



DISTRICT: Denver Public Schools, Denver County
DIRECTOR OF NUTRITION SERVICES: Leo Lesh
EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM: Universal Free Breakfast; Breakfast in the Classroom; Breakfast Carts in High Schools

★ **BACKGROUND**

In 2006 Denver Public Schools (DPS) launched Start Smart, a Universal Breakfast Program, which offers breakfast at no charge to all students, regardless of income, at schools where breakfast is currently served. Currently 120 schools participate in the program, reaching more than 60,000 students. To reach more children with free breakfast, DPS also offers Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) where breakfast is brought to each classroom for every student. Currently nine schools participate in BIC. Getting kids to participate in breakfast at the high school level has always been a challenge; in 2007 DPS started bringing breakfast to where the students are. DPS set up breakfast carts and reimbursable vending machines in main hallways.

★ **IMPLEMENTATION**

Denver Public Schools receives funding for Start Smart through the DPS Department of Food and Nutrition Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program. In developing Start Smart, DPS tapped into the expertise of on-staff registered dietitians to revise breakfast menu offerings. Revised breakfast menu items include whole grain, reduced-sugar cereals, fat-free and low-fat milk and dairy products, variety of fresh and canned fruit options, homemade whole grain toast with cheese, breakfast sandwiches/wraps, hardboiled eggs and breakfast baskets which provide all the essential elements of a healthy morning meal.

To market Start Smart, DPS has teamed up with various partners to help promote the program. DPS and Western Dairy Association send out postcards to parents in the district two times a year. During National School Breakfast Week, DPS always holds a special event with a local celebrity, along with a student contest to further promote the importance of eating a healthy school breakfast daily.

★ **IMPACT**

For those schools who participate in Start Smart through the traditional, before school cafeteria style service, participation has grown from 11% to 25%. Breakfast in the classroom has a much higher participation reach, for example, at Godsmen Elementary, the average daily participation (ADP) before BIC was 90 students. The year BIC started the ADP increased to 465 students—an increase of 416%.

High schools that are serving out of the breakfast carts have seen an increase of at least 25% ADP. Schools offering breakfast meals as a part of a reimbursable vending program noted a 16% increase in ADP.

At one DPS middle school where the students are involved in BIC (students help transport food carts to each classroom, and help pick up/dispose of trash within their classroom), the principal is very supportive and impressed, he stated BIC is developing a greater sense of community and responsibility among students.

★ **WORDS OF ADVICE**

"Breakfast has a significant impact on learning, development and growth, but more importantly; providing breakfast is the right thing to do for our students," exclaims Lesh.