communities throughout the country. The grant will support Brighter Bites' ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic and nutrition crisis by fueling growth in Houston, Dallas, Austin, the Washington, D.C. metro area, New York City, and Florida, as well as expansion to Brighter Bites' first city in California.



The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have exacerbated the worst hunger and nutrition crisis in recent history. Health disparities in nutrition and obesity have manifested in minority groups that face hurdles to accessing healthy, affordable food experiencing disproportionate rates of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from Covid-19.

“Access to healthy food builds the foundation for good health in communities,” said Eileen Hyde, director of sustainability, food systems and food access for Walmart.org. “Our goal is to improve

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people's ability to more consistently consume nutritious food, and we're thrilled to support Brighter Bites who work every day to do just that."

This summer the organization experienced a 2,000 percent increase in demand for services compared to the same time period last year and has been forced to pivot operations in order to safely bring its three-part program back to schools this fall.

This school year Brighter Bites will enroll nearly 30,000 underserved families in the program across 126 schools nationwide. Each week, participating families will receive specially curated boxes filled with 20-25 pounds of 8-12 different produce items, along with nutrition education materials and recipes to help families prepare healthy meals together at home.

Brighter Bites traditionally utilizes a volunteer co-op model with parent and community volunteers helping to bag the bulk produce on school campuses. However, due to safety concerns the organization is now paying distributors to pre-package the produce into individual cardboard boxes for families to receive via carpool lines. Brighter Bites is also ramping up its work with farmers to facilitate the recovery and distribution of fresh, high-quality produce that would otherwise go to waste.

"Brighter Bites is incredibly grateful for the Walmart Foundation's ongoing support, especially at a time when an unprecedented number of families are struggling to put fresh, immune-boosting food on the table," said Rich Dachman, Brighter Bites CEO. "This grant provides the resources we need to rapidly innovate in order to safely bring our program back to schools this fall without missing a beat."

And whereas before Brighter Bites' staff would distribute printed nutrition education materials to families at in-person events, this year the entire process will be streamlined with families scanning a QR code on their produce boxes to access all of the corresponding recipes, tip sheets, and materials via the new Brighter Bites Mobile App. Brighter Bites will also be conducting virtual cooking demonstrations, and engaging with families at a higher level through online channels and social media.

Through third-party research partnership with the UTHealth School of Public Health, Brighter Bites is able to demonstrate impact in terms of improving families' nutrition and long-term health. A few topline statistics that UTHealth researchers reported from last school year include:

\* Of the families who participated in Brighter Bites over the 2019-2020 school year, 99 percent of parents reported their family ate more fruits and veggies during the program, while 97% reported continuing to eat more produce on their own during the summer after.

\* As compared to the shopping and consumption habits of families at baseline, by the end of the spring participating families reported a significant decrease in the amount of added sugars consumed, as well as a significant increase in eating produce-heavy meals together at home.

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