

Starting the School Day Ready to Learn

A Position Statement of the



Hungry Children Can't Learn

Success in school is vital to every child in our nation. Theories and opinions on how to achieve success abound. Yet principals and teachers witness one unfortunate and preventable impediment to our children's success in school every day – hunger. America's principals and teachers regularly see children arrive at school hungry because they do not get enough to eat at home. Childhood hunger manifests itself as illness, unruly behavior, and the inability to focus and participate in classroom activities and ultimately affects a child's ability to learn. According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), in 2008 more than 49.1 million people lived in households struggling against hunger, a sizable increase from 36.2 million in 2007. Given the intransigence of the current recession, that number is unlikely to decrease soon. Many of the more than 25 million children in our nation's pre-K–8 public schools come to school hungry. Some have not eaten anything, others arrive at school with only a candy bar or soft drink in their stomachs. Even children who can afford breakfast arrive at school hungry because they have not had time to eat, they weren't hungry when they woke up, their parents had already left for work or were too busy to prepare breakfast, or they had a long bus ride to school. Too many children who need food assistance do not receive it.

Before we had the Breakfast in the Classroom Program, kids were coming to school at 9 a.m. and they weren't feeling good. They thought they wanted to go home. The reality is, they were hungry. This program has reduced that pattern." - Carrie Zimbrick, Principal, Willamina Elementary School

Principals Play an Important Role in Ending Childhood Hunger

The National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation believes that principals, working with teachers, school food services personnel, custodial staff, students, families, and other stakeholders, are in the best position to reduce childhood hunger in our nation's schools. That's why the NAESP Foundation has joined with the Food Research Action Center, the National Education Association Health Information Network, and the School Nutrition Foundation on the Breakfast In the Classroom initiative. This initiative will provide financial and professional support to principals in five urban cities, thanks to a generous grant from the Walmart Foundation. Schools in the five urban school districts, Dallas (TX), Little Rock (AR), Memphis (TN), Orange County (FL), and Prince Georges County (MD), will be given the opportunity to receive a grant to implement breakfast in the classroom for all children for *free*.

Principals Cannot Do It Alone

Schools cannot simply move breakfast to the classroom overnight. A shift in the way breakfast is served requires thoughtful planning, including an assessment of food operations and capacity, identification of the resources necessary to move breakfast into the classroom and their deployment, and support of the school community, including teachers, families, and food services and custodial staff. Successful meal service requires customer satisfaction, a positive meal image, and a supportive environment.

- Encourage the school board to develop and implement effective School Wellness Policies that include ensuring that no child begins the school day hungry. Include school breakfast participation as a measure of success for school building administrators.
- Assemble stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, students, and administrators to support in-classroom breakfast. Promote involvement and capacity building by working with a school health leadership team that can provide targeted implementation training.
- Invite a group of students, such as a Nutrition Advisory Council, to help plan breakfast in the classroom implementation.
- Identify a champion in each school who is committed to providing encouragement and support.

Steps to Achieving Support, Buy-in, and Success

Breakfast in the classroom works particularly well in elementary schools or in schools where students are in the same room at the start of each school day. Other helpful conditions include buses arriving just before classes begin, and teachers and parents/caretakers who are supportive of breakfast and realize its importance to learning. Incorporating breakfast in the classroom into an existing school day schedule is easy. It requires few, if any, additional labor hours for preparation, service, and clean up; makes best use of available space; and doesn't require altering schedules of multi-purpose rooms where lunches are served or which are used for physical education classes or other purposes in the morning.

The most successful programs have the support of families, teachers, food services staff, custodial staff, and students. Following are suggestions for developing the support and buy-in needed for a successful in-classroom breakfast program:

Family support. School breakfasts supplement the efforts of well-intentioned families/caretakers. Not having to worry about preparing their children's breakfasts or getting them to eat in the morning can save parents time, assure parents that their children are receiving the nutrients they need to learn and grow, and help parents get to work on time. Reach out to parents to increase their awareness and motivation to get their children to school on time. Communicate the health and educational benefits and the federal-funding implications of school breakfast participation. Parents may not know that their children are eligible or even be aware of the availability of such a program. Include information in newsletters and at open houses; ask parent-teacher organizations to assist with dissemination of information; mail, send home, e-mail, or post on websites written descriptions; provide translations in multiple languages for parents/caretakers whose primary language is not English. Advertise the benefits and how much time school breakfast will save parents in the morning rush. Publish school breakfast information (including menus) on the school Web site.

