

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Eat Smart Idaho uses mural to improve lunchroom environment

AT A GLANCE

A pleasing lunchroom environment is important for student success. This lunchroom received a needed update to help students thrive.

The Situation

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program that provides food for millions of children every year. This is particularly important for children from low income families. For some of these children, the lunch they get at school may be the only food they eat that day. It is important to make the environment where they eat a pleasant place for these children to feel comfortable eating.

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) is a nationwide project developed at Cornell University. The purpose of SLM is to help create a pleasing lunchroom environment in encouraging children to make healthier decisions. SLM utilizes six key principles of behavioral economics:

- Manage portion sizes
- Increase convenience
- Improve visibility
- Enhance taste expectations
- Utilize suggestive selling
- Set smart pricing strategies

These principles are evaluated and measured using the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard.



Mural artist Jon Hanley (second from left) volunteered to teach students how to create this mural “Feed Your Dreams.”

Independence High School is an alternative High School in Blackfoot, Idaho. This school is designed for students who have difficulty in the regular high school setting. Food insecurity is high among students at this school, making the school lunch vital to their learning success.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension’s Eat Smart Idaho program provides nutrition and physical activity education and projects implementing environmental changes, such as the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement. Eat Smart Idaho targets schools where a majority of students participating in the NSLP receive free or reduced priced meals due to income status. Throughout

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federal fiscal year 2018, Eat Smart Idaho approached 41 schools to implement SLM.

A key to success in the schools that Eat Smart Idaho targets is to have school administrators and kitchen staff on board. The kitchen manager at Independence High School, Kelly Gardner, was ready to make these changes.

Prior to meeting with Eat Smart Idaho, Kelly Gardner had put a lot of work into making her lunchroom an inviting place for the students to eat. She even painted the lunchroom in a fun 50's diner theme. But one summer break everything was painted over in a plain white.

One of the SLM principles is to “enhance taste expectations.” One way to do this is by branding and decorating the lunchroom in a way that reflects the student body. This was a principle that Independence High School was ready to implement.

Eat Smart Idaho brought together the school and community to create a lunchroom environment that was inspired by the school. Several members and organizations in the community donated their time and resources to help complete this project. A local mural artist volunteered his time to teach the students how to

create a mural. Food was donated by Ridley's, Subway, Papa Murphy's and Chic Fil A to feed the participants, totaling about \$200 in donations. Home Depot and Walmart donated the paint and brushes, totaling about \$130 in donations. Students were recruited through word of mouth and posters to participate in the mural design and painting.

Program Outcomes

Over the three-day period, 15 students came together to create a mural that represented their school, their hopes, and their dreams. The message of the mural was “Feed Your Dreams” and included the school mascot in the design. Each year students will be able to add to the mural by putting their goals and dreams in picture form around the message.

Statewide, Eat Smart Idaho made environmental changes in 35 schools. Schools made an average of 5.6 changes to the school lunch environment to improve SLM scores by an average of 19 percent on the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard. These changes can help students throughout the state have a better and healthier lunchroom experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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