

Innovative Smoothie Program Boosts Breakfast Participation

Wells Middle School – Riverside, CA | Alvord Unified School District

WHY FOCUS ON SCHOOL BREAKFAST?

Motivated by strong evidence linking breakfast to student academic success and well-being, Wells Middle School wanted to increase participation in their daily breakfast program. The school had initiated efforts to improve overall wellness through their model physical education program and health education courses, but only half of the students ate breakfast daily and less than a third of students consumed fruit and vegetables every day. A school poll revealed a potential solution to increasing both breakfast participation and fruit intake: staff and students expressed strong interest in fruit smoothies. In response, Wells Middle School, in partnership with the district's child nutrition department, started the breakfast smoothie program.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 6th to 8th grade
- 963 students
- 95% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

ETHNICITY

- 1% Asian
- 2% Black/African-American
- 94% Latino
- 3% White/Caucasian
- 1% Multiracial/Other

ACTION STEPS

Using Kaiser Permanente's Action Plan Grant funds, the school purchased seven high-quality, industrial grade Vitamix blenders and installed them in the school cafeteria. The school district's child nutrition department made sure that all smoothie ingredients aligned with the Healthy Schools Program meal guidelines and agreed to provide ingredients and blender maintenance to keep the smoothies flowing. Extensive outreach was conducted to build support for and awareness of the program. Food service staff were recruited as smoothie makers during breakfast service. To spread the word to students, the school organized an "opening day" that included announcements posted throughout the school and during physical education and nutrition education classes. The program was also promoted through the school's website.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

The Breakfast Smoothie Program was met with an overwhelming positive response from students. In fact, the greatest challenge faced was supplying the high demand for smoothies. With just 30 minutes scheduled for breakfast service, staff had to work quickly to make enough smoothies for the many students who lined up each morning. Some students were initially frustrated with the long waits and short time to finish their smoothie before class. To accommodate the students' smoothie cravings, staff decided to pre-make smoothies rather than prepare them on a made-to-order basis, efficiently distributing smoothies to students.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the start of the Breakfast Smoothie Program, school staff reported that breakfast and fruit consumption increased among students by nearly 50%. Prior to the program, the school was serving 170 breakfasts daily; this increased to 240 breakfasts per day once smoothies were on the menu. The initial grant funding for equipment purchases was leveraged by additional district funding for ingredients and equipment maintenance to sustain the Smoothie Program.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

The overwhelming demand for breakfast smoothies was a clear indicator of the program's success; however, the popularity of the smoothies created initial logistical challenges for staff and students during the early stages of implementation. To anticipate

Our goal was to increase breakfast program participation, as well as increase students' consumption of fruits. By introducing the Smoothie Program, we were able to accomplish both.

-Physical Education Teacher

demand in the future, staff recommends conducting pre-assessments to better approximate the number of students interested in participating in the program. This information would be helpful during the planning stage for estimating the amount of ingredients or number staff needed to operate the smoothie stations.

For More Information:

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The Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant Program is funded by Kaiser Permanente and implemented in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program. Action Plan Grants support schools to create healthy school environments for students and staff. This case study was developed based on the school's responses to the Action Plan Grants year-end survey.

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