adequately outfitting his 28 kitchens to serve more scratch-cooked foods seemed like a herculean task to Food Service Director Jeremy West. But “gearing up” was just a small hurdle in taking the food service at Greeley School District 6 from heat-and-serve to homemade. The shift in mindset for his staff, as well as students and parents, was the bigger challenge. “Before, we were serving pizza every day, some form of potatoes every day. We knew there would be backlash from changing this,” West remembers.

So, communication – including writing and distributing a brochure entitled School Food Renaissance – quickly became the food service director’s primary strategy. “We let parents and kids know we were raising the bar. We’d be serving better food for the kids because they’re worth it,” West recalls. As for his staff, West explains that a review of data from the county health department did most of the convincing for him. His school district was outpacing neighboring ones in obesity numbers and significantly lacking in fruit and vegetable consumption. Once his team saw the figures in black and white, they were eager to leave behind the old kitchen ways.

Kitchen staff completed culinary training, as well as ServSafe® certification, an industry program that trains food service workers to handle fresh and raw ingredients efficiently and safely. Salad bars were added at all schools. West also implemented small changes like making fresh pizza sauce and slicing turkey roasts to create deli meat for sandwiches instead of buying packaged turkey slices.

“I think everybody feels better about what we’re doing,” West reflects. “And we’re perceived in the community in a better light. We’re supporting student achievement in a better way.” He advises other food service directors who are joining the LiveWell@School Food Initiative to be accepting of change and don a thick skin.

“The best thing you can do is invite your staff in, your community, your students.”

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