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How it Works: “Breakfast in the Classroom” Fact Sheet

Offering “breakfast in the classroom,” where meals are delivered to the classroom and students eat at their desks during the first 10-15 minutes of the school day has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for increasing participation in the school breakfast program. As an added benefit, many teachers and principals cite breakfast in the classroom as an opportunity to incorporate social and emotional learning for younger students into the school day. Sharing a meal together in the classroom also reduces the stigma associated with school breakfast for low-income children and provides social bonding time for students and teachers.

What it looks like:

- School nutrition staff packs breakfasts into coolers or insulated bags to be transported to each classroom. Staff often prepare in advance for the next day’s breakfast, packing non-perishable items in crates and packing milk in coolers in the walk in refrigerator.
- Breakfast is delivered to the classroom either by school nutrition staff or designated students, and is served by the teacher or each student can pick up a meal before taking a seat at the start of the school day.
- Teachers or school nutrition staff record which or how many students eat breakfast and students eat at their desks during the first 10-15 minutes of class.
- Students eat breakfast during morning announcements or while the teacher takes attendance, checks homework, or reviews lessons. Some teachers also use breakfast in the classroom as a means to teach valuable nutrition lessons or incorporate breakfast into reading, science, or math lessons.
- Students clear breakfast trash and wipe down desks. Breakfast trash can be placed in the hallway to be collected by custodial staff and liquid milk can be discarded in the sink or, if there is no sink, in a designated bucket.
- Custodial staff collect the trash from the hallways after breakfast and coolers, bags, and any left over food are picked up by school nutrition staff or returned to the cafeteria by designated students or volunteers.

Keys to Successful Implementation:

- Breakfast delivery to the classroom models are often more common in elementary schools where children start the day in the same classroom with the same teacher each day, making delivery, counting, and claiming smoother for teachers and school nutrition staff.
- Delivering breakfast to the classroom requires collaboration and support from teachers, custodians, and administrators to be successful but often produces the largest gains in participation of all the breakfast service models. Engaging these stakeholders early in the implementation process to address possible obstacles is essential.
- The effectiveness of breakfast in the classroom is amplified when breakfast is offered free to all students regardless of income. Offering breakfast free to all students reduces stigma associated with school breakfast and increases participation which helps the school nutrition department budget.