



Des Moines Public Schools—School Nutrition and Student Learning

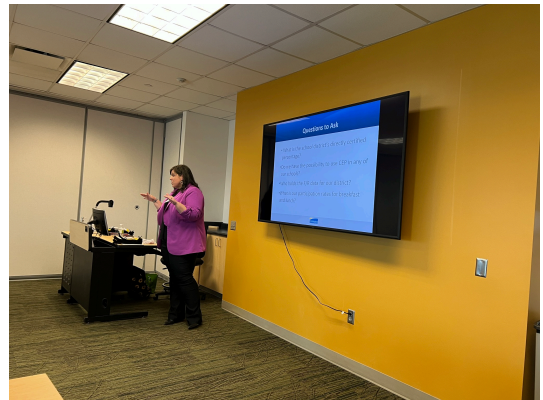
With the vision to improve education through nutrition, Des Moines Public Schools developed a strategic plan to support the success of urban education by expanding student access to nutritious meals. The district brought its vision to life by utilizing community partnerships, creating board goals and expanding nutrition knowledge. They shared their journey with board members at IASB's Summit on Student Success held April 27.

Des Moines Schools' ultimate mission is to serve the *whole child*. This means placing Des Moines Schools at the center of the community, while working to assist both students *and* their families. What exactly must a 'community school' encompass to achieve this mission? Des Moines Schools shared the following:

- Bilingual family liaisons
- Success case management
- Food pantries
- Community partnerships
- Health clinics
- Welcome center/enrollment
- Community school coordinators
- After-school programming
- Behavioral health services



Board members discuss their home district's nutrition progress and needs



Des Moines Public Schools shares their nutrition journey with attendees

Addressing Nutrition

Des Moines Schools recognized that a key way to support students, families and the overall community was through nutrition. The district developed a goal and plan to provide students access

to healthy food along with health and supportive services through internal and external partnerships and programs.

To first address this issue and ensure more students are eating breakfast and lunch, Des Moines Schools created student support tickets and feedback forms through their district website. Here, students and their guardians can request support, including reimbursable lunches and other nutrition services. The district set the standard to have a response time to these tickets of fewer than three days. To make strides toward their nutrition goals and guide effective decision-making, it was essential that administrators were aware of what percentage of students are eating breakfast and lunch with access to healthy food.

Financing and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

To bring their school nutrition vision to life, Des Moines Schools took advantage of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, a meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas that allows the nation's highest poverty schools to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to enrolled students. Districts such as Des Moines that have adopted CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Each school district contains students who are "directly certified," meaning they are on SNAP, Medicaid, are a migrant or facing homelessness. Additionally, there are those qualifying for free or reduced meals, which are families who meet 130–185% poverty guidelines. CEP is calculated by the number of directly certified students multiplied by 1.6. For example, take a school of 100 students where 60 of the 100 receive SNAP benefits. 60 multiplied by 1.6 equals 96%. That means 96% of meals served at the school will be reimbursed at the free rate and 4% will be reimbursed at the paid rate.

Reimbursable Lunch and Breakfast Components

Understanding nutrition and the components of a healthy lunch was crucial. Des Moines Schools shared that all reimbursable lunches must offer fluid milk, meat/meat alternate, grain, fruit and vegetable. Students must take at least two of these components plus a half-cup of fruit or vegetables.

For breakfast, students must select two fruit items, equivalent to one cup, along with one milk and two grains or meat/meat alternate items. When establishing meal requirements, Des Moines Schools noted it is important to consider taste, cost, availability, storage space, transportation, allergies, cooking equipment, skill and USDA guidelines.

To remain in compliance with the USDA, school nutrition programs must include the following:

- All grains are whole-grain rich

- Variety of fruits and vegetables
- Limited sodium and saturated fat for each item served
- No trans-fat in any products served
- A la carte items sold must meet certain guidelines

Once Des Moines Schools gained an understanding of what makes a nutritious meal, they considered the following ways to increase meal participation among students:

- Encourage eating
- Recess before lunch
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) sample time
- School meal schedules
- Breakfast in the classroom
- Adults eating
- Nutrition education

Nutrition Education Programs—Pick a Better Snack and More

Des Moines Schools encouraged attendees to consider how they can improve education through nutrition in their own districts. The following are grant-funded nutrition and education programs:

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)
- Pick a Better Snack
- Team Nutrition (USDA)
- Farm to School
- Fuel Up to Play 60
- Action for Healthy Kids
- 5210
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation—Healthy Schools Program

Des Moines Schools continues to work with and recommend Pick a Better Snack, which offers nutrition education to K–3 students. The program offers a 30-minute monthly lesson that is often connected to science and contains a physical component. In addition, The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) has allowed Des Moines students to grow their own produce in a school garden and

taste it themselves through sampling. This allows students to not only learn the process of growing and harvesting food, but also the benefit of consuming fresh fruits and vegetables daily.

Questions for the Board Table

Des Moines Schools asked attending board members to consider these questions:

- What is your school district's directly certified percentage?
- Do we have the possibility to use CEP in any of our schools?
- Who holds the free/reduced lunch data for our district?
- What is our participation rate for breakfast?
- What sort of nutrition education does your district provide students and staff?

Have you seen your district's latest USDA review? These are reported every five years and posted on the IDOE website [here](#).

Thank you to Des Moines Schools for sharing their journey to provide nutrition education and healthy meals to ALL students at the Summit on Student Success on April 27 at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, IA. For more information, contact Amanda Miller, amanda.miller@dmschools.org