

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.

Maryland has worked to expand breakfast participation, particularly with the creation of the Maryland Meals for Achievement program, a successful state program that supports breakfast in the classroom initiatives. 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 – Eliminate the “reduced-price” category – School districts should consider offering meals for free to all students whose family income falls above 130 percent and under 180 percent of the federal poverty level. Struggling parents who have recently lost their jobs or had their hours cut but have incomes that qualify them for reduced-price meals have a difficult time paying the school breakfast and lunch cost sharing fees. Districts that have eliminated the reduced-price category, such as Washington County, have seen meaningful increases in the number of students eating breakfast and say the change has made the program easier for staff to administer.



Second Step – Make breakfast part of the school day – 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 Maryland to make breakfast a 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 Maryland Hunger Solutions for help getting started. We’ll help you decide what model will work best for your school, create a plan with a complete budget analysis, look at your current serving methods to overcome obstacles, and identify opportunities. Contact Courtney Conner at 410-528-0021 or cconner@mdhungersolutions.org.

Also, check out *Students Can Have Their Breakfast and Eat It Too: A Guide to Expanding School Breakfast in Maryland* at www.mdhungersolutions.org/pubs.shtm for more resources and information.



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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

Grab-and-go breakfast is another option for schools to consider. All the components of school breakfast are either conveniently pre-packaged in boxes or bags, or provided in individual bins that allow students to assemble a complete meal quickly. Students can eat in the cafeteria, the classroom or elsewhere on school grounds.

Grab-and-go breakfasts are especially convenient for middle and high schools with large numbers of students on the move. Plus, breakfast bags and boxes 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 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.



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being