



Faribault Public
Nutrition Services
Food for



Picture by Faribault Public Schools

SPOTLIGHT ON EQUITY- FARIBAULT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“During this pandemic, people now recognize how important foodservice is and that it is about a lot more than just meals. The focus on school meal professionals as champions has been really great – this situation has fostered more collaboration.”

- Brenda Boehm, Director of Food Services

Where:

Faribault Public Schools in Minnesota is located South of the Twin Cities. They pride themselves on providing “high quality and equitable education that nurtures, inspires, challenges and empowers students to engage and grow as learners and citizens.” (Mission Statement, Faribault, 2020). They have worked closely as a team to ensure that historically excluded students are included. It was no surprise to learn that they have an equity strategy embedded into their Faribault Public Schools Strategic Plan 2020. The strategic plan, created by staff and community stakeholders, is a guiding document with strategies to serve the community’s needs successfully.

Some strategies included:

- Student-centered learning- addressing individual student learning in innovative and challenging ways
- Equity – committing to high quality education for every student
- Mental health and safety – focusing on the social and emotional well-being and safety of students and staff
- School climate- fostering unity, respect, and connectedness within schools
- Family and community engagement- engaging families and the community to help students grow as learners and citizens

The Team:

Their team includes Andrew Adams, Director of Finance; Brenda Boehm, Director of Food Services; Becky Ford, Director of Faribault Youth Investment; Sandy Malecha, Senior Director of Healthy Community Initiative; Fatima Ponciano, Early Childhood Navigator at Healthy Community Initiative; and Joy Riggs, Communications Coordinator at Healthy Community Initiative. Each member uses their unique talents to their mission to support all kids in Faribault, regardless of language, race, or ability.

Relationship building:

Fatima and Becky worked in tandem to distribute meals on the ground. To gather accurate information about requests within their community and about culturally appropriate foods to serve, Fatima and Becky spoke directly with kids and their families. They opted for direct communication with families instead of surveys, which has helped build stronger relationships within the Faribault community as meals are delivered. New bonds were created through these interactions, and each conversation opened the door for continued authentic connections.

Building authentic relationships is a critical way to learn about the Faribault community. Each meal delivered opened dialogue for the team to learn if families wanted to be connected to other services. Examples of these services included medical services, energy assistance, or help filling out applications for SNAP, WIC, P-EBT, Alternative Household Income Forms, etc.

Collaboration:

Big believers in collaboration, the Faribault team has many partnerships with local businesses and community organizations, the Community Action Center of Faribault, families, and students. Families receive better wrap-around services as a result of these partnerships. To create a more sustainable program that ensures all Faribault families can benefit from food and support services for years to come, the Faribault team applied for a National Partnerships Nutrition Hubs grant from the No Kid Hungry campaign.

Guiding qualities for meal support

- **Acceptance** – The team consistently met people where they were and filled in gaps when needed. For example, one day, a parent came in with six children, 4 of whom were students with special needs, and did not have time to get to the meal pick-up location. Andrew worked with transportation services to make sure meals were delivered directly to her house every day as part of their route.
- **Collaboration** – The team worked with many community organizations, such as Growing Up Healthy, to engage navigators and cultural liaisons who spoke community members' languages. This strategy helped bridge gaps and build trust.
- **Outreach** – Faribault Public Schools identified transportation as a significant challenge early on. The team worked to identify "hot spots" and made sure buses travel to those locations. Then, to create a more sustainable program that can deliver meals to more locations consistently, the team applied for a grant to purchase a van.
- **Cultural humility** – Recognizing people of varying backgrounds have different experiences, the district leaders understood that they could not be experts in all cultures. So, they worked with community liaisons, cultural and equity teams to guide their work. They also have language support services and encourage staff to interact directly with families so everyone can learn and grow. They have also made efforts to hire personnel who represent their community.

"A focus on collaboration is part of Rice County culture. For years, we have been convening people with the goal of meeting and linking individuals so that this type of work could be successful."
- Joy Riggs, Communications Coordinator at Healthy Community Initiative