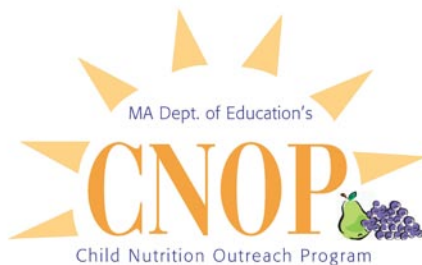


A Guide to Breakfast in the Classroom



For more information about starting a School Breakfast Program, call the Mass Department of Education, School Nutrition, Health and Safety at 781-338-6498 or their Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread at 617-723-5000

What is the School Breakfast Program?

The School Breakfast Program is a federally funded meal program that provides reimbursement to any public or non-profit private school that serves breakfast. The program is subsidized by both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) and is administered in the state by the Massachusetts DOE. Participating schools must comply with federal nutrition standards and make breakfast available to all students. Schools in Massachusetts with a high percentage of low-income children are mandated to offer the breakfast program.

The School Breakfast Program functions in the same way as the School Lunch Program. Depending on family income, a child may be eligible for a free or reduced priced meal. Those who do not qualify for either of these options may pay for a morning meal. However, some schools offer breakfast to all students free of charge regardless of household income through the Universal Breakfast Program.

All students are welcome to eat breakfast at school. No advance sign-up is necessary.

What is Breakfast in the Classroom?

Breakfast in the Classroom is a serving model in which students eat their morning meal in the classroom, usually during homeroom. The methods used to transport food to the classroom may differ from one school to the next depending on building layout, staff availability, student ages, and morning schedules (see below for specifics). However, breakfast is generally served for 10-15 minutes while teachers take attendance, collect homework, or accomplish other administrative tasks.

Why Serve Breakfast in the Classroom?

Offering breakfast in the classroom makes the morning meal accessible to all students. By eliminating many of the logistical barriers that frequently prevent students from participating in the breakfast program, such as an early start time, this serving model ensures that all students have the opportunity to start the day with the nutrients and energy they need to learn better, behave better, and perform better in school.

Unlike breakfast programs that take place before the start of the school day, breakfast in the classroom ensures that students do not need to arrive early in order to have something to eat. This normalizes the breakfast program and alleviates any potential stigma associated with eating breakfast at school. As a result, breakfast participation increases dramatically when schools utilize this serving method.

How to Serve Breakfast in the Classroom

1) Preparing food for the classroom

- ✓ Cafeteria staff often begin preparing in the afternoon for the next day's breakfast. Non-perishable packaged goods can be counted and placed in crates in advance. Coolers can be packed with milk the night before and put in the walk in fridge. The rest of the prep work for breakfast is completed in the morning before students arrive. If students will be transporting the meals, they can help with some of the prep work in the morning by counting the milks for their classmates.

- ✓ Low sugar cereals, granola bars, yogurt, fresh fruit, dried fruit, applesauce, trail mix, low fat cheese sticks, and whole-wheat bagels with cream cheese or peanut butter require little preparation and are easy to transport.
- ✓ Many schools without kitchens receive pre-made hot foods from a satellite kitchen and use hot boxes or other warmers to keep the food at a safe temperature. Otherwise, these foods can be kept warm by transporting them directly to the classroom in insulated bags. Warm, hand held items such as breakfast sandwiches and egg burritos are easy for students to eat in the classroom.

2) Getting food to the classroom

The layout of your school building and the availability of kitchen staff will largely determine your method for transporting food to the classroom.

- ✓ Either food service staff can deliver breakfast to each floor or classroom before class begins or student representatives from each class can pick up pre-packed meals from the cafeteria and deliver them to the classroom. Carts, crates, and/or coolers can be used to transport the breakfast items. Following breakfast, students or staff can return the coolers and any remaining food to the cafeteria.
- ✓ Once the food is in the classroom, teachers can invite students to take their breakfast from the cooler or have one student distribute the meals to the rest of the class. Teachers can record the meals taken while taking attendance or have students indicate on a sign up sheet if they took breakfast.
- ✓ In schools with multiple staircases and no elevators, it may be easier to have each student grab their own bagged or individually wrapped breakfast from the cafeteria or from a table stationed at the school entrance or other high traffic area.

3) Cleaning up the classroom

- ✓ Each classroom should contain a spray cleaner, sponge, and paper towels in case of spills as well as a sturdy trash bin with a lid and heavy-duty trash bags.
- ✓ Students should be taught responsibility by requiring them to clean up after themselves. This includes wiping their desk, disposing of all leftover items and packaging into sturdy trash bins, and putting the bins in the hall for custodians to collect.
- ✓ Custodians can collect the bins during the time that would have otherwise been spent cleaning the cafeteria. This will ensure that classrooms are kept clean and that there won't be any potential for rodent problems.

Frequently asked questions about Breakfast in the Classroom

1) *“Time on learning” is a high priority for schools. Won’t a classroom breakfast take time away from teaching?*

Students can’t concentrate or learn when they are hungry so the extra time that it takes to serve breakfast is an investment in their education. If breakfast is served in the classroom, this time does not have to be “wasted” as students can perform a variety of tasks while eating such as working on homework or reading assignments. Teachers could also use this time to take attendance, collect homework, and accomplish other administrative tasks. Breakfast usually takes only 10-15 minutes in the morning and will ensure that students’ attention lasts until lunch. Additionally, research shows that eating breakfast closer to instruction time has a greater impact on student success.

2) *My food service budget is extremely tight. Won’t this new type of breakfast increase my labor costs?*

Labor costs don’t necessarily have to increase as long as you are using your staff efficiently. Switching to breakfast in the classroom will require slightly different preparation, but not more work. Enlisting the help of students to pick up meals in the morning and return the empty coolers to the cafeteria following breakfast will ensure that your labor costs do not increase. Perhaps most importantly, breakfast in the classroom is a great way to increase breakfast participation as more students are able to attend. The more students that participate in your meal programs, the more federal dollars you will bring in to your budget.

3) *I am interested in implementing breakfast in the classroom, but how do I respond to resistance from teachers, custodians, and/or food service staff?*

Any major change will generate resistance among stakeholders, yet these are the individuals who stand to benefit the most. Teachers, principals, and food service directors all have unique concerns when it comes to serving breakfast in the classroom. Diminished time on learning, pest infestation, and additional labor are the typical reasons cited for not adopting this unique breakfast delivery model. But all three of these issues are avoidable when breakfast in the classroom is implemented in an efficient and thoughtful manner as described above.

Breakfast in the classroom is beneficial to all members of the school community. Teachers who were once skeptical of the program have explained that serving breakfast in the classroom actually saves time. Instead of arriving late to class when coming from the cafeteria or playing outside, students tend to come on time to get their breakfast. Additionally, providing 10 or 15 minutes for breakfast and morning activities gives students a chance to settle down and prepare for the day. Participating principals also find that more time is spent on learning when students have eaten since there are fewer disruptions from students misbehaving or requesting to see the nurse for a hunger-related headache or stomachache. Finally, food service directors that serve breakfast in this manner acknowledge that they benefit financially from the program, as breakfast participation increases significantly once it is moved into the classroom.