St. Lawrence Catholic Elementary School’s Success with Breakfast in the Classroom is Awesome!

By Suzette Hartmann, School Nutrition Specialist

Sometimes a plan can come together quicker than expected. For Kathleen Prechtel, RD, School Nutrition Director for St. Lawrence Catholic Elementary School in Indianapolis, her plan came together quite quickly to start serving breakfast in the classrooms. Both Prechtel and the school principal, Sarah Watson, began working at St. Lawrence at the start of the 2015-2016 school year. Shortly thereafter, Prechtel observed that breakfast participation was very low, even though about 70% of the students qualified for free/reduced price meals. Not long after the start of the school year, the principal approached Prechtel to ask about the possibility of offering breakfast in the classrooms instead of the cafeteria. A major reason for the low participation was because the cafeteria and gym are in one building and the classrooms are in a different building. Only students who arrived at school for early morning care ate school breakfast. Both Prechtel and Watson knew more students would eat school breakfast if it was made more accessible. Teachers reported that many students were coming to school without eating breakfast, or students were eating junk food such as chips for breakfast. Prechtel noted that some teachers and the social worker were buying cereal bars to keep in the classrooms for students who were noticeably hungry.

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On November 5, 2015, Prechtel attended a breakout session at the Indiana School Nutrition Association’s Annual State Conference. The presenter talked about a grant opportunity offered by Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom. Within one month of attending the conference, Prechtel submitted a grant application. A month later, St. Lawrence received a grant for approximately $15,000!

The grant required schools to serve breakfast in the classroom at no charge to all students. In order to know if this would be possible, Prechtel had to “crunch the numbers” based on expected revenue. With about 70% of their students eligible for free and reduced meals, the numbers looked good.

Items purchased with the grant funds included insulated bags, transportation carts, a Grab and Go cart, new shelving for the walk-in cooler, a can rack, moveable shelving units to store bags, a POS tablet, a bagger for fresh fruit, trash cans and portable sweepers for the classrooms, and marketing materials.

Now all the students eat breakfast in their classrooms. Breakfast is delivered to Pre-K through 5th grade classrooms, while the 6th through 8th grade students make their selections from a breakfast cart.

The food service staff received a lot of support from the teachers and custodian to help make the grant a success. Middle school students working on service projects help the food service staff take the carts from the cafeteria building to the classroom building each morning, and the custodian brings the carts back after breakfast. Students have about 15 minutes at the start of the school day to eat breakfast during morning announcements. Prechtel stated, “The morning is now a time for students to come together. Teachers are reporting fewer trips to the nurse’s station for headaches and stomach aches, and teachers also report students are more alert.” Offer versus Serve is implemented, and the students have a choice of two different grains each day, one of which is always cereal. A hot item is offered twice each week. When hot oatmeal is offered to middle school students from the breakfast cart, students may add raisins, walnuts, or flax seed.

St. Lawrence Catholic Elementary School serves students from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. Their grant is for grades K-8. Prechtel reported that last school year breakfast participation for grades K-8 was 16%, and this year K-8 participation is 71%! For grades K-5, participation is 80% (K-5 has a higher percentage of free/reduced eligible students).

Prechtel stated, “The grant paid all of the start-up costs. Without the grant, changing the breakfast service would not have happened as quickly. We would have had to find the start-up money elsewhere. I love my job, and I like to promote school meals and provide nutrition education whenever I can.”

Photo of insulated bags with breakfast logo
On March 6, 2017, students at St. Joan of Arc Elementary School in Indianapolis celebrated National School Breakfast Week at an event sponsored by the American Dairy Association Indiana Inc. During a special breakfast in the school cafeteria, Dwayne Allen, former Indianapolis Colts Tight End and Fuel Up to Play 60 ambassador, talked to students about the importance of eating a healthy breakfast. Some of Allen’s favorite breakfast foods are milk, granola, and yogurt.

Third generation dairy farmer Kelly McKinnon and 500 Festival Princess Carly Bailey also talked to the students. Other special guests included local members of the Indianapolis Fire Department, Indianapolis Colts Cheerleaders, and Buttercup, the American Dairy Association of Indiana’s mascot.

Lesley Bartone, Food Service Director for St. Joan of Arc, helped plan the celebration. Bartone enrolled her school in Fuel Up to Play 60 this school year and selected students from each grade to form a Fuel Up to Play 60 Wellness Team. Student members of the team had the opportunity to ask Dwayne Allen questions during breakfast, and everyone listened very attentively to hear what Allen had to say.

Bartone has implemented a Grab and Go breakfast service, and students eat breakfast in their classrooms. Breakfast participation has increased significantly since breakfast in the classroom was implemented.
Happy spring! I hope you enjoy your break and your time with your family!

I wanted to bring to your attention an exciting Pilot Program that we have been awarded by USDA and will implement for next school year. USDA is allowing approved states to use Medicaid data to certify students for free and reduced price meals. This will link more eligible children to nutritious school meals with less paperwork for the State, schools and families.

We will be adapting our Direct Certification system to incorporate this change, so please be on the lookout for more information on the modifications for next year.

Our hope is that this change will bring more students into the Direct Certification process, and there will be fewer applications for you to process. You may even pick up students who have not applied for free or reduced price meals in the past.

We look forward to working with you to implement this exciting change.

Thank you for all you do!
How do I find a supplier for fresh, quality produce for my program? Where can I find local produce? How can I ensure spending 100% of my district's USDA entitlement dollars? If you've ever asked yourself any of these questions, then the DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program may be just the answer you are looking for! The DoD (Department of Defense) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program allows schools to use USDA Foods entitlement dollars to buy fresh produce.

