

# **Breakfast Helps Kids Eat Right**

Breakfast is critical to children's nutritional intake and their learning potential. Yet, new data from an American Dietetic Association Foundation survey shows that 42% white, 59% African American, and 42% Hispanic children are not eating breakfast every day. Expanding the availability, accessibility and participation in school breakfast programs is one of the best ways to close this gap, especially among low-income children. RDs can help.

## Why breakfast?

Research shows that children who eat breakfast:

- Show improvements on math, reading and standardized test scores
- Are better able to pay attention and perform problemsolving tasks
- Have fewer absences and incidences of tardiness and are more likely to behave better in school
- Have more important nutrients, vitamins and minerals such as calcium, dietary fiber and protein
- Are less likely to be overweight

Rates of breakfast consumption are too low for children of all groups, according to new data from the American Dietetic Association Foundation's Family Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey.

## Why school breakfast?

The National School Breakfast Program makes it possible for all school children in the U.S. to receive breakfast every day. Research shows that children do not consume enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains or milk / milk products. School breakfast provides one-fourth of the recommended amounts of protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A and vitamin C for the day. Yet the funds available for school breakfast programs are significantly underutilized.

And while 10.8 million children in more than 86,000 schools participate in the National School Breakfast Program on a typical day, that compares with over 30 million children who participate in the National School Lunch Program.

## How can we help more kids eat school breakfast?

Schools can expand access to and participation in breakfast by offering alternative service locations – such as breakfast in the classroom, grabn-go breakfast and breakfast after first period – which make breakfast convenient and accessible to all students. Expanding breakfast outside of the cafeteria into alternative serving locations can dramatically increase breakfast participation.

 Breakfast in the Classroom: Yields the highest participation levels, up to 98% enrollment



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- Grab 'n' Go Breakfast: Where breakfast in bags are handed out as children get off the bus or from meal carts or kiosks set up in strategic locations, generates 15-40% participation level increase
- Breakfast After First Period: Particularly well suited for high schools, where students are often not hungry first thing in the morning, also yields a 15-40% participation level increase

### How can registered dietitians help?

- Promote breakfast to parents and students and encourage them to take advantage of school breakfast programs throughout the year.
- Educate principals, superintendents and other administrators about the health, educational and financial gains from school breakfast.
- Share expertise with school nutrition staff to help ensure student access to tasty and appealing foods that meet nutritional standards.
- Help plan and implement in-school promotional strategies to encourage breakfast participation among students.
- Advocate for improvements in the school breakfast program, bringing successful strategies to the attention of schools and community groups, and joining/building coalitions to work for school breakfast expansion.

#### Where can I find more information?

School Breakfast Toolkit, U.S. Department of Agriculture (<a href="https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm">www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm</a>)

**Data Sources:** USDA School Breakfast Toolkit (<a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm</a>); Food Research and Action Center (<a href="http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-and-lunch/school-breakfast-program/">http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-and-lunch/school-breakfast-program/</a>); Nutrition Explorations (<a href="http://www.nutritionexplorations.org">www.nutritionexplorations.org</a>); 2010 Family Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, American Dietetic Association Foundation



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