



**SCHOOL:** Chief Joseph School, Great Falls, Montana  
**DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE:** Jennifer Spellman  
**EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM:** Breakfast in the Classroom

### ★ **BACKGROUND**

From zero to 180. Students eating breakfast, that is. Until the 2008-2009 School Year, Chief Joseph School had not offered a breakfast program. When Principal Michelle Meredith urged Jennifer Spellman, district school food service director, to start a traditional school breakfast, Spellman was reluctant. All through the district, she had witnessed poor participation in traditional before-school cafeteria breakfast programs. The only way Spellman was willing to start a breakfast program was to try something new. It was the information provided by the Dairy Council that explained Breakfast in the Classroom that inspired Spellman and Meredith to pilot the program at Chief Jo. They had to convince the Assistant Superintendent this would not disrupt the classroom. There was reluctance, but not any more. Chief Joseph students are eating it up, and Spellman is delighted with both participation and feedback from teachers.

### ★ **IMPLEMENTATION**

PTA funded the first week of breakfast for all students so they could learn how the program worked – and tasted. Now students who participate are charged accordingly. Teachers take breakfast and lunch counts as part of attendance. Breakfast is delivered to the classroom on rolling carts and served from baskets. Students select breakfast items and eat at their desks. Teachers use the time to read-aloud or for math minutes so there is no loss in instructional time. A grant from Western Dairy Association allowed the school to purchase a new cooler for the additional milk, yogurt and juice delivered to the classrooms.

### ★ **IMPACT**

The breakfast program has decreased morning visits to the health room for stomachaches and headaches and visits to the principal's office are down. Now that children no longer need to sacrifice their play time for breakfast, participation in the school breakfast program exceeds 60 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. Spellman also notes that the program has improved communication between teachers and the school food service department.

### ★ **WORDS OF ADVICE**

Meeting with teachers to explain the process before implementing the program and address concerns makes start up easier. It definitely helps to have the principal be the advocate for the program.

Simple changes can make all the difference. For breakfast waste, trash bags are delivered with breakfast. A student carries trash to larger trash cans in the hallway and custodian picks them up later in the morning.

With an average participation of 29 percent for traditional cafeteria breakfast districtwide, Spellman is happy with the 60-70 percent participation that Breakfast in the Classroom draws. With such positive feedback, other schools are interested in the program.



**SCHOOL:** Rocky Boy Elementary  
**FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR:** Paula LaMere  
**EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM:** Free Breakfast in the Classroom

### ★ **BACKGROUND**

Although 87 percent of Rocky Boy's student body qualifies for free or reduced cost lunch, until last year only 40 percent were taking advantage of breakfast offered before school.

### ★ **IMPLEMENTATION**

Hot breakfasts in the classroom? That's what Rocky Boy Elementary students and staff wanted, and School Food Service Director Paula LaMere rose to the challenge. When she instituted a free Breakfast in the Classroom program in 2008, early feedback indicated that students and staff preferred traditional hot breakfasts to prepackaged items. Now 90-95 percent of the students eat breakfast. Carts with insulated bags and containers deliver individual plates of foods to each student. Menus include scrambled eggs, toast and fruit. Oatmeal, yogurt and fresh fruit. Ham, hash browns, toast and fresh fruit. Waffle, sausage patty and fresh fruit. Lowfat milk is served daily and 100 percent fruit juice once a week. LaMere noticed that when both milk and fruit juice are offered, students often decline milk, and recognizing that milk provides nutrients these kids need, she limits juice to once a week.

LaMere used staff orientation days to introduce the program and its logistics. Each classroom receives a garbage bag for breakfast trash, which is then set outside door. The custodian finds picking up the bagged breakfast trash easier than cleaning the entire cafeteria.

### ★ **IMPACT**

"Students love it," says LaMere. "When students see me, they always ask 'what's for breakfast tomorrow?'" This is such a great program. I know students need the good food, the nutritional benefits and the breakfast gets them ready to learn. I'll continue to push this program because it is so good for the students. This successful program proves I'm doing my job."

Principal Josephine Corcoran notes that the program works well. Because all students receive a healthy breakfast, being hungry isn't a contributing factor to behavioral issues. Classroom breakfast provides a calm setting for eating. Students seem more willing to try new foods and are more focused on eating rather than running out to play.

### ★ **WORDS OF ADVICE**

Breakfast in the Classroom is a great program that benefits students. I encourage anyone to do it. As a Provision 2 school, universal free breakfast makes financial sense. Reimbursement nearly doubled because of the increased participation. LaMere said, "We're serving so many more students with little extra cost."



