

Eat Smart Idaho brightened mealtime experience in a cafeteria

AT A GLANCE

An Eat Smart Idaho community nutrition advisor coordinated a cafeteria mural project for JR Simplot Elementary School to create a healthy, smarter lunchroom.

The Situation

The environment and atmosphere play an essential role during mealtimes. When a cafeteria is pleasant, students eat more, do better in academic work, and have fewer behavioral problems. In addition to making a cafeteria safe and clean, making the cafeteria inviting and colorful is important as well. The basement cafeteria at JR Simplot Elementary was bright and clean, but the walls were blank. Eat Smart Idaho's strong partnership with the school provided an opportunity to implement Smarter Lunchrooms strategies to improve the mealtime environment.

The priorities of the school foodservice director and Eat Smart Idaho are closely aligned. The director is determined to serve a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, but it can be challenging. Partnering with Eat Smart Idaho has helped reinforce her health-focused goals, even with a small budget. The small community of American Falls is made up of low-income families that may not have access to regular meals or fresh fruit and vegetables at home.

Health and wellness priorities of the school district include:

- Currently implementing healthy lunchroom campaign



Mural at JR Simplot Elementary School cafeteria. Photo by Kathryn Hickok.

- Serving a salad bar every day
- Moving breakfast from the cafeteria into the classrooms to increase participation to over 400 students per day
- Not have vending machines in the school
- Not selling candy or treats for parent teacher organization fundraisers

Our Response

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement is a research-based program with a goal of creating lunchrooms that guide healthy eating choices, are sustainable and are low cost for schools. The evidenced-based interventions offer nudges to make selecting the healthy choice

the easy choice. In 2021, Eat Smart Idaho worked with 32 schools to implement the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement.

A colorful mural in contrast to the blank cafeteria walls seemed like a natural progression for JR Simplot Elementary's healthy trajectory. The school is one of the Eastern District School Champions which means Eat Smart Idaho has worked closely with the school foodservice director to successfully implement several strategies. In addition to three years of interventions from the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, Eat Smart Idaho has worked with JR Simplot Elementary to provide nutrition education classes to students and promote the Long Live Idaho social marketing campaign.

This school has adopted many of the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement interventions, such as adding a seasoning station at the end of tray line and using creative descriptive names of items on the menu. They have rearranged the cafeteria to provide an open, clean and safe eating environment.

The cafeteria at JR Simplot Elementary had primarily blank white walls. The community nutrition advisor at the time proposed a mural to help make the cafeteria more cheerful. Eat Smart Idaho has helped facilitate murals in other districts, but this would be the first in the eastern district.

With the help of the food service director and a local artist, the community nutrition advisor discussed the initial stages of the mural drafts. The advisor requested that it emphasize a balanced diet. Each food group was represented, even dessert. The nutrition advisor explained kids can enjoy a cookie when it is a part of a balanced diet. The local artist, Terry Stillwell, completed the final draft and it received approval from the group. The advisor and the artist completed the project over the summer of 2022.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Program Outcomes

The new mural offers an attractive and colorful addition to the Long Live Idaho posters lining the cafeteria walls and transformed the cafeteria into an environment where the elementary students can enjoy their lunch. "It adds a lot to this space," said the school foodservice director. In addition to the mural, the foodservice director and her team have added displays of students' art projects.

The Future

Eat Smart Idaho will continue to work with JR Simplot Elementary and schools across the state on their health goals; to sustain the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement interventions; and to implement additional policy, systems and environmental changes to promote healthy eating. As the school works to rebuild the Wellness Committee that was disbanded due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Eat Smart Idaho will participate in this process and reinforce the importance of lunch time and healthy spaces. The successful implementation of the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement at this school will be shared with other schools interested in this intervention. JR Simplot will continue to be one of Eat Smart Idaho's Smarter Lunchrooms Movement champion schools.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Home Depot in Pocatello and Ace Hardware in American Falls donated all the materials needed for this project. Terry Stillwell donated her time and designed and painted the attractive mural.

Eat Smart Idaho's administrative team: Kali Gardiner, Kristin Hansen, Kathryn Hickok, Cammie Jayo, Shelly Johnson, Siew Guan Lee, Joey Peutz, Annie Roe and Becky Woodhouse.