ON TIME, FOCUSED, AND FED: A BREAKFAST STORY FROM ILLINOIS

Some students at Beardstown Junior and High School in Beardstown, Illinois can’t always count on eating the food they need at home. Principal Scott Riddle shared that for most of these kids, “If we don’t serve breakfast, they don’t get breakfast.”

With over 73% of the school’s student population eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, the need is high and so “the goal,” says Riddle, “is to get food into the hands of the kids.”

With the help of Team No Kid Hungry in Illinois, Beardstown was able to make breakfast a part of the school day, ensuring those kids could start their morning with the food they need. The children simply pick up a meal as they enter school and eat together in the classroom. To start the program, the junior and high school needed two point of service (POS) terminals, which they were able to purchase with funds from the Rise and Shine Illinois grant – an initiative spearheaded by No Kid Hungry Illinois.

Since implementing the program, Riddle has seen two major improvements – a spike in attendance because kids are coming to school on time in order to get breakfast, and increased productivity in the classroom. “Teachers say you can see kids who are distracted in the classroom because they’re hungry and sleepy. With breakfast, they perform better, they’re more attentive.”

On average, about 520 of the 840 students in the junior and high school are eating school breakfast, a 122% increase over last year. In a county that has a food insecurity rate of over 23%, these meals mean all the difference. As Riddle points out, “Breakfast is about making sure your neighbor has something to eat. It’s teaching a community value.”

Nourishing kids from the inside out, the breakfast program not only ensures that the students are receiving a healthy meal it also turns classrooms into communities.

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