

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. During the 2007-2008 school year, however, only 44 eligible low-income children participated in the school breakfast for every 100 who participated in school lunch across the state of Maryland. Barriers to participating in the School Breakfast Program exist and must be eliminated to ensure students can reap the academic and nutritional benefits of the meal. Some factors that prevent students from eating school breakfast include:

- Tight morning schedules, particularly for students who take public transportation;
- Not being hungry right when they wake up;
- Preference/peer pressure to play outside instead of coming in to the cafeteria; and
- Stigmatization of obtaining school meals.

Taking these factors into consideration, schools should develop a plan for reaching students through more innovative delivery service models. Some schools in Maryland have taken creative steps to address these challenges and increase breakfast participation by structuring breakfast as a part of the school day. They know that incorporating breakfast formally into the school day dramatically increases participation by making it convenient and accessible to all. Some models schools are using include:

Breakfast in the Classroom

Providing breakfast in the classroom is the most effective 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, do other administrative tasks, or read with their students. Teachers see the difference that classroom breakfast makes – students pay more attention and are more focused on their work. Once teachers start serving breakfast in the classroom, they do not want to stop. Based on other schools' experiences implementing breakfast in the classroom:

- Ensure all school staff members are supportive of this service method: principals, teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff in order to get all hands on deck.
- If food service staff members need additional assistance:
 - Use student volunteers and offer service hours.
 - Recruit parent volunteers.
- Have all components of the breakfast and accountability sheets well labeled for maximum organization.
- Encourage food service to prepare/package cold breakfasts the afternoon before.
- Allow teachers to eat breakfast with their students to model good breakfast eating habits.

This also provides buy-in to the teacher to allow breakfast in the classroom.

Grab and Go Breakfast

All of 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 ground as guided by school policy. Grab and go breakfast bags are especially convenient for middle and high schools with large numbers of students on the move. Some schools worried about the additional waste that might be produced by grab and go bags or classroom breakfast. Custodial staff members at the schools, however, find that this is not the case. Special waste containers were made available for students to throw out their trash. Based on other schools' experiences implementing grab and go breakfast:

- Ensure all school staff members are supportive of this service method: principals, teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff in order to get all hands on deck.
- Encourage food service to prepare/pre-package breakfasts the afternoon before.
- If food service staff members need additional assistance:
 - Use student volunteers and offer service hours.
 - Recruit parent volunteers.
- Place breakfast carts/tables in high-traffic areas, particularly near school entrances.
- Run multiple points of service and only offer breakfasts in an easy to grab format.

Breakfast After 1st Period

Because a lot of students— especially teenagers— do not like to eat breakfast early in the morning, schools offer a “second chance breakfast.” Breakfasts are available in the cafeteria, from “grab and go” carts in the hallway, other high traffic areas, or in the classroom. 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.

While efforts such as convenient breakfast packaging and stronger marketing yield positive results, schools with the greatest successes in increasing breakfast participation are the schools that have structurally changed how breakfast is delivered to their students. Emphasis should be placed on