**DISTRICT:**

Hawthorne School, Missoula, Montana

**DIRECTOR OF NUTRITION SERVICES:**

Val Addis

**EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM:**

Free Breakfast; Breakfast in the Classroom

**★BACKGROUND**

When Val Addis arrived in Missoula she brought 30 plus years of school nutrition experience with her and was ready to make some changes. Her philosophy about school breakfast is that "this is not a food service program, it is academic support." Principal Steve McHugh agrees. He agreed to pilot the program and soon became an advocate for doing what's right for kids. Prior to beginning Breakfast in the Classroom, fewer than one- third of students participated. Now nearly 95 percent eat breakfast.

**★IMPLEMENTATION**

Addis, the district's director of nutrition services, began offering breakfast free of charge to all students in the classroom. With 58 percent Free/Reduced, reimbursement covers all students. Under the program, food is delivered to the classroom just before the bell rings. Hot breakfasts are served three days a week. The first 10 minutes of the school day is devoted to children eating breakfast at their desks. Students who choose to participate in the breakfast program pick up breakfast and eat at their desks while teachers take attendance, read aloud, work through the daily math problem or make daily announcements. Time spent over breakfast allows the children to quietly and easily settle into the school day without lost instructional time.

**★IMPACT**

Now that children no longer need to sacrifice their play time for breakfast, participation in the school breakfast program exceeds 90 percent. Addis notes that tardies are down 15 percent and absences are down 2 to 3 percent since the breakfast program began. The school nurse isn't busy with morning headaches and stomachaches. "They went away with breakfast."

**★WORDS OF ADVICE**

Let the teachers be your advocates. Addis' breakfast program expanded to other schools due to principals and teachers talking to other about the positive impact on students.

Simple changes can make all the difference. The custodian is delighted not to have to ready the Commons after breakfast for gym. Custodians report less food and paper filling the trash than during traditional breakfast because more kids are eating their breakfast in the time allowed. After breakfast, teachers place a small trash bag in the hallway and custodians remove the bags when convenient.

Addis says: "This program allows us to leave money in the classroom. Because we can be more self-sufficient, I don't need to request capital funds to repair or buy equipment so that leaves more money for education needs."

McHugh says there is no reason not to do Breakfast in the Classroom. Kids love breakfast and enter the classroom calmer.



**SCHOOL:** Victor School K-12, Victor, Montana  
**DIRECTOR OF NUTRITION SERVICES:** Maria Stover  
**EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM:** Free Breakfast; Modified Grab-n-Go

### ★ **BACKGROUND**

Although 68 percent of Victor's K-12 student body qualifies for free or reduced cost lunch, until last year only about 60 students – 16 percent of the student body – were taking advantage of breakfast offered at school.

### ★ **IMPLEMENTATION**

In spring 2008 Maria Stover, Food Service Director, implemented a free Grab-n-Go breakfast available to all students before school. Approximately 230 students – 86 percent of the students – began eating breakfast at school. In Fall 2008 she expanded the Grab-n-Go breakfast to include first period, allowing late arrivers to eat breakfast. In September 2009, 355 of the 380 student population showed up for breakfast. Breakfast choices are set out on the cafeteria line. Most foods are portable and minimally-wrapped. Students choose to eat in the cafeteria or take breakfast with them. Daily offerings include a variety of fresh fruit, cups of whole-grain cold cereal, graham crackers and, of course, wholesome milk. Stover offers hot oatmeal with berries twice a week. Other rotating items include whole-grain muffin bars baked on site, bagels with cream cheese, soft pretzels with cheese and yogurt with granola are some of the alternative options on the line. Stover has promoted the breakfast at board meetings and in newsletters to parents along with daily announcements.

### ★ **IMPACT**

Superintendent Orville Getz loves it. Principal Dan Johnston agrees. "I believe the Victor School breakfast program to be a model program for other schools to follow. Feeding the high percentage of students we do shows the monumental success of this program. Our students have a longer school day than most schools. Combining that with the after-school activities this age group participates in makes the meals they receive at school that much more important. I support the program 100 percent." Teachers bring entire classes down to ensure that all are eating breakfast. Students say it is awesome and are incredulous that it is free. Western Dairy Association awarded a grant which helped Stover purchase a warming cabinet for hot foods. Because of federal reimbursements, it is a financially sound situation and Stover has been able to contribute to funding a recent kitchen remodel.

### ★ **WORDS OF ADVICE**

Go for it, but you do need buy-in from the administration and staff. Families need to complete the free/reduced lunch application. Promote it heavily.