

In Lakewood, Nutrition and Learning Go Hand in Hand



Lakewood school officials know nutrition and learning go hand-in-hand. That's why the district serves up breakfast during the school day, just like lunch, in all of its seven elementary schools. By serving breakfast after the bell, most of these schools are feeding at least 90 percent of their students — far surpassing statewide averages.

And that makes a big difference for student learning.

"It is extremely important to provide breakfast to all students of the Lakewood School District, as it has positive effects on their behavior and academic performance," said Superintendent Laura A. Winters. "When children start their day with a healthy breakfast on a consistent basis, their concentration and alertness improve. Our students really look forward to the healthy breakfast that Sodexo serves each morning."

Piner Elementary Principal Deborah Meabe agrees, noting that nearly all of Lakewood's public school students come from low-income homes where parents struggle to make ends meet.

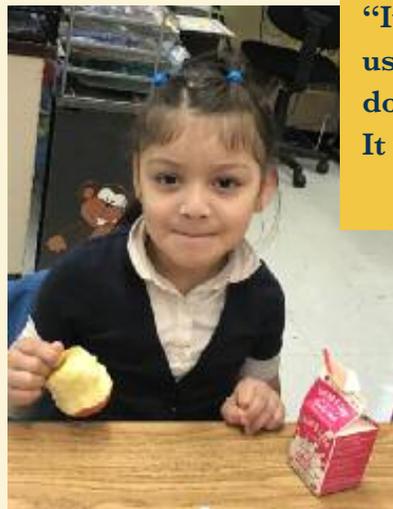
"When students have not eaten, they are not as alert and their ability to do the work is not there," she noted. "Breakfast gives them the nutrition they need to concentrate and learn. And our parents really appreciate it. It takes the pressure off in the morning, knowing their children can come to school and eat."

Lakewood kindergarten teacher Marianna Fiani sees the need every day.

"The kids go right for the breakfast as soon as they walk in the classroom," she said. "They feel good knowing there is something here for them to eat in the morning."

Fiani added that breakfast quickly becomes part of the morning routine, with most teachers incorporating lessons or other activities into breakfast time.

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—*Kindergarten teacher Marianna Fiani*

■ *A Lakewood kindergartener enjoys a healthy breakfast to start her day.*

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The district is ramping up breakfast service in its middle and high schools, adding grab-n-go carts in high-traffic areas and allowing students to eat in the classroom during the first 20 minutes of the school day. These changes are driving up participation, according to Cory Goldfarb, general manager, On-site Service Solutions, Sodexo Schools Division, which manages Lakewood's food service.

"They used to have 11 minutes for breakfast but now the district is allowing more time," Goldfarb said. "That has really increased participation."

In addition to having one of the most successful school breakfast programs in the state, Lakewood also serves up summer meals, fruit and veggie snacks during the school day and afterschool snacks, with plans to start serving dinners. A weekend backpack program is also part of the nutritional support the school district provides to its students. Lakewood also participates in Community Eligibility — a federal option that allows districts to reduce paperwork, receive higher federal reimbursements for meals served and feed all children at no charge.

All this adds up to a win-win for school officials, parents and students. Not only is Lakewood effectively reducing childhood hunger and boosting learning, it is also reaping a healthy return in federal dollars — funds that are used to improve meal services for all students, Goldfarb said.

"With that money we are able to add staff, elevate our food purchases and provide nutrition education in class," he explained. "We're able to use a lot of those funds to invest back into our nutrition programs. That's good for the district. It's good for the kids. And it's good for the families."

