

Mealtime Sampler

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Expanding Breakfast: Brookline's Model For Starting From the Ground Up

Gail Koutrobus, foodservice director in Brookline, Massachusetts, knows an opportunity when she sees it. When the principal of Pierce School, the second-largest of Brookline's eight public K-8 schools, approached her about serving a morning snack in kindergarten classrooms, she offered an even better alternative – *Breakfast in the Classroom*. That simple question set in motion Koutrobus' plan to expand an already successful, reimbursable school breakfast program.

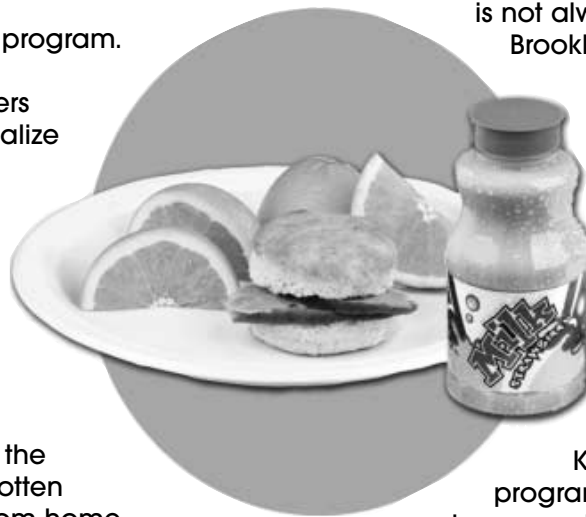
Now, bright-eyed kindergarteners with freshly washed hands socialize around small tables every morning, enjoying easy-to-eat foods, such as fruit or juice, cereal or hot breakfast sandwiches and milk. For the children, the breakfast is part of their daily routine – and much of kindergarten is about routine. For the teachers and administrators, it's a solution to the problem of food allergies, forgotten morning snacks, and snacks from home that range from nutritious foods like string cheese and apples to less nutritious choices such as juice drinks and chips. For Koutrobus and her staff, it's a great option for expanding breakfast, increasing participation and ensuring that children receive a nutritious morning meal.

When asked about *Breakfast in the Classroom*, kindergarten teacher Anne Selman volunteers, "The program is wonderful!" Served 45 minutes after the children arrive, teachers pick up a breakfast container for each classroom from the cafeteria. Containers are packed on site by Pierce's school foodservice manager, Merima Kantardicz, and her staff. Selman gives them high praise, emphasizing how easy they make it.

For Selman, the benefits of classroom breakfast go beyond helping them focus on learning. There was a huge inconsistency in the amount and healthfulness of snacks from home and *Breakfast in the Classroom* solved it. Before, children constantly compared what their parents packed. "We focus on equality. This is an equitable solution, and it's nutritious," says Selman. It also helps children make the important developmental shift from self to community that takes place at this age. In

addition, eating breakfast and family income is not always related. Many people think

Brookline is a wealthy town, but it is very socio-economically diverse. "Just because children are affluent, it does not necessarily mean they eat breakfast every day," emphasizes Koutrobus.



What's next for Brookline? This small first step has met with such success that Koutrobus is rolling out kindergarten classroom breakfast in every K-8 school one at a time this year.

Koutrobus, who ties the breakfast program to learning and quality food, has a marketing plan showing that this innovative approach works in every way. "I want to start with kindergarten in every school," says Koutrobus. "The idea is to teach good habits and capture children at a young age."

