

CLASSROOM BREAKFAST WITH MILK HELPS KIDS LEARN



It's 7 a.m. at Strafford School District in Strafford, Missouri, but Helen Willis, the district's cafeteria manager, has already been hard at work. The aroma of egg and cheese biscuits fills the cafeteria as the staff heads down the hall to the high school, taking breakfast to students in their classes. Before the first bell, Willis and her staff fill carts with white and flavored milk, juice and an ever-expanding breakfast assortment packed in foam clamshells. The choices entice more than half of the 300+ teenagers to choose school breakfast daily.

This scenario didn't exist until last year. Before then, high school students ate breakfast in the cafeteria with elementary and middle school students, and weren't happy about it. Many students stopped at a convenience store or for fast food, for a more expensive and often less nutritious breakfast, or they skipped the meal entirely.

But that was then. It's different now at Strafford High. Breakfast participation is up more than 47 percent, with the district serving 47,495 breakfasts this past school year! Based on this success, the district expanded Breakfast in the Classroom to the middle school this fall.

An Idea Blooms

Willis got the idea after attending a Midwest Dairy Council workshop session at a state school foodservice conference. It emphasized alternate serving methods, including Breakfast in the Classroom, which can increase the number of students who eat school breakfast.

After the workshop, Willis shared what she learned with her superintendent and high school principal. They were interested in the studies showing that most students who begin the day

with a well-balanced school breakfast are more alert and ready to learn, perform better on standardized tests, behave better in class and are absent or tardy less often.

According to Willis, the program was an immediate success. Since it began, one longtime teacher reports his students are rarely tardy and are in better moods as they begin the day. Parents appreciate the inexpensive, nutritious breakfast. Students paying full price are charged only \$.75; others pay only \$.30, based on income guidelines. Yet, the program operates in the black and is a model of efficiency.

Milk Consumption Jumps

The breakfast program also has resulted in significantly more milk being consumed. "Milk consumption jumped dramatically after the breakfast program started," said Janis Farr, a nutrition program manager for Midwest Dairy Council. "The biggest increase came in the pint-size plastic single-serve containers."

"During a five-month period this past school year, the school went through around ten thousand units, nearly a four-fold increase," she said. "The standard half-pint gable tops increased by 15 thousand units – a 12 percent increase."

"With school breakfast everyone wins," concluded Farr. "Teachers have fewer discipline and attention problems. Students learn more and feel better."

To learn more, go to www.nutritionexplorations.org and click on School Foodservice.

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