



Beyond Breakfast: Impact of the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom

Since 2010, the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners) have been working with school districts across the country to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program to ensure all students have access to a nutritious breakfast. During this time, the Partners have worked with more than 70 school districts, providing over \$11 million in grant funding, as well as technical assistance to help implement Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) programs in over 500 schools in 26 states, making breakfast accessible to nearly 100,000 students.

Breakfast served after the bell, and eaten in the classroom, reworks the morning meal, removing many of the traditional barriers of the program, and increasing student participation. According to the Food Research & Action Center's (FRAC) [*School Breakfast Scorecard*](#), just over half of low-income students who participated in school lunch are also eating school breakfast in the 2017-2018 school year, which means there is still work to be done to improve access to the morning meal.

After eight years of working with districts across the country to successfully transition from traditional breakfast to breakfast in the classroom, the Partners have created a report to document the impact, successes, and challenges of implementing an innovative breakfast program. The goal of this report was to assess the perceived value associated with implementing BIC to support the expansion and continued adoption of BIC nationally.

REPORT METHOD

This report was based on three methods of data collection: online stakeholder surveys, phone interviews, and in-person, recorded interviews. This project was developed to document the impact, successes, and challenges of grantees in pursuit of three main objectives:

1. Document the impact of the Partners grant on funded districts.
2. Collect successful strategies and practices for BIC implementation from each group of stakeholders.
3. Compile a list of challenges faced and solutions developed by stakeholders while implementing BIC.

Four distinct surveys were conducted via Survey Monkey and sent to four main stakeholder groups engaged by the Partners during the grant process and captured answers from:

- 74 school nutrition professionals
- 26 National Education Association (NEA) state and local leaders
- 305 school principals
- 74 school district superintendents



Six Partners-funded districts were selected for in-depth phone interviews; within each district, interviewers sought to speak with three stakeholder groups: school nutrition, teachers, and principals. Based on survey responses five districts were also selected for in-person interviews with stakeholders. More details about the data collection and research methods are available in the final report.

KEY FINDINGS

The Partners have encountered many challenges and successes, resulting in a long list of “lessons learned” and best practices that support BIC implementation, expansion, and sustainability from working with school districts.

1: All Stakeholders are crucial to BIC success

Smooth BIC implementation and long-term program sustainability are bolstered by gathering and engaging all stakeholders (school nutrition staff, administrators, custodial staff, teachers, students) at the beginning of the planning process so they are part of the entire implementation plan. The ability to offer feedback and suggestions and take part in program development creates conditions for success in both the long and short-term. During this time, it is important to ensure expectations and roles are clear-- creating pathways for consistent communication. Doing so, means issues can be swiftly addressed.

2: Breakfast in the classroom works for students because the benefits go “beyond breakfast” participation

When breakfast is served in the classroom mornings are smoother, less chaotic, and students are able to focus on instruction because there are fewer disruptions and negative behaviors. Respondents report increased participation after BIC implementation, as well increased attendance, reduced tardiness, fewer behavior referrals, increased readiness-to-learn, and a decrease in food insecurity.

Increased participation also leads to increased revenue for school nutrition departments. Grantees reported they were able to reinvest in their school nutrition program through new equipment, meal quality improvements, expanded programming (e.g. summer and afterschool meals), feeding more students throughout the year, and, in some cases, increased labor in the form of hiring new employees or bringing part-time employees up to full-time with benefits.

3: Student involvement can increase participation

When breakfast is served in the classroom it creates opportunities to engage students in leadership roles. In some schools, students are rewarded for good behavior with increased



responsibilities around BIC through “Breakfast Ambassador” programs, which charge students with picking up and delivering breakfast bags to the classroom, and spearheading breakfast distribution and clean-up. In addition, dialing in on student menu preferences keeps participation up and food waste down. Engaging students early to discuss hot and cold breakfast preferences, investing in new equipment, and periodic student surveys are all successful student engagement strategies cited by grantees.

4: Strategic investment in equipment can help school districts overcome challenges

The unique flexibility of the Partners grant allowed school districts to ask for equipment that would establish sustainable programs as well as make adjustments during the assessment and implementation process. Equipment needs vary widely by school and district and range from large-ticket items such as freezers and overwrap machines to smaller items like rolling carts and even raincoats for school nutrition staff. Pre-ordering software was also cited as a strategic equipment investment, helping cafeterias forecast how much food to send out and reducing food waste in the process. Many school districts noted that a key to success was not forcing the exact same model in every school building, but rather tailoring each program to the unique structural and cultural facets of each school.

5: Peer-to-peer interactions are influential to BIC sustainability

Connecting stakeholders with peers who are already successfully using breakfast in the classroom can be instrumental in winning stakeholder buy-in. Having one or more “breakfast champions” on staff—from any stakeholder group—to continuously advocate for the program is another key strategy to long-term program success. Bringing stakeholders to a nearby district operating a BIC program and connecting them with colleagues will help them understand how the program works and help you win buy-in.

CONCLUSION + NEXT STEPS

Much progress has been made in the school breakfast space since 2010. Nationally, participation has increased from 9.4 million low-income children (SY 2009-10) to 12.5 million (SY 2017-18). However, there is work yet to be done.

Based on results from this initiative and our combined experience, the Partners have learned that increased participation is just the beginning, and that the benefits of breakfast in the classroom go well beyond the morning meal.



The Partners have developed recommendations we believe are important to stakeholders working toward increasing breakfast participation nationally, specifically as it relates to moving the morning meal away from the cafeteria and into the classroom after the bell rings. These recommendations can be found in our full report, along with action steps to help guide you from stakeholder engagement through implementation and program sustainability best practices.

[ABOUT THE PARTNERS FOR BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM](#)

Funded by the Walmart Foundation, the Partners came together in 2010 in response to their shared passion for childhood nutrition and their belief in its potential to improve educational outcomes and child health. The Partners is a consortium of national education and nutrition organizations:

- Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
- The NEA Foundation
- School Nutrition Foundation (SNF)
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Foundation

The mission of the partners is to increase breakfast consumption among school children and spark the academic and nutritional gains associated with the morning meal. The Partners provide technical assistance and support to school districts to implement Breakfast in the Classroom after the bell programs, which provide for the greatest participation of students, especially those who experience poverty and food insecurity.

For more information on our findings and conclusions, and to access the full report, visit www.breakfastintheclassroom.org.