



# Montana Team Nutrition Awards Mini-Grants to Nine Montana School Districts

## Introduction

In December 2020, Montana Team Nutrition was awarded grant funding from Share our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign. This campaign aims to maximize child nutrition programs to ensure children have access to healthy meals at school and at home. Montana Team Nutrition used the funding to facilitate a mini-grant program for nine school districts involved in Cohort 1 of the Montana Cook Fresh Initiative. The grant funds enabled schools to purchase equipment, supplies and support professional development opportunities for staff in preparing high quality school meals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## NINE PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Belgrade School District - Food Service Director, Brittany Moats
- Choteau School District #1 - Food Service Director, Cathy Campbell
- Deer Lodge Elementary - Food Service Director, Shelli Boggess
- Hardin Public School 17-H & 1 - Food Service Director, Marlo Spreng
- Joliet School District - Food Service Director, Laura Smith
- Libby School District #4 - Food Service Director, Ellen Mills
- Shelby Public School - Food Service Director, Christy McAllister
- St. Regis School District - Food Service Director, Dawn Palmer
- Superior School District #3 - Food Service Director, Chandra Plakke

Each school district decided how to spend their grant funding based on their nutrition program's needs. Six school districts used the funds on kitchen equipment and supplies. Some schools purchased equipment needed to help them prepare more from-scratch items such as, hotel and sheet pans, stock pots, knives, or other utensils. Other schools purchased equipment to increase efficiency and safety in the kitchen, including utility carts, anti-fatigue mats, a

## Learn More

### WEB

[www.montana.edu/teamnutrition](http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition)

### FACEBOOK

[www.facebook.com/MontanaTeamNutrition](https://www.facebook.com/MontanaTeamNutrition)

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pressure cooker, a fruit wedger, a food dicer, and a portable heated shelf warmer.

Three school districts used the funds to support the cost of professional development for staff. Joliet School District and Shelby Public School were able to attend the 2021 Montana School Nutrition Association Annual Conference. Libby School District staff used the funds to attend the 2021 Montana Farm to School Summit where they learned about ways to implement fresh, local products into their school nutrition program. They used Summit resources to find local vendors to supply produce for school lunch and snack programs.

### Impact

The mini-grant program has impacted an estimated 8,858 children across nine school districts. This funding improved each nutrition program's ability to serve high quality school meals to their students that included from-scratch cooking throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and in the future. Many school nutrition programs have experienced an increase in school meal participation while also dealing with labor shortages and supply chain issues. This grant opportunity has supported schools in their ability to be flexible during a difficult time. Lessons learned from these Montana School Food Service Directors while providing meals during COVID-19 include:



### Bakers Rack at Choteau School District #1

*"We have changed our lunches to mainly home cooked meals. We were always running out of hotel pans and space. By purchasing more pans and a baker's rack that problem was solved."*

**–Cathy Campbell, Choteau School District**

Dawn Palmer, Food Service Director at St. Regis School District, standing with their new portable heated shelf warmer after a hearty breakfast meal service.





**Zingy Pulled Pork Sandwich**  
**Superior School District #3**



**New Fruit Wedger in Use! Shelby**  
**Public Schools**



**Homemade Pizza**  
**Choteau School District #1**

*"The most important tool in a small school kitchen is that of organization and planning! Avoid all stress and struggles possible by planning. Work as a team using sources such as Team Nutrition and No Kid Hungry to assist."*

**- Shelli Boggess, Deer Lodge Elementary**

*"Be flexible with what you are serving. Stick to a cycle menu that is easy to procure food and paper products for. Communicate with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders about the difficulties that the food service program is facing, as well as when the originally published menu is changing."*

**- Brittany Moats, Belgrade School District**

*"We can do anything thrown our way as long as we have each other."*

**- Christy McAllister, Shelby Public Schools**

*"You have to be able to adapt to change at any moment. Just go with the flow, keep a smile on your face. It's all about feeding children and making them feel important."*

**- Cathy Campbell, Choteau School District #1**

*"The students need variety. The students want hot food. The students want choices. The students WANT to eat in their cafeteria. The students appreciate a la carte choices. Sack lunches for 1800 isn't any easier than hot food for 1,800. Once the students are thrown off their system/habit, it's hard to get it back."*

**- Marlo Spreng, Hardin School District 17-H&1**

*"We learned more about grab and go and how to keep food warmer after it was done so it was still warm when the kids ate. We also learned more about sanitizing things properly."*

**- Laura Smith, Joliet School District**

*"We learned how to be patient, flexible, and innovative in creating delicious meals when products and subs for absent employees are scarce."*

**- Ellen Mills, Libby School District #4**

*"[We learned to try] different ways to prepare meals until it ran smoothly. There is no easy way, but we got it figured out and participation has increased."*

**- Dawn Palmer, St. Regis School District**

*"We learned we can always overcome, adapt, and succeed. We learned that most of the students are just grateful to be here and to be fed good food."*

**- Chandra Plakke, Superior School District #3**

