

# CLASSROOM BREAKFAST BOOSTS BRAIN POWER!



As a result of Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association's contribution to Maryland public schools, the state's Classroom Breakfast Pilot program is not only improving students' academic performance and behavior, it is boosting their calcium intakes, too.

Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association delivered more than 600 insulated bags to seven Maryland counties participating in the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program, which offers school breakfast in the classroom for free to all students. The lightweight, one-crate bags keep milk cartons cold as they are transported from the kitchens to the classrooms where more than 22,000 children eat breakfast daily.

"The bags help to maintain the quality of the milk, which in turn increases consumption," said Mydina Thabet, dietitian for Prince George's County Public Schools. "Using the bags helps kids meet their calcium needs."



Thabet said that with the bags, milk arrives to the classroom in a more pleasing package. The bags feature a *got milk? get breakfast!* message which appeals to the students, she said.

Robert Wempe, food service director for Allegany County Schools, is grateful to have the bags for the breakfast service. "We have a much easier time keeping the milk cold since receiving the bags," he said.

Cold milk is one component of classroom breakfast. The meal features two or three items from different food groups, including a grain or protein and fruit or juice. Menu items such as assorted cereals, french toast sticks and mini loaves have been very popular, Thabet said.

The benefits associated with children eating nutritious classroom breakfasts have led to yearly increases in the number of participating schools since the program was first introduced in 1998.

Researchers from Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, who have evaluated MMFA for three years, said the program has helped to improve students' test scores, behavior and well being. Teachers and principals in participating schools report that students settle into their school day more quickly, are more attentive and complain less often of hunger and tiredness.

"Most of the schools are very positive," Thabet said of the classroom breakfast program. "They know it is more work for them but they know there are many benefits to the program."

The program works because it removes barriers that keep children from taking advantage of the School Breakfast Program, according to Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland Superintendent of Schools.

"No one has to pay. That means all students can afford breakfast and no one has to feel 'needy' if they eat," Grasmick said. "Breakfast is served in the classroom, making it more convenient and more fun for all students."

Courtesy of



According to Maryland State Department of Education data, an average of 10 percent of the students in school on a given day eat school breakfast under the traditional program. In MMFA schools, average daily participation is about 70 percent and as high as 90 percent in some schools.

Gary Dodds, food service director for Washington County schools, has seen a 90 percent participation increase in his schools involved in the program. "It's a whole different environment," he said. "With classroom breakfast, it is part of the day."

Dodds said any concerns teachers may have had originally regarding possible spills in the classroom are no longer issues. They praise the program and are pleased about the difference in their students' attentiveness and behavior, he said.

Marisa Godwin, a teacher at Hyattsville Elementary School in Prince George's County, said her students are interacting better in the morning after eating breakfast.

"They all want to eat," she said. "Breakfast in the classroom is a good idea because school starts so early and many aren't able to eat before they come."

Wempe said that students are also more inclined to go directly to the classroom upon arriving at school. "It has cut down on tardiness," he said. "There is not as much commotion because kids go right to the classroom."

"I know the kids really enjoy the program," Dodds said. "I see it as a tool for education."

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