

EXPANDING THE REACH OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Why breakfast counts

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day – especially for learning. A key piece of school improvement is to ensure that each child starts the day right with a healthy breakfast at school.

Breakfast helps children learn. Numerous studies have shown that breakfast improves learning and attendance, and reduces behavior problems and tardiness. Children who eat breakfast at school – closer to test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.

Breakfast promotes good health. Eating breakfast at school results in fewer visits to the school nurse, improves children's diets, and helps build healthy habits. And, children who start the day with breakfast are less likely to be obese.

D.C. Public Schools have taken the first step to make sure that all children start the day with breakfast. But, while participation has grown, too many children still are missing out. Together, we can take the next step and expand the reach of our School Breakfast Program.

Schools can help boost breakfast participation by taking two important steps.



First Step – Provide universal breakfast – Providing universal (“free”) breakfast means that all children can eat a healthy morning meal. D.C. Public Schools took this step and began offering universal breakfast as of October 2005. Participation grew by nine percent. But, in the District of Columbia, less than half of low-income students eligible for school breakfast actually participate in the program.

There are a number of barriers that prevent children from getting to the school in time for breakfast – tight morning schedules and late arrivals mean that many children just don't get to school – 30 minutes before the official start of the day – for breakfast. It's time for the District to make breakfast a part of the school day.



Second Step – Make breakfast part of the school day – Schools that get breakfast to students – either by classroom breakfast, “grab-and-go” bags, or “second chance” breakfast – see that more children eat breakfast. That's great for children – and great for the schools. Children that eat breakfast are better behaved, have fewer sick days and visits to the school nurse, and they score higher on standardized tests.

I want to increase breakfast participation at my school. How do I start?

Contact D.C. Hunger Solutions for help getting started. We'll help you decide what model will work best for your school and create a plan, complete with a budget analysis.

We'll help you to look at your current serving methods to overcome obstacles and identify opportunities. For example, it's helpful to think of ways that students can be involved. In some school districts, students who deliver the breakfast to the classroom receive community service credits.

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There's more than one way to serve breakfast

Option #1: Classroom Breakfast

Providing breakfast in the classroom is one easy way to boost breakfast participation. Students eat breakfast in their classroom either at the beginning of the school day or early during the day. Often breakfast is brought to classrooms from the cafeteria by students, or served from carts in the hallways by food service staff.

While teachers are initially concerned that classroom breakfast might cut down on class time, they find that students settle down faster when breakfast is served in the classroom. While the students eat breakfast during the first ten minutes of class, teachers use the time to take attendance and do usual administrative tasks.

Teachers see the difference that classroom breakfast makes – students pay more attention and are more focused on their work. Once they start serving breakfast in the classroom, teachers don't want to stop!

Option #2: Grab-and-Go Breakfast Bags

Grab-and-go bags are another option for schools to consider. All the components of school breakfast are conveniently packaged so students can grab a bag quickly, either from the cafeteria line or from carts on school grounds. Students can eat in the cafeteria, the classroom or elsewhere on school grounds.

Grab-and-go breakfast bags are especially convenient for middle and high schools with large numbers of students on the move. Plus, breakfast bags are seen as "cooler" than cafeteria breakfasts – and that means more students are likely to participate.

Some schools worried about the additional waste that might be produced by grab-and-go bags or classroom breakfast. But, custodial staff at the schools find that this is not the case. Special containers are available for students to throw out their trash. And, some schools use the breakfast program as a way to involve older students in helping with distribution and clean-up.

Option #3: Second Chance Breakfast

A lot of children – especially teens – don't like to eat breakfast early in the morning. Some schools offer a "second chance breakfast" between first and second periods. Breakfasts are available in the cafeteria, from "grab-and-go" carts in the hallway, or in other high traffic areas. Having a second chance breakfast means that students get a healthy meal – and the energy they need to power through the rest of the morning.

What's for Breakfast?

Cold Breakfast Options

Breakfast bar
Cereal
Cheese
Fresh fruit
Fruit juice
Milk
Mini-bagels with
peanut butter
Muffins
Yogurt

Hot Breakfast Options

Breakfast pizza
Pancakes
Egg & cheese burritos
Oatmeal
Sausage & egg sandwich
Waffles

All breakfast options must meet USDA requirements.