



center for BEST  
PRACTICES



## MAKING BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL WORK IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

An estimated 6.8 million young people ages 10 to 17 struggle with having enough to eat, including 2.9 million who experience very low food security.<sup>i</sup> School nutrition programs can help ensure that these youth have access to the food they need to learn and thrive. School breakfast programs have a positive and lasting impact on kids, including contributing to higher test scores, improved attendance, and fewer behavior problems. Despite the benefits of breakfast, for a variety of reasons, many kids are not able to eat a healthy breakfast at home.

One of the most effective ways to boost school breakfast participation is to make it a part of the school day. Traditional school breakfast programs that offer breakfast in the cafeteria before the start of the school day often operate too early for students to participate, particularly if bus or carpool schedules do not allow them to get there on time. Some middle and high school students end up skipping breakfast because they are not hungry first thing in the morning; or, socializing with friends is more appealing than eating breakfast in the cafeteria before school. Breakfast After the Bell serving models can overcome these barriers. Initially more common in elementary schools, an increasing number of secondary schools across the country are implementing successful Breakfast After the Bell Programs.

### Choose a Breakfast After the Bell Model that Works for Your School

- **Allow Grab and Go to the classroom.** Students pick up convenient pre-packaged breakfasts from mobile carts in high traffic areas, such as hallways, entryways or cafeterias. No Kid Hungry research indicates that when middle and high school students take those breakfasts back to their classrooms, participation is 15 percentage points higher than when they eat in common areas.<sup>ii</sup>

- **Deliver Breakfast to the Classroom.** Schools that implement Breakfast in the Classroom, where breakfast is delivered to the classroom and eaten during the very beginning of the school day, have the highest participation rates of any breakfast serving model. On average, in middle and high schools that implement Breakfast in the Classroom models, participation is 20 percentage points higher than effective grab and go models.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Consider offering Second Chance Breakfast.** Students eat breakfast during a break in the morning, often between first and second period; or, midway between breakfast and lunch. Second Chance Breakfast is a great way to reach students who are not hungry first thing in the morning. Schools can serve breakfast in the same manner as they would with Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab and Go to the Classroom, or can they re-open the cafeteria to serve breakfast and allow students time to eat.



#### ***Success in Action***

El Monte Union High School District in El Monte, CA implemented second chance breakfast between first and second period, called Nutrition Breaks, using carts, vending machines, and cafeteria lines. As a result, they saw a 33 percent increase in breakfast participation in their district.

### **Make students a part of the conversation**

- **Engage students in the planning process and solicit their feedback.** Bring students into the breakfast conversation to gain buy-in and empower them to help shape the breakfast program based around their needs. Students can help distribute surveys to their peers to inquire about student perceptions of the breakfast program. Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom created this [Breakfast in the Classroom student survey guide](#), which details how to conduct student satisfaction surveys to gather useful feedback, and gives instruction on how to conduct student focus groups.
- **Include students in the menu planning process.** This enables students to express their dietary interests and makes them more likely to participate in the program

because they have some ownership in it. Schools can organize taste tests, survey students about menu items, or allow them to rate items on menu websites.

- **Utilize peer influence to promote school breakfast.** Student Volunteers or Ambassadors can give a nudge to their peers to eat breakfast. [Breakfast Nudges](#) are subtle acts of positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions that try to influence a student's behavior.

### Brand your Breakfast

Middle and high school meal programs are often competing with the nearby coffee shop or fast food restaurant. It is important to recognize that students are your customers and their preferences matter. Offer breakfast items that resemble popular commercial items, and market them with enthusiasm. Showing students that school breakfast can be just as appealing as breakfast at the nearby cafe, but cost less and be more nutritious, can be a win-win for schools and students.

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i Popkin, S., Scott, M., Galvez, M. *Impossible Choices: Teens and Food Insecurity in America*, Urban Institute, 2016.

ii Participation estimates based on analysis by Share Our Strength of free and reduced-price participation in the school breakfast program in 237 middle and high schools across eight states implementing some form of Breakfast After the Bell.

iii Ibid