
RSU 9 FOOD SERVICE UPDATE

November 2023

Andrew Hutchins-Director of Food Services

Regional Training Summit



In August, The Mt. Blue Food Service Team hosted a regional training for school nutrition professionals in the area. Our 26 team members were joined by an additional 32 food service staff from RSU 56, 73, 15 and 58. The day long training covered a variety of topics relating to school nutrition and featured guest speakers and local celebrities. Special thanks to our own Mt. Blue Campus Nurse Vicki Gerstenberger for providing multiple sessions of first aid training. Also, thanks to Farmington Fire for providing live fire extinguisher training for all participants. A skill we all hope we never need to use!

Milk Carton Shortage

The country is currently experiencing a supply chain shortage of cardboard milk cartons and it is beginning to affect us here in Maine. To be clear it's not a shortage of milk, but rather a packaging issue. So far, in RSU 9, we've been able to avoid any shortages but the next month or two could be troublesome as we serve roughly 2,700 carton of milk each day. We have a plan to adjust daily offerings if needed by adding additional beverage choices. This will ensure students still have access to wholesome, fresh milk at both breakfast and lunch. We'll continue to work closely with our valued distributor partners to minimize any impact on students.

Participants learned new knife skills in both beginner and advanced sessions. Tips and tricks on efficiency, knife cuts, and presentation were covered. Each attendee was able to practice knife cuts "hands-on" with their own workstation. How to properly care for and sharpen knives rounded out the sessions.



Professional Child Nutrition Speaker Jeff Joiner provided our keynote presentation. He focused on teamwork, customer service, and making the best of every situation through the art of being thankful. Participants greatly enjoyed his thoughtful message and amusing delivery. Many points of this valuable segment were touched upon throughout the day in other sessions.



Breakfast and Lunch Participation Continues to Grow

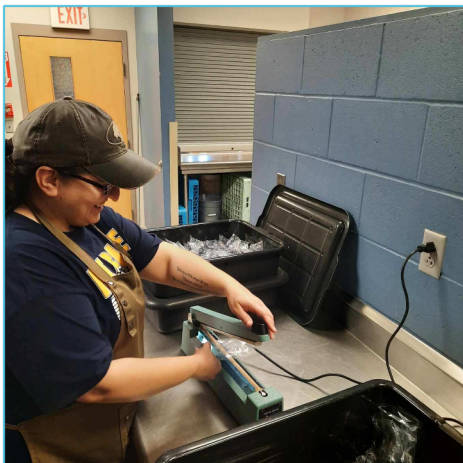
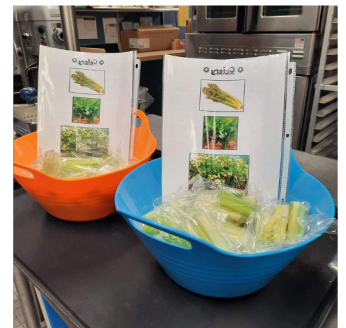
As you may recall, last school year we were astounded by the tremendous growth in student meal participation. We were seeing growth of 15-20% in both breakfast and lunch participation. As a reminder, 2-3% annual growth had been the trend in the “pre-Covid” years. We surely thought this rate of growth would level off this year.

So far that has not been the case. For the first two months we have enjoyed average participation growth of 5.5% at breakfast and 6.4% at lunch over last year’s figures. This equates to an additional 250-300 meals served per day.

Currently, 76% of students are participating in the school lunch program and 45% join us for breakfast. For comparison, in school year 2017/2018 we had participation rates of 46.5% for lunch and 25% at breakfast. For the month of October, all-time records for the number of meals served were broken at every single school and in some cases the standing record was broken more than once in the same month. The team is very excited to have more students dining with us and look forward to breaking new records each month.

Fresh Fruit and Veggie Program a Great Success!

For the first time, all five of our elementary school have been selected to participate in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This federal grant allows us to prepare and serve a fresh fruit or vegetable snack during the school day. A snack is offered on each full school day and is accompanied by a fun facts sheet about each days offering. The program is a great opportunity to give students additional exposure to fresh fruit & vegetables and learn more about their nutritional benefits and where/how they are grown.



The snacks are prepared and individually packaged in a central location after lunch and then distributed to each elementary school for the next day. A shout out to Rob Olsen and his metal fabrication students for building the “Fruit Shoot” shown above. (center) It’s used to fill bags with fresh cut produce. Once filled. The bags are heat sealed with manual (left) and automatic (right) heat sealing machines. About 1,200 portions of fresh fruit or vegetables are produced each afternoon.

In addition to being a big win for our students, the program has also provided a great opportunity for many of our 30-35 hour per week team members to work a few extra hours.