

## **Feeding the Kids of Malone**

Two programs funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are helping provide nutrition to kids in the North Country.

Together, Debbie Reome and Marie Brooks sum up their work and how they feel about it.

“We love to feed the kids of this community.”

As the Malone Central School District meal-production lead, Reome is in the kitchen, making sure safety standards and nutritional guidelines are met, in proper serving sizes. Brooks is the district’s financial lead, with an eye on ingredients and budgeting. She says, “This is a team effort and everyone we work with makes a difference for Malone’s kids.”

All of them now have more opportunities to do what they love.

Right now—and for the rest of the summer—at the Malone Middle School, Davis Elementary, St. Joseph’s Elementary, and the Wead Public Library, kids 18 and under throughout the district can get breakfast and lunch at no cost to them or their families. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is covering the costs of these meals through a program called Summer Feeding.

“It’s about the kids,” Brooks says. “Specifically, it’s about making sure nutritious meals are available to all kids.”

“To offer a little more convenience, families who get lunch at any of our locations can also pick up breakfast for the following morning,” Reome adds.

Breakfast options include fruits, juice, milk, and varied daily offerings of bagels with cream cheese, cereal bars, assorted muffins, and more. The lunch menu lists sandwiches or pizza, vegetables and fruit, and, of course, milk to wash it all down.

Pete DePaul is the Malone district’s director of food services. He points to another feature of the Summer Feeding Program that makes it especially beneficial to every parent and guardian in the area. “All the foods we have on offer are healthy, and a lot of them—like the fruits and vegetables—can be expensive to purchase throughout the summer. Then, there’s the added issue that they can turn and become inedible before you know it. This program helps families keep some fresh fruits and veggies at home, without the expense and worry of buying more each week.”

## **Education Depends on Nutrition**

When classes resume in September, Malone students will also see changes in school meals. This, too, is the result of the USDA's push to ensure that more nutritious food is available to kids across the country.

"This academic year, students won't have to pay for meals," Brooks says. "When they get a sandwich or pizza, a fruit and some veggies, and milk, that's a meal—and that meal is free. Of course, when students add to their tray, there will be an *a la carte* cost—but only for those additional items."

Reome says she's excited about another component of the USDA's investment in school nutrition. "With their financial support and some changes within the district, we're able to make meals that are more desirable—and with more options for students. This is a win-win for families and schools."

Malone Superintendent Brandon Pelkey says teachers will also see benefits of this program in their classrooms. "As educators, we know that—when students have what they need—they learn. This means having dedicated teachers, a good night's rest, and engaged parents. Nutrition is an essential part of this list. When these needs are met, students can excel in and outside of school."

### **No Such Thing As a Free Lunch**

To get meals at no cost during the school year, families must complete an application.

Earlier this year, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack said the agency expanded policies toward school nutrition after seeing the creative ways a number of districts across the country have increased meal availability during the academic year and summer break.

The Secretary added that the USDA wanted to see these efforts expand to serve as many kids across the nation as possible. "We believe that a healthier future for our country starts with our children," Vilsack said. "Continuing to make school meals healthier and available to more students are some of the best ways we can help our children thrive early in life."

This led to extending a USDA program called Community Eligibility Provision. Malone CSD is able to offer these meals without charging families because the district's application to the program was approved. This means that, throughout the summer and the academic year, the USDA will **reimburse** the district for a percentage of meal costs.

**Though meals will be served at no charge to students, families within the district must complete the annual Free and Reduced Price Lunch Application to ensure that the schools**

**will receive this funding in the future.** This form is available digitally at [spohouseholdincomeform-Final PDF.pdf](#) . Printed applications are available at Malone CSD schools or can be mailed to families.

Reome and Brooks say they hope to see more families make use of the meals they're providing through the USDA programs.

"We know how it is when families' schedules change in summer," Brooks says. "And preparing more meals every day can really cause a time crunch—especially in the morning."

"But that's what we do," adds Reome. "We make these meals for the kids of Malone. And families can feel good about the freshness and the quality of food they're getting."

"In fact," Brooks says, "we have a rule: We will only serve food that we would feed our own kids. So, tell everybody, 'Come and get it!'"

To learn more about Malone's Summer Feeding program or the district providing school meals at no cost during the academic year, please visit: [CEP Parent Letter.pdf](#)