

# Feeding All Children

Partnerships in Beloit are working to keep children healthy



**SESSION: FEED YOUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN, YOUR BUDGET AND YOUR TEST SCORES!**

**Presenters:** *Beloit School District: Steve McNeal, superintendent; Janelle Marotz, business manager (pictured); Tony Capizziello, culinary arts instructor*

**F**eeding children has become a community affair for the Beloit School District. In a bid to increase achievement and decrease tardiness and other barriers to learning, the school district has collaborated with a variety of community partners to set up several new initiatives involving food.

The rationale was simple, according to Janelle Marotz, Beloit's executive director for business services, who was part of a panel that discussed the collaborations between community and school district.

"Food is a very powerful community builder," Marotz said. "All students, regardless of their income, need to eat."

Beloit, which serves 7,200 students, has a large percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. At the elementary level, 80 percent of the students' family income levels are low enough to qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Concerned about making sure these students eat as well as those who may not qualify for free meals, the district decided to offer free breakfast and lunch to all children at every school. Dawn Smith, food service

director for ARAMARK, worked with the district to set up the programs.

Offering the free meals to all children eliminates the stigma that often goes with being identified as poor since all children are eating regardless of their families' income levels, Smith said. Expanding the meal programs has increased meal participation overall. Test scores are higher as are attendance rates.

Because the district is serving more meals, the amount of reimbursements from the National School Lunch Program has increased and the district is actually making money on the effort, Smith added.

Breakfast can be served anywhere, even in the classroom. District officials left it up to individual teachers and schools to decide how they wanted to set up their programs.

In addition, Beloit expanded its Summer Food Service Program, which offers meals to children during the summer break, and opened the sites to all children, not just those who are district students.

By working with area churches and the Salvation Army, the district was able to widely publicize the program, which brought in more children. They worked with the city's

transit agency to help bring children to the sites to eat.

The Second Harvest Foodbank of Madison also worked with the district. They provided funding and connected Beloit with other agencies. Gina Wilson, Second Harvest's director of agency services and programs, encouraged other districts to consider such a venture.

"Students depend on you for meals during the school year," she said. "So what are they going to do in the summer?"

Another food-related collaboration between ARAMARK, the school district and Blackhawk Technical College is Beloit Memorial High School's culinary arts program. Students take classes that can earn them technical college credit and receive real-life work experience by working for pay in the Knight Spot restaurant. For many district students, this experience is a powerful motivator that helps them save money on college and train for a career in a field that is always looking for workers.

"Because students without a lot of money need a hook, they need to see the end of the road," Beloit superintendent Steve McNeal said. ■

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