

At Palmyra, morning hunger has broken

By CHRIS SHOLLY

UPDATED: 08/29/2009 07:51:04 PM EDT

Students' morning hunger pangs may become a thing of the past at the Palmyra Area School District.

Beginning Sept. 8, elementary students will have the option of buying breakfast. The private vendor that operates the district's cafeterias, The Nutrition Group, already offers the breakfast plan at the high school and the middle school.

Victoria DeHart, food-services director, said the breakfast will be served to elementary students between 8:30 and 8:50 a.m. at Pine Street, Forge Road and Northside elementary schools. There will be a variety of cereals, muffins, doughnuts and breakfast drinks for students to choose from. The cost will be \$1.

"Once we get started, we'll be offering breakfast districtwide," she said.

The district has offered breakfast to students at the high school for the past year and a half and launched the program at the middle school in March.

"Studies show that students do better when they eat a good breakfast," DeHart explained. "We want to provide students with a good breakfast to start their day."

DeHart said she surveyed parents last year to determine if there was interest in a breakfast for elementary students. Many parents who responded said they would use the service at least three times a week, she said.

It's too early to tell how successful the program will be, she added.

"We definitely had a high percentage of participation at the middle school," she said. "We would like to see 10 to 20 percent participation. But we think it will be between 5 and 10 percent in the beginning."

DeHart said the district will offer various promotions throughout the year to increase participation.

In addition to the morning meal, this year the district is introducing Singapore Math. Teachers received training in the new curriculum last week.

Collene Van Noord, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, said the primary mathematics program was developed in Singapore and imported to the United States in the last two decades. The Southeast Asian city-state was concerned that its students had poor math skills, so it looked around the world for a program that would improve those skills. Now, Singapore's students consistently rank No. 1 in international math comparisons.

"With Singapore Math, students build a strong sense of numbers, so that kids understand numbers and how to work through problems," she explained.

A U.S. Department of Education study found the program builds "a deep understanding of mathematics concepts through multistep problems and concrete illustrations."

students have mastered the previous one.

"Teachers are so excited about it, and they can see their children enjoying it," she added.

Another change in the school curriculum this year is the high-school block system will go from four to five with each block 72 minutes long instead of the 86 minutes under the previous system.

Van Noord said the new system increases the number of core subjects - language arts, math, science and social studies - that students must take but also will offer them more choices in other classes of interest to them.

Also, there have been some management changes in the district schools.

Anne Hoover is the new principal at Palmyra Area Middle School. Previously, she served as principal at Forge Road Elementary for 10 years. She has worked for the district for 15 years. Before becoming a principal, she taught at Northside Elementary School.

Hoover said she is looking forward to working at the middle school.

"It's a great staff," she said. "They've made great progress over the past year, and I look to continue making progress this year."

Jacy Hess, who previously taught in the district, has returned to take over as principal of Forge Road Elementary. And James Hale was appointed principal at Northside Elementary. He replaces Tracy Blun who took a position in another school district.