Hunger Games is no game, but serious business to students

This SEEDS program teaches students to buy and cook nutritional meals, all according to government standards, for under $2 a meal.

We're talking about SEEDS Hunger Games in Manistee, a worthwhile local program at Manistee High that teaches students how to put together meals under a stringent budget in case, one day, they ever find themselves in that situation—and let's face it, many of us do at one point or another in life. The SEEDS (Seeking Ecology, Education and Design Solution) program is nearing the end of the five-year grant that funds it, and while the folks at MHS have reapplied, it is clear Manistee is no longer going to be a site for the Hunger Games program.

SEEDS Hunger Games teaches students valuable lessons, and lets them learn in a practical manner that takes them out of the classroom, into the grocery store, and then into the cooking lab to cook up the meal they've purchased for very little money.

"One Thursday a month, we get about a dozen kids come out, and they really seem to enjoy themselves," says Kevin Summer, SEEDS After School Site Coordinator at Manistee High.

"Depending on how many come, we break down into groups, give them handouts on how much they can spend, offer some tips on what to look for, because their meals must supply fruits, grains and proteins."

The price-per-meal guideline is laid out by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), one of the nation's most important anti-hunger programs. SNAP annually helps almost 47 million low-income Americans to afford a nutritionally adequate diet. To get SNAP benefits, households must meet certain tests, including resource and income tests. Another guideline for the meals comes from myplate.gov, a United States Department of Agriculture site.

Well, are you ready for what the students get to spend on their meal that includes fruits, grains and proteins? Under $2.00. That's right, using SNAP guidelines and tips from Summers, the students are able to put together, then cook, a nutritious meal once a month for less than $2.00.

During SEEDS Hunger Games, after receiving SNAP's average per meal allotment to spend on ingredients, under $2.00, students then visit Oleson's Food Store, a nearby grocery store, and shop for the best deals possible that fit their menu. Sometimes, the students also stop at Family Dollar to look for bargains.

By the time they are nearing the end of the program, the kids have worked up a pretty solid appetite, and they are ready to cook their meals and dig in.