

School Nutrition Feature

'GOT BREAKFAST?'
FOUNDATION TOUTS CLASSROOM BREAKFAST

To kick off National School Breakfast Week this March 5-9, the "got breakfast?"TM Foundation in Washington, D.C., announced two initiatives aimed at increasing breakfast participation, particularly among the millions of low-income children across the country who do not eat breakfast in school or at home.

The first initiative was the announcement of "got breakfast" grants, which will be given in partnership with Share Our Strength to four school districts to help them serve classroom breakfasts to students. The "got breakfast?" grants, totaling \$35,000, were awarded to Balboa High School, San Francisco, Calif.; Langley Park McCormick Elementary School, Prince George's County, Md.; Friendship Public Charter Schools, Washington, D.C.; and an additional school to be announced.

"Millions of underserved children around the country are not eating breakfast before the school day, and studies show that serving breakfast in the classroom breaks down many of the traditional barriers to getting students the most important meal of the day," said Pat Nicklin, managing director of Share Our Strength, at a press conference in Washington on March 5 at the National Press Club.

The second initiative is the release of the "Classroom Breakfast Playbook," an informational survey and manual written by the "got breakfast?" Foundation with Executive Director Tami Cline, a well-known registered dietitian. The booklet summarizes studies and the opinions of foodservice directors across the country

that prove that Classroom Breakfast raises test scores, reduces health issues and doubles—and in some cases triples—participation numbers in the federal School Breakfast Program.

"This booklet is designed to provide detailed information for school officials and school foodservice directors about classroom breakfast, and it outlines some of the best practices out there," Cline said. "It includes some opinions from foodservice directors that have actually done this in their schools. They believe that classroom breakfast is the way to go. This playbook will be a vital tool in the 'got breakfast?' Foundation's efforts this coming year to expand classroom breakfast across the country."

Out of 55 million children who attend school in the U.S., 30 million participate in the National School Lunch Program, yet only 9.6 million children eat breakfast at school. The School Breakfast Program provides federal reimbursement to schools for each meal served, so when schools increase the number of students eating breakfast, schools will see an increase in funds. According to the Food Research and Action Center, more than \$500 million in federal funds available to provide school breakfast to children in need are not being accessed.

Schools that implement classroom breakfast have found various ways to get around time constraints and logistical hurdles. Some schools have set aside time in the morning so that when children arrive at school, they can sit at their desks and are served a convenient grab-and-go meal.

Often during meal distribution, teachers use the time to conduct an educational activity to prepare the students for the start of their day.

A recent evaluation of three of eight elementary schools in the Irving (Texas) Independent School District—featured in this issue's "On the Cutting Edge"—that serve breakfast in the classroom indicated "huge gains" in breakfast participation since the program was implemented, according to Michael Rosenberger, Irving ISD food service director. In fact, two of the schools have increased their average daily breakfast participation by 300 percent since the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. A key component of the program's success has been the support of school teachers and principals, Rosenberger noted.

"We have some of the best principals in the entire state here in Irving. They really understand the role that nutrition plays, and that a good breakfast plays," he added. "I am so fortunate that I'm not one of these directors who is fighting with the principals. Most of my schools are open for a half-hour, maybe even 45 minutes, for breakfast. There is great cooperation."

This issue comes to the forefront often during standardized testing time.

"Probably every principal around the world, whenever it's testing time, says, 'Let's make sure they eat.' And my response to that has always been, if it's important enough for them to have breakfast on the day of the test, what about all of the days previous to that when they are learning content? I think everyone here really has that same vision. If you wait until the test date to stress the importance of breakfast, it's too late."

In addition to the "got breakfast?" Foundation and Share Our Strength, the "got breakfast" initiatives are supported by a cross-section of groups from the private and nonprofit sectors—General Mills, The Coca-Cola Co., USDA, FRAC and the Alliance to End Hunger.
www.gotbreakfast.org.

—Mindy McBain

