

School Breakfast: What's the Big Deal?

Presented by:

Montana Food Bank Network

December 2016



The administrators at Browning Middle School and Fairfield schools sat down with me to share their experience with breakfast. Here are some of their tips for running a successful breakfast program.

In addition, Lynne and Wanda's interviews were too long and detail-packed to include all of their ideas in the webinar, so here are some of their thoughts that didn't make it into the presentation.

Questions? Contact Tirza Asbell at 406.215.1771 or tasbell@mfn.org

Making Breakfast a Success at Fairfield Schools

Advice from Superintendent Les Meyer

Support the program

“I feel my role is to go down and eat every chance I can,” says Superintendent Meyer. It’s partially meant as a joke, but the support that he gives to Wanda and the rest of the kitchen staff is no joke. He credits Wanda Sand, the Food Service Director at Fairfield, with the success of the program. He says the success is a tribute to the kitchen staff.

While Superintendent Meyer has a relatively hands off approach to the breakfast program, that doesn’t mean that there is little dialog between Wanda and himself. He trusts their decision making because “they are the ones that are [closest] to the problem...they are the ones that are in it everyday.” If there is a question or concern, Wanda has no problem bringing it to him.

Finally, if there is a way that breakfast can address some of the daily challenges students face, it is important for schools to do the best they can to acknowledge that. “...[If] we have the means to be able to provide breakfast to those students and to those families who want to take advantage of it, then by all means we should.”

Have more questions?

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Les Meyer

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Wanda Sand

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Wanda Sand

Food Service Director

Be involved in the school

The food service department is incredibly dedicated to its students. Not only do they work to bring the students at Fairfield delicious meals, they are also very involved in the school. For the last Homecoming parade, the food service staff made a float and covered it with festive sayings. They were so popular that they kept the posters and used them to decorate the lunch room.

Not only do they participate in parades, they also have helped a student or two win the student body election. Most notably, a student asked if they would be able to serve super nachos once a month so that he could use it in his platform. They agreed, and he won. Wanda tells me that even though he is an adult with a family of his own, he still remembers that time.

Allow yourself to fail

One of the biggest tools that Wanda employs is her ability to try new things. If one of her employees has a new idea or a recipe to try, Wanda does not hesitate to try it.

“The girls might come up with a new ideas out there...and I would say we have always done it this way and it probably works best, but that doesn’t mean we can’t try it. And then, if we like it better, we will do it that way, if we don’t we will go back to the old way.”

Not only does Wanda welcome the opportunity to try new things, but has found that the staff learns a lot from being able to try something, even if it is unsuccessful. She says,

“They need to experience that. Just because I have done it like this I know that it is probably going to work. They need to experience it...You hate failure, but boy do you learn from it.”

Wanda loves her job, and it shows. Even after working at Fairfield schools for 29 years she says,
“[I]t’s a hobby, we are going to get a real job when we get older.”

Making Breakfast in the Classroom a Success

Advice from Principal Julie Hayes

Browning Middle School

Listen to your staff

Lynne has had many discussions with Principal Hayes about ideas to improve breakfast at Browning Middle School. After meeting with both Lynne, and the teachers, she realized that there was a great amount of support behind trying breakfast in the classroom. After realizing that this model may be a good fit for everyone, Principal Hayes decided to find a way to implement it in her school.

Make it official

After finding a time where breakfast in the classroom would fit into the day, Principal Hayes decided to announce it to the students at the first of the year orientation. There she explained how breakfast would be served during first period homeroom and that it would eliminate the need for the students to need to bring snacks to tide them over until lunch. The student body has been incredibly receptive to the program. "...[T]here was absolutely no pushback. They like the break and they like eating breakfast."

Allow the program to grow

Principal Hayes says the program has been well received but it hasn't been without its challenges. At first there weren't enough garbage cans but that was easily remedied by adding another one. The kitchen staff has had to readjust to the popularity of the breakfast, and increase the amount of entrees made daily. Also, there is now a rotating schedule for the homerooms to avoid one class being last daily.

Making the transition to alternative models has been a positive one overall. "I think not only did they change when we are eating, but they have a lot of different items they didn't have before, and so they really enjoy that. "

Have more questions?

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Breakfast in the Classroom

Lynne Keenan

Food Service Director

The district's superintendent helped lend some 'good support,' and helped let the principals know that the schools would be transitioning to an alternative model.

Both the high school and middle school serve their breakfast from kiosks. They cost \$15,000, but the district will not absorb the cost of the equipment. Grant funding, a partnership with General Mills, and the increased participation in breakfast will cover the costs of the kiosks. Lynne said, 'they will pay for themselves this year.' The cost is partially due to the fact that Lynne decided to buy high quality kiosks so that they can avoid having to replace them any time soon.

Browning is also a No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps site. This means that there is an AmeriCorps volunteer there who helps support the efforts of the Food Service Department. Browning's member has helped with communication between the staff from the high school and Lynne, streamlined processes to improve efficiency, and helped as needed to make the program a success.

Lynne worked really hard to educate the parents about the change in breakfast at the middle and high schools. A week before school started, she sent out a menu and pictures of the kiosks as well as where they were located in the school.

Feedback about how the program is working is a really important to the food service department. At the time of the interview, the plan was to send out a survey to the teachers and the students to find out how the changes made this year are impacting the schools.

Nutrition is another really important part of the Browning school nutrition programs. Because the students are served fresh fruit and vegetables every day, as well as fresh baked, whole grain bread, they are asking to eat those same foods at home. Lynne is hopeful that these changes will have a long term effect on the community's health.