

FLAGLER COUNTY PROVES BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM WORKS!



Roy Pistone recalls the days when his mother would prepare a wholesome breakfast before sending him on his way to school. These days that image, unfortunately, has become somewhat of an antiquated concept. In its place is a picture of parents readying for the daily grind while overlooking the early-morning nutritional needs of their kids. As mom and dad head to work, their children often head to class battling hunger pains or nibbling on non-nutritious foods of convenience. At greater risk of skipping breakfast are children from single-parent homes.



Wadsworth Principal Stewart Maxcy, Wadsworth food service manager Linda Brown and Roy Pistone, director of food services for Flagler County have been serving Breakfast in the Classroom for four years with success.

Pistone, director of food services for Flagler County, set a goal of making sure his students had a fighting chance to meet the day's academic challenges. That's why he approached Wadsworth Elementary about implementing a "Breakfast On The Go" pilot test in February of 1998.

At Wadsworth, he found an eager principal in Stewart Maxcy and a cafeteria staff willing to try what at first seemed to be the impossible: serve breakfast to more than 300 students in less than 15 minutes.

"When we started, I thought it would never work because I didn't think three people could do it and we started with two," said Linda Brown, food service manager at Wadsworth. "I had no idea it would work as well as it has."

Wadsworth had been serving breakfast to roughly 100 students before "Breakfast On The Go" was implemented. Now, between 350 and 400 are served daily.

Nearby Bunnell Elementary also is experiencing success with breakfast participation improving from 200 to 400.

And the price is not only the best bargain in all of Flagler, but in the entire state, with the exception of schools that offer free breakfast. Flagler students pay 25 cents and those on a reduced plan pay 10 cents.

Bargains aside, Wadsworth was an eager participant for one basic reason. "Students are not going to think unless they have fuel inside of them," Maxcy said. "A fed mind works better, especially when it comes to testing."

The Wadsworth menu features finger-food fare that's easily bagged and grabbed by students briskly moving through the line. On Monday through Friday they are served, respectively, honey buns, doughnuts, French toast sticks, cinnamon rolls and ham and cheese bagels. Milk and juice are the beverage options with chocolate milk by far the No. 1 choice. Brown says about 300 cartons of chocolate are grabbed each morning.

Pistone, a registered dietitian, is pleased to see the milk numbers so high. "As a dietitian, I can say kids don't get enough calcium, period, especially with our girls," he said. "It's necessary for all of

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them, we all know that, for their growth and teeth as well. Plus, there are other nutrients in milk the kids might not be getting.”



It's easy as 1-2-3: grab a milk, grab a bagged breakfast and go head to the classroom.

Overall, Pistone says the morning meals meet nutritional guidelines that give kids a better chance of staying focused throughout the day. He also likes the idea that the program allows students an opportunity for a positive distraction before tackling a full day of studies. Kids arrive at Wadsworth around 9 a.m. Those participating in “Breakfast On The Go” step directly from their bus or car line to the breakfast line and in just minutes, have a sack of food and are off to their classroom. They have until 9:20, during morning announcements, to finish eating, chat with friends or ask a teacher questions. They also are encouraged to participate in the D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read) program during this time.

“These kids really need the extra calories and they are good calories that we offer,” Pistone said. “I just think it’s so important for the kids to have something good to eat, plus it’s good social time for them. We’re always trying to teach the kids to be a little bit more quiet. That’s kind of hard for young kids to do. They have all this built-up energy and they’re asked to basically sit for five, six hours at school and try to behave themselves, which they should in order to learn.

“However, during this time at least they can release a little of that energy and talk with their friends and so forth.”

Maxcy says his teachers support the program and any initial concerns about kids making a mess with their food have been surprisingly minimal. The trash is bundled up and left outside the door each morning for the custodial staff to pick up. It’s basically been no muss, no fuss. And the best part is the kids benefit.

“It’s a matter of ‘am I worried about having a few crumbs in my room or am I worried about doing what’s best for the kids?’” Maxcy said. “You know how hectic today is. To get the kid up, dressed and out the door with breakfast is sometimes a chore. But for a quarter or a dime, they can pick up a breakfast and mom and dad don’t have to worry about it. Where else are you going to get a breakfast for that?”