

Cafeteria Chronicles: Celebrating Progress, Strengthening Partnerships, and Inspiring Change

As we wrap up the Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Awards and Grants for small and rural school food authorities, we celebrate not only the milestones achieved, but the people, partnerships, and passion that made this work possible. Over the past year, Action for Healthy Kids has had the opportunity to host regional events in school districts across the country, witnessing firsthand the dedication of school nutrition teams and the real progress they've made transforming their meal programs.

Get a behind-the-scenes look at HMI regional events in this [video](#).

Impact

Across the events, one message was clear: HMI has made a lasting impact on students nationwide. With access to support, funding, and training, schools were able to make improvements that once seemed impossible. From new kitchen equipment and scratch-made meals to smarter procurement practices, districts saw their goals become reality. Barbara Burns, Child Nutrition Services Director at **Carrollton Exempted Village School District** in Carrollton, OH called the initiative “a game changer,” providing the tools to improve food quality, develop staff expertise, and maintain lasting progress.

“My Team is still buzzing over the success of the day...I will never forget this moment and I hope that it lived up to all of the hype and spotlighting that we shared about it.”

-Alva Spence, Child Nutrition Manager, Palo Alto Unified School District (CA)

Changemakers

Every regional event provided Action for Healthy Kids with the opportunity to connect with passionate nutrition professionals who make this work possible. Behind each new entrée, salad bar, and kitchen upgrade is a dedicated team focused on improving student health and well-being. Each team's creativity, perseverance, and unwavering resilience has been the driving force behind the success of the HMI initiative.

“Our jobs are stressful at times but the overall aspect of it all is the children and is quite rewarding. We all love our job, love the kids, love the organizations like yours to where we can all come together and try to make our children healthier and have some knowledge they can take with them as they get older.”

-Tina Owen, Food Service Director, Frankston Independent School District (TX)

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What's Next

As we close this chapter, schools are already looking ahead and asking, "What's Next?" Their feedback is clear: programs like the HMI Initiative are vital for keeping meals healthy and innovative. Districts are asking for continued support, training, and funding to accelerate innovation and future growth.

While HMI may be wrapping up, the momentum it sparked is only beginning. The successes we celebrate today show a nationwide dedication to student health and a desire for more initiatives like HMI in the future.

Thank you to all of the school districts that hosted Action for Healthy Kids at HMI Regional Events and for leading the way in school nutrition!

Belton School District 124 (Belton, MO)
Carrollton Exempted Village School District (Carrollton, OH)
Brooks County School District (Quitman, GA)
Littleton Public School District (Littleton, MA)
Ashwaubenon School District (Green Bay, WI)
Quitman Independent School District (Quitman, TX)
Palo Alto Unified School District (Palo Alto, CA)
Hunterdon Central Regional High School District (Hunterdon, NJ)

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