

THE MORNING NEWS

School cafeterias get students ready for school day

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SPRINGDALE -- There's no argument breakfast fuels the body, much like gasoline fuels the family car.

“Hungry children can't learn. That's a fact,” said Carol Godfrey, director of food service for the Springdale School District. “We want children to eat breakfast.”

Study after study shows higher scores on standardized tests and classroom improvement in memory, problem-solving skills, verbal fluency and creativity when children eat a good breakfast, Godfrey said.

About 52 percent of Springdale's 16,511 students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, breakfast and lunch. The district is reimbursed by the federal government for the number of breakfasts or lunches meeting the U.S. Department of Agriculture requirements of a serving each of milk, juice or fruit, meat and bread.

Springdale school cafeterias serve more than 3,000 reimbursable breakfasts every day, Godfrey said. That compares to more than 11,000 lunches served daily in Springdale cafeterias.

Rogers school cafeterias serve about 3,000 breakfasts daily; Fayetteville, 1,500. The breakfast numbers do not include students who purchase a la carte breakfast items.

Margie Bowers, food service director for the Rogers School District, agrees that hunger interferes with learning but also notes the breakfast program helps instill good nutrition and eating habits.

The Springdale program was one of eight school districts around the country featured in “Classroom Breakfast Playbook,” released Monday by the “got breakfast?” Foundation. The profile on the Springdale breakfast program notes that the district's prekindergarten program rates higher on state evaluations because breakfast is served in many of the prekindergarten classrooms.

The cafeteria breakfast line opens about 30 minutes before school starts and students move through quickly, selecting either a hot breakfast or an express breakfast, which includes cereal.

A favorite in the elementary schools is a breakfast pizza, served about twice a month, Godfrey said. Students at the secondary schools have more choices, such as sausage biscuits or breakfast burritos.

Godfrey wants to see more students eating a good breakfast but finds getting high school students to the cafeteria more challenging.

“If you can attract them to the cafeteria rather than a vending machine, it's a better start than soda and chips,” she said.