



DISTRICT: Laramie County No. 1, Cheyenne, Wyo.
DIRECTOR OF NUTRITION SERVICES: Linda Willman, R.D.
EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM: Free Breakfast; Breakfast in the Classroom

★ BACKGROUND

Prior to the 2003-04 school year, Laramie County School District No. 1 offered a traditional breakfast program before the school day began. Participation in the program was weak since children opted to remain on the playground rather than come into the gym before the school day began to eat breakfast. Only on cold or rainy days did breakfast participation increase temporarily.

★ IMPLEMENTATION

To help increase overall breakfast participation, Linda Willman, the district's director of nutrition services, began offering breakfast free of charge to all students in the classroom in the fall of 2003. Under the program, the first 10 minutes of the school day is devoted to letting children eat a cold breakfast at their desks. A grant from Western Dairy Council allowed the school to purchase more coolers for the additional cold milk, yogurt and juice delivered to the classrooms. Students who wish to participate in the breakfast program pick up breakfast from two choices offered on the breakfast cart and eat at their desks while teachers take attendance and make daily announcements. Some teachers use the breakfast time as their class' story time and read to the students. Either way, the extra time spent over breakfast also allows the children to quietly and easily settle into the school day.

★ IMPACT

The breakfast program was such a success in the first school that it was quickly expanded to five elementary schools. Now that children no longer need to sacrifice their play time for breakfast, participation in the school breakfast program exceeds 90 percent. Teachers note that fewer students are tardy or absent since the breakfast program began, and students are more ready to start their school day once the breakfast time is over. Even the physical education teacher noticed a change in the students – she believes they have more energy. And the music teacher observed an improvement in student performance since the schools started offering breakfast in the classroom.

★ WORDS OF ADVICE

Let the teachers be your advocates. Willman's breakfast program expanded so quickly due to teachers talking to other teachers about how the program reduced tardiness and got students ready to learn.

Simple changes can make all the difference. For breakfast waste, custodians now place two trash liners in each classroom trash can. After breakfast, teachers simply remove the innermost liner and place the trash out in the large waste bins in the hallway, or place them outside the classroom so as to eliminate lingering breakfast aromas.

Maximize purchasing. "We also participate in the USDA after-school snack program, and we found that the cold, individually-wrapped food items served at breakfast can also be offered in the after-school program," noted Willman.