



FAST FACTS

NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:	Cheney School District #360
LOCATION:	Cheney, Washington
GRADES SERVED:	Pre-K - 12th Grade
NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED:	5,060
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE- OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS (PRE-PANDEMIC):	48%

At Cheney School District, Executive Chef and Director of Nutrition Services LJ Klinkenberg’s scratch-cooked meal program is ensuring kids are able to get wholesome meals that are delicious and healthy. Klinkenberg came to Cheney as a consultant to support the district, among others, in scratch cooking. When the position to head up the operation became available, he realized he wanted to dedicate himself full time to transforming the school food environment.

WHOLESOME, SCRATCH-COOKED MEALS



A delicious breakfast of WG pretzel bites, sun butter, and fresh fruit

Klinkenberg prides himself on serving good quality food to his students. He laments that low quality food is readily available to school nutrition providers and are Child Nutrition (CN) labeled, which he feels incentivizes or at least allows schools to offer undesirable meals to kids.

The COVID-19 pandemic required Klinkenberg to offer more pre-packaged,

pre-made meal items than he would have liked, but they’ve done everything they can to meet their high bar.

When serving grains, Klinkenberg prefers to offer 100 percent whole grains whenever possible, and says that he doesn’t purchase products that aren’t at least deemed “whole grain-rich” (at least 51 percent whole grain). He notes



A student favorite: cinnamon bun (un-iced) and chili

that kids don’t even notice a difference between the whole grain and non-whole grain options if they’re prepared correctly. Because of the importance of fiber and whole grains in kids’ diet, he’s passionate about making sure kids are getting the healthiest choice.

Klinkenberg also tries to limit added sugars in his scratch-cooked meals.

A student favorite is the Breakfast cobbler, which is made with whole grain granola and either blueberries, apples, strawberries, or peaches, depending on commodity items they receive. The cobbler is served warm and can be topped with milk. The district also purchases only “no sugar added” applesauce and does not offer chocolate or flavored milk to students.



Fresh baked whole grain rolls.



A chicken parmesan on a freshly baked whole grain roll with kiwi and strawberries.



A whole grain pizza topped with chicken, black olives, and green bell peppers.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Klinkenberg notes that a strong board policy and a supportive administration are major supports that he wishes other schools shared.

Quality cooking equipment also makes all the difference when scratch cooking. Klinkenberg says he has obtained new equipment by applying for grants. He especially likes the Rationale ovens, which can be programmable to specific menu items, which in turn can help with standardizing preparation method across kitchens. He notes that this could also be helpful for schools struggling with training staff or dealing with labor shortages.

“OUR GOAL IS TO FEED NUTRITIOUS FOOD, FOR THE KIDS TO USE THAT AS ENERGY TO LEARN, BE GOOD HUMANS, AND SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITY.”

This story was developed and based on an interview and email correspondence with the district from May to June 2022. Compliance with nutrition standards is self-reported and has not been verified by CSPI.

School Website: <https://www.cheneysd.org/>

For more information, please contact policy@cspinet.org

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