



# Grab 'n Go Breakfast Programs

This document prepared using excerpts from the breakfast toolkit: "Students Can Have Their Breakfast and Eat It Too: A guide to Expanding School Breakfast in Maryland" by Cristina Sepe, Emerson National Hunger Fellow with Maryland Hunger Solutions (<http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pubs.shtml>).

## BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY BREAKFAST

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day – educationally and nutritionally.

### Breakfast helps children learn.

Numerous studies show that breakfast:

- Improves academic performance and attendance
- 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
- Improvements in children's diets
- Helps build healthy eating habits
- Maintaining a healthy weight

*What we find particularly exciting is that this [school breakfast] is a relatively simple intervention that can significantly improve children's academic performance and psychological well-being.*

J. Murphy, EdD, School Breakfast Program researcher, MA General Hospital and Harvard Medical School

**Grab and Go Breakfast:** A great alternative service method to traditional breakfast consumed in the cafeteria prior to the start of the school day

Breakfasts conveniently packaged in bags with all of the components of the meal so students can grab a bag quickly, either from the cafeteria line or from carts on school grounds. The breakfasts can be consumed in the **classroom**, hallway, or other venue.

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 are available for students to throw out their trash.

### Grab and Go Benefits

- Increased **participation!**
- **Convenience!** Less time to prepare than most traditional breakfast meals.
- Decreased lines in the cafeteria.
- Enjoyed on the go, in the classroom, before school or during break.
- Older students like it.

*"Since we've had [alternative] breakfast... more kids come to school. Attendance has gone up. I notice a difference in concentration...It's healthier, and we don't have colds and flus like we used to." – Baltimore City Public School Administrator*

## SUCCESS STORY

School: **Rippling Woods Elementary School (School #3392)**

School System: **Anne Arundel County Public Schools**

Grades Served: **Pre-K – 5<sup>th</sup>**

Enrollment: **685**

Free/Reduced: **36%**

Average Number of Breakfasts Served (March 2008): **175/day**

Average Number of Breakfasts Served (March 2005): **41/day**

Anne Arundel Food and Nutrition Services instituted the “breakfast with class” serving model for some of their schools. “Breakfast with class” allows students to receive breakfast through the cafeteria but eat it in the classroom.

During the time allotted for school breakfast, students stream through the cafeteria serving line with bags to place their breakfast items. Students still fall under the three meal categories and pay according to eligibility. They then bring the bags to their classrooms and eat. Teachers are also offered breakfast and are encouraged to join their students. Anne Arundel has seen higher breakfast participation rates for schools that use the “breakfast with class” model than schools that do not.

*“I am very pleased with the Breakfast with Class program. We have seen several improvements, there are fewer behavior problems, and students are in class on time and have the opportunity to begin class work while they eat. I would not want to return to serving breakfast in the cafeteria.” – Administrator*

*“I think it is a good idea because some kids don’t have breakfast in the morning. I also think it’s a good idea because they can just listen to the teacher’s directions while they’re eating. Plus they won’t be late for class.” –Student*

Rippling Woods Elementary is one of eight schools using the “breakfast with class” service model in the county’s school system. There are two serving lines that students go through to pick up their bag with the breakfast components plus milk and juice and pay, if necessary.

Cafeteria staff pre-package breakfasts the afternoon and store it overnight. Teachers often use the meal time to make classroom announcements.

**Clean up** is incredibly simple and self-contained: students place their trash in the bags the breakfast come in and place it in the classroom’s trashcan. Custodial staff members pick up the trash at the end of the day and love that **they do not have to clean the cafeteria in the morning**. The principal and teaching staff are incredibly supportive of the program and regularly send out newsletters reminding parents and families of it. As a result of this innovative method, breakfast participation has increased substantially at Rippling Woods Elementary.

**School Food Service:** School food service directors and personnel are very important to the educational process. Their work completes the cycle of providing a healthy learning environment through serving school meals.

### Food service staff may have concerns about workload:

However, expanding the School Breakfast Program does not necessarily mean more work for food service personnel. Depending on the breakfast service method, it can be set up to work with current operation with very little change. Prepackaged breakfast foods keep labor to a minimum.

### Take-home lessons:

- Ensure all school staff members are on board with the service method: principals, teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff.
- Encourage food service to prepare/pre-package breakfasts the afternoon before.
- If needed, 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.

[www.eatsmartmaryland.org](http://www.eatsmartmaryland.org)

