



DISTRICT: Douglas County Schools, Douglasville, Ga.
FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR: Don Williams
ALTERNATE BREAKFAST SERVICE: Grab 'n' Go Breakfast

★ **BACKGROUND**

Guided by the “generally accepted principles” that a good breakfast helps learning, and middle school children often take their own initiative for meals, Don Williams wanted to increase the number of students eating school breakfast. It looked like a daunting task. Participation at the five Douglas County middle schools was under 3% of the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of 3,947, mostly attributed to unavoidable late bus arrival and resistance by students arriving in time to go to the cafeteria for sit-down breakfasts. With less than a 29% free/reduced meal rate, it was impossible to offer free breakfast to all.

★ **IMPLEMENTATION**

A plan was developed taking breakfast to the students once buses arrived. A pilot school with a receptive principal and nutrition manager was chosen. Several Grab 'n' Go Breakfast stations were positioned in hallways near classrooms. As students entered the building they picked up their breakfast, taking it into the classroom to eat during the morning news, a school-wide activity. Menu selections were placed on utility carts, including milk, juice and easy-to-serve Grab 'n' Go items like chicken and biscuits. All elements were disposable and trash cans were placed at all stations, so students just stepped into the hallways to throw out garbage.

With so many paying students, a workable debit program was needed. They could pay at the point-of-sale or go to the cafeteria and deposit money into their accounts at all different times. Paying and non-paying students could not be tracked, thereby removing the stigma often associated with breakfast. Foodservice staff at the stations recorded which students took breakfast on transaction sheets, using the last four digits of ID numbers. Later, the information was entered into the computer.

★ **IMPACT**

In the pilot school, average breakfast consumption increased from 100 to 400 breakfasts per day, with teachers reporting increased attention, better behavior and fewer discipline problems. Grab 'n' Go Breakfast was phased into the other schools and participation rates in the five-year old program currently range from 42% to 61% of the ADA. Lunch participation also increased, and Williams theorizes, “I believe this is due to involving more students in breakfast. They experience our delicious, nutritious food and decide to continue enjoying it at lunchtime.”

★ **WORDS OF ADVICE**

“When we started Grab 'n' Go Breakfast, our program was having such difficulty, we were ready to try anything,” reflects Williams. “We didn't know if it could be done, with such a low level of free and reduced meals, but our commitment to understanding the benefits of breakfast and wanting to make a program work helped us to succeed. Realize you'll meet with some resistance from custodians, teachers, and others. Expect it, work with it and overcome it, because the program rewards will far outweigh that resistance.”