



## **Breakfast in the Classroom**

A positive link between nutrition and learning has long been recognized. In fact, this concept underlies the federally-supported School Breakfast Program (SBP). Unfortunately for many children, consuming a healthful breakfast is not part of their usual morning routine. Skipping breakfast increases as children age and appears to be more common among certain minority or low socioeconomic groups. Limited family income, time constraints, and lack of appetite in the morning are some of the reasons children skip breakfast. For many children, the SBP is an important alternative to breakfast at home. Short-term studies, particularly among undernourished or hungry children, suggest that participation in the SBP has beneficial effects on cognitive function (e.g., memory), academic performance, school attendance, punctuality, and psychosocial function. In addition, breakfast may help children achieve a healthy weight and establish lifelong healthful habits.

**Q. Why Breakfast in the Classroom? Why shouldn't breakfast be kept in the cafeteria, where the "clean up" and food allergy issues can be better addressed?**

**A.** The goal of serving breakfast at school is to increase access for all students. Due to space restrictions, not every school can seat every child in the cafeteria for lunch. This would be the same for breakfast. Traditional school breakfast programs offer meals before school starts. Bus schedules, limited time and long distances to and from the cafeteria are all barriers to school breakfast participation. Often times, there is a stigma that only low income student participate in the school breakfast program. Having breakfast in the classroom eliminates many of these barriers and reduces the stigma by enabling more students to participate in breakfast.

**Q. Isn't breakfast in the classroom harmful for those students with food allergies?**

**A.** Food allergies may be life threatening for any student that suffers from such a condition. School foodservice professionals are mandated by law to protect such students. It's estimated that four out of every 100 students suffer from food allergies. For those served breakfast in the classroom, the risk to these students is no different than it would be in the school cafeteria or at a public restaurant. Schools must address food allergies on an individual basis.

**Q. Doesn't breakfast in the classroom lead to lost instructional time?**

**A.** Class instruction time is getting tighter and tighter. However the 10-15 minutes of time invested in breakfast may actually result in a more productive classroom with students paying attention and less classroom disruptions. Research confirms that breakfast eaters have higher test scores, work faster, make fewer errors and are more creative. They are less likely to be sent to the principal's office, visit the school nurse and are more cooperative and get along with classmates. Breakfast in the classroom programs usually allow students to eat at their desks while teachers take attendance, make morning announcements or for younger students, read aloud.

**Q. Shouldn't students be eating at home?**

**A.** Breakfast at school can be a welcome solution to busy parents who don't have time to make and serve breakfast at home. Often, students are rushed to get to school on time, especially if they have an early start time. For many teenage students, sports or clubs often meet before school. Even if they ate breakfast at home, by the time 9:00 a.m. rolls around, they're hungry again. School breakfast in many cases would be considered a mid-morning snack for many students. Common foods include 1 cup of milk, a muffin and fresh fruit. For most students, it will give them enough energy until lunch but not make them feel "stuffed".

**Q. Doesn't breakfast in the classroom lead to garbage and sanitation issues?**

**A.** Schools that serve BIC must consider the clean up. Extra trash bags, brooms and buckets with sanitizer must be conveniently located. Often times, students will pay special attention to keeping their own desk and space clean. Trash and spills do need to be cleaned up in a timely manner. Foodservice professionals are mindful to serve foods that do not create a mess and are easy for students to eat.

**Additional Resources:**

<http://www.midwestdairy.com/Op42/breakfast/>

<http://www.nationaldairyCouncil.org/Research/DairyCouncilDigestArchives/Pages/dcd79-2Page5.aspx>