What are the advantages of DoD Fresh?

- **Consistency**: Product catalog is updated weekly and schools can receive deliveries weekly, making orders timely, fresh and responsive to market fluctuations. Under USDA regulations, foreign products cannot be purchased with entitlement dollars so the program is restricted to domestically-grown items.
- **High Quality**: DoD maintains high quality standards through Produce Quality Audits, encouraging vendors to follow Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP), and requiring that pre-cut and packaged produce is sourced from approved suppliers.
- **Variety**: DoD Fresh vendors offer as many as 50 different types of produce, available in multiple forms (whole, precut, and a variety of pack sizes) and from multiple locales as local and non-local items are routinely offered.
- **Easy ordering and funds tracking**: Schools place orders via the web-based Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Order/Receipt System (FFAVORS). The prices listed in the FFAVORS catalog reflect the prices that schools will be billed for the product. FFAVORS tracks schools' entitlement fund balances and total order costs.
- **Reduced administrative costs**: The Defense Logistics Agency manages more than 45 contracts with produce vendors across the country who in turn contract with growers to supply their designated region. Therefore, school districts do not need to get quotes or bids for the produce utilized through the DoD Fresh Program. DoD not only manages the contracts, but they also manage all vendor payments and reconciliation!

Indiana’s DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for the entire state is currently under contract with Roby’s Country Garden located in Bardstown, Kentucky. For more information and to sign up for the program, contact Cheryl Moore, Food Distribution Specialist, at mmoore@doe.in.gov or 317-234-2516.

Please note, the DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is different than USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is a grant that enables schools to provide fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to eligible elementary schools with high free and reduced rates. For more information about USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, contact Allie Caito-Sipe at acaito@doe.in.gov or call 317-232-0849.

Photo: Thursday, January 5, 2017
Today’s delivery of DoD fresh produce to New Albany Floyd County Schools from Roby’s Country Garden.
New Salad Bar is a Popular Choice at Noblesville High School

By Suzette Hartmann, School Nutrition Specialist

Last school year, Sue Dunn, Food Service Director for Noblesville Schools, and Erin Brattain, RD, Assistant Food Service Director, began offering high school students a salad bar using existing equipment. Because the salad bar was so well received, over the summer Dunn and Brattain purchased equipment and signage for a new salad bar. The new line was added to give students more options and help reduce plate waste.

Last year the salad bar included a selection of veggies, and students purchased between 20 to 30 salads a day. This year a wide variety of meat/meat alternates, fruits, and grains have been added to the bar. Now over 100 students are selecting a reimbursable lunch from the new salad bar every day.

Students pick up a clear plastic clam shell containing lettuce from an open air merchandizer, and then they fill the container with their choice of items from the salad bar. New signage and pendant lighting also help to make the line look new and inviting.

Dunn and Brattain looked to the commercial sector, such as Whole Foods Market and Marsh Supermarkets, for many of their salad bar ideas. They also talked to other school directors and managers. Their goal was to create a “college feel” to the serving line for the high school students. The teachers and administrators have also been very receptive. The most popular veggie items are diced bell peppers and grape tomatoes. Meat/meat alternates include shredded cheese (always popular), cottage cheese, diced egg, diced ham, and a chicken item. A selection of fruit and two different types of whole-grain chips are included on the line. After attending an IDOE sponsored A+ Culinary Training last summer, food service staff began making their own pickles using a recipe provided during the training! Each Friday the food service staff create a taco salad bar, and the students prepare their salad meal with taco meat and a tortilla, rice bowl, or a tortilla shell.
Over the last eight weeks, selected 3rd and 4th grade classes from Beech Grove City Schools participated in the SuperFood HEROES Program.

SuperFood HEROES is nutrition education curriculum paired with taste-testing designed to increase vegetable consumption among elementary school students. SuperFood HEROES provides vegetable exposure and nutrition knowledge to students during their major taste bud development. Research shows that the more times children taste a food, the more likely they are to begin liking the food. Sometimes, however, it can take eight or more times of trying the same food to start enjoying it. Because of this, students were encouraged to taste the same vegetable multiple times.

Black beans were the selected vegetable for the students. The black beans were chosen to help schools increase the consumption of the beans/peas (legumes) vegetable subgroup category. Over the course of the eight weeks, students were served fresh and cooked black beans in various ways in hopes of broadening acceptability and instilling healthier eating behaviors.

This research-based intervention, created by The Welborn Baptist Foundation (Evansville, IN), educates students on the “superhero-like” nutrients that vegetables provide in their diet. It was created in response to the recent changes in the USDA school food standards to encourage students to consume more of the healthy options offered in the school cafeteria.

Purdue Extension, Marion County Public Health Department, and Indiana Department of Education presented the nutrition education, while Chartwell’s Beech Grove School Registered Dietitian planned and prepped the taste testings.

Chartwell’s Beech Grove Registered Dietitian, Tarrah McCreary, planned and prepped eight different black bean recipes – ranging from citrus black beans to hot fiesta black beans to Mexican black beans. She even made black bean brownies to celebrate the last week!

In order to provide ways to creatively serve the vegetable at home and reinforce the information taught at school, McCreary sent home the recipes and information provided during the taste tests.

Purdue Extension, Marion County Public Health Department, and the Indiana Department of Education are working on next steps to bring the SuperFood HEROES program to your school.
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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

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