

Feeding Children Well

How Highline Public Schools is Creating the Healthiest Next Generation



The Healthiest Next Generation Initiative

The goal of the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative is to help all children maintain a healthy weight, enjoy active lives and eat well by creating healthy early learning settings, schools and communities.

Join partner organizations, the Departments of Health and Early Learning and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in elevating local success statewide.

This story is an example of what one school district is doing to create the healthiest next generation in Washington.

QUICK FACTS

Highline Public Schools:
19,000 students in 39 schools

Legislative Districts:
33 and 34

CONTACT

Department of Health:
John Wiesman, DrPH, MPH
Secretary of Health
jmwiesman@doh.wa.gov

Janna Bardi, MPH
Assistant Secretary
Prevention and Community Health
janna.bardi@doh.wa.gov

Photo courtesy of Highline Public Schools

Opportunity

Highline Public Schools in South King County educates over 10,500 elementary school age students every day. Although district-wide more than 74 percent of these five- to eleven-year-olds qualify for free or reduced price meals (with some schools as high as 90 percent), only 30 percent were eating breakfast. To the district, these numbers meant that not only were many children starting the day hungry, but federal dollars were being left on the table. Also, students who eat breakfast are more prepared to learn and do better in school. With the support of Highline Public Schools Superintendent Susan Enfield, the school district explored increasing participation in the federal School Breakfast Program.

Action

An assessment of elementary schools in 2012 found several reasons why Highline students weren't eating breakfast. Long lines, overcrowded cafeterias and students getting to school too late to eat were at the top of the list. These results left the district wondering: what if students could eat breakfast in their classroom?

In 2013, Sarah Keen, Highline Public Schools Nutrition Services Manager, received competitive funding from Action for Healthy Kids and the Washington State Dairy Council to pilot a Breakfast in the Classroom program at three elementary schools. Working closely with principals, teachers and facilities staff at each school, all students in these schools got nutritious breakfast items such as cereal, milk, fruit and juice right in their classroom.

Impact

Over the 2013-2014 school year, breakfast participation rates more than doubled at schools with Breakfast in the Classroom. Michelle Crane, a teacher at White Center Heights Elementary School said she used to have four or five students complain they were hungry every day after morning recess and now "they never ever complain they are hungry."

For 2014-2015, they expanded the alternative breakfast program to three more elementary schools. These schools implemented Grab and Go, a program that allows students to pick-up nutritious breakfast items from the cafeteria and bring their food to homeroom. Grab and Go programs have increased participation in the School Breakfast Program by about 20 percent, and staff are able to serve around 300 students in 20 minutes.

The District also offers the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, an after-school snack program and the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program at select locations. When the school year comes to an end, the District will connect qualifying students to the Summer Food Service Program, helping ensure students in Highline Public Schools are well fed all year long.

To learn more about the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative, visit: www.doh.wa.gov/healthiestnextgen or join us at hashtag #HealthiestNextGen