

BREAKFAST FOR LEARNING EDUCATION ALLIANCE

Purpose

To inform our members, affiliates, and networks about the important educational benefits of school breakfast and to promote the broader implementation of proven strategies to increase school breakfast participation, such as breakfast in the classroom.

Statement of Support

We know the positive impact that school breakfast participation has on student achievement, attendance, behavior, and health. Too many students miss out on school breakfast and the positive educational outcomes that flow from participation. Therefore, as groups that are committed to improving educational outcomes for all of America's children, we are working in partnership to increase the number of students eating school breakfast so they start their school days ready to learn.

The School Breakfast Program plays an essential role in a child's ability to learn. Children experiencing hunger are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy, in addition to having behavioral and attention problems more often than other children. Eating school breakfast can increase cognitive functioning, attention, and memory and is associated with improved math and reading scores. Students 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 and have time lags before class or tests.

Research also shows that children who eat school breakfast eat a wider variety of foods, have a lower body mass index (BMI) than students who do not eat breakfast, have a lower probability of being overweight or obese, and experience fewer visits to the school nurse.

The traditional school breakfast program is served in the cafeteria before the school day begins. Any school breakfast program is better than none, but this traditional time and place create numerous barriers to participation, including: children's or parents' commutes getting them to school after breakfast, inflexible bus schedules, children backed up at school security lines, and children avoiding breakfast because of the stigma of the program being for "poor" kids. Moving breakfast from the cafeteria into the classroom and offering it to all students free of charge is one proven way to improve participation, and we urge more schools to adopt this strategy.

With this approach, breakfasts are delivered to the classroom (on rollaway carts) or children pick up their meals from kiosks located in the hallway or in the cafeteria and eat in the classroom after the morning bell. In schools that have successfully implemented breakfast in the classroom, the meal typically occurs during morning activities, such as announcements, individual reading time, while the teachers collect homework or go over the day's lesson plan, so no instructional time is lost. Many teachers and principals in fact have reported gains in instructional time: breakfast in the classroom is a great way to strengthen the learning environment. Children cannot learn on an empty stomach.

As partners, we will work in close collaboration to increase school breakfast participation through the promotion of alternative breakfast models, especially in high-poverty schools, and raise the profile of the program's lasting impact on learning. Our goal is to pursue the best interests of students, to level the academic playing field, and to create a clear pathway to success for all of our nation's children.

