

USDA's School Kitchen Grants Benefit Meal Programs and Students

L.E. Berger Elementary School

West Fargo, North Dakota

This fact sheet is part of a series exploring the effects of kitchen equipment grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on students and meal programs around the country. For more school case studies and the companion issue brief, please visit www.pewtrusts.org/school-kitchen-grants.

School nutrition staff in West Fargo, North Dakota, are committed to preparing more of their students' meals from scratch and increasing the variety of fresh fruits and vegetables offered. The region's short growing season and distance from major produce markets make adequate and efficient cold storage essential, but the walk-in refrigerator-freezer at 50-year-old Berger Elementary School wasn't up to the task. Fortunately, federal and local investments in school kitchen equipment are helping the district achieve its goal of expanding the healthy meal and snack options available to students.

The school's refrigerator was awkwardly located, forcing staff to traverse a store room and step up to access the unit. This configuration prevented workers from using rolling carts and made supply runs time-consuming and labor intensive, often requiring staff to shuffle inventory around to clear a path. The multiple trips through the unit's door also made it challenging to maintain safe food storage temperatures.

L.E. Berger Elementary School Kitchen Upgrades at a Glance

Grades	1-5
Enrollment	437
Free and reduced-price meal eligibility	51%
FY 2014 funding awarded	\$6,827
Equipment received	Roll-in refrigerator
District	West Fargo Public Schools

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics data for SY 2013-14 and North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

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Using a U.S. Department of Agriculture equipment grant, the school purchased a new roll-in refrigerator and installed it near the cafeteria serving line, which has greatly improved efficiency in the kitchen. The unit easily accommodates wheeled carts and racks, which allow employees to transport large amounts of food with less effort and without compromising the cooler's temperature. With the time saved, food service staff have been able to do more on-site preparation of fresh ingredients and then store pans of chopped vegetables and other ingredients in the cooler until they're needed.

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The upgrade at Berger Elementary has given West Fargo Food Service Director Jan Sliper more confidence to purchase locally sourced fruits and vegetables for use in school meals. "With the new equipment, we're able to regularly have cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, melons, and other produce grown in the region on our menus," Sliper says. "And the easier procedures and working environment have helped improve my team's morale."

She is looking forward to even more kitchen upgrades in the near future. A local bond measure, passed with nearly 80 percent support in November 2015, will finance construction of a central kitchen where staff from all district schools can combine their efforts and resources to make healthy meals faster and more efficiently, with expanded capacity to buy, store, and prepare fresh local ingredients.

For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org/school-kitchen-grants

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The Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project, a collaboration between The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, provides nonpartisan analysis and evidence-based recommendations to make sure that all foods and beverages sold in U.S. schools are safe and healthful.