Advise resistant parents that, while their children might have had breakfast at home, some of their classmates might not have. Classrooms with hungry children tend to experience less academic success and have more distractions. Classroom dynamics affect all students in those classrooms. By supporting a school breakfast program in their children's school, parents are helping all students be ready to learn through access to a nutritious meal in the morning. Moreover, breakfast in the classroom can promote good eating habits that carry over into meals at home and for a lifetime.

Teacher support. Incorporate information about the benefits and mechanics of universal in-classroom breakfast into professional development. Provide an example by sponsoring a breakfast with teachers and principals, accompanied by information about the importance of eating breakfast and its potential positive effects on students. Offer free breakfasts to the teachers. Point out ways they can use the time for administrative tasks or supplementary classroom activities.

Teachers can help by teaching students about the importance of breakfast and how eating breakfast helps them learn. Teachers can remind students about the availability of school breakfast and encourage them to pick up breakfast in the morning. When analyzing learning and behavioral difficulties, teachers can find out whether the student is eating breakfast. When teachers see improvements when students eat breakfast, they can reinforce the behavior and inform the principal.

Food services staff. School food services directors are gatekeepers with expertise in the logistics and economics of operating the school food breakfast program and implementing breakfast in the classroom. Food Services Staff can also provide input on the timing of breakfast to ensure maximum participation.

Custodial staff. Be sure to outline ideas for dealing with trash when designing the breakfast program and be open to custodial staff suggestions. Custodial staff might feel that in-classroom breakfast will generate additional trash and mess. Breakfast in the classroom is so convenient that in many cases it takes few staff members to serve meals and manage cleanup. Typical school breakfast program foods are easy to serve, eat, and clean up. Most of the time very little to no additional staffing is needed when pre-packaged or bagged breakfasts are used. Many schools provide a large trash bag with the breakfast in the classroom. Students learn to be responsible by cleaning up after themselves. After trash collection, the bag is secured and placed in the hallway for custodial staff to pick up.

Student buy-in. Encourage students to share ideas and suggestions. Involve students by organizing a Student Breakfast Committee or holding a contest where students design a breakfast menu. Advertise school breakfast with student-designed posters and displays around campus. Correlate menus with school-spirit days. Work with student leadership to advertise the menus as part of spirit-day advertising. Develop job descriptions for student tasks. Have a "frequent breakfast" participation card that enables students to enter a prize drawing when they reach a certain number. Offer breakfast in the classroom with the principal on a rotating basis. Hold participation-rate competitions among classrooms.

Other school staff. Nurses can promote school breakfast when students visit their office and provide nutrition education in the classroom that features the importance of a nutritious breakfast. The school librarian can make available literature and develop displays that promote good nutrition and starting the day with a good breakfast.

Evaluation

Continuous monitoring and improvement should be a central feature of a breakfast in the classroom program. Principals are skilled at designing evaluations and analyzing data on a variety of student outcomes. They can apply these skills by working with teachers to develop evaluation procedures and measures for data to inform program improvement. An analysis of student attendance, disciplinary incidents, and student engagement can provide insight into the effectiveness of the in-classroom breakfast program.

Our Shared Commitment

The NAESP Foundation is grateful to the Walmart Foundation for making the breakfast in the classroom initiative possible and to the Partners for Breakfast In the Classroom for its shared commitment to ending childhood hunger. The grants will eliminate mealtime stigma and hassle by making breakfast available in the classroom to all students, regardless of income. The grants will fund nutritious breakfast food, carts for breakfast delivery, and custodians to help with cleanup. With funds for these items, principals can take the lead in reducing the number of hungry children in their classrooms.

This message was developed by the **National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation**, a member of Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom. This partnership of the Food Research and Action Center, National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation, National Education Association Health Information Network, and School Nutrition Foundation seeks to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program through the promotion of Breakfast in the Classroom. Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom is sponsored Walmart Foundation.



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