

NON-TRADITIONAL BREAKFAST SERVICE DOES MORE THAN NOURISH KIDS



While the reasons to adopt a new-style breakfast service vary from district to district and in many cases, school to school, one thing is certain – it can increase participation and students reap the rewards. The list of New England schools with alternate breakfast options continues to grow with Concord, New Hampshire and Burlington, Vermont adding schools to the list.

Solving a Tardiness Problem

When asked why she decided to replace an already popular traditional breakfast service with Breakfast in the Classroom, Concord, N.H. foodservice director Megan Bizzaro's simple answer was "a conversation with the principal." The conversation about educational improvement in a severe-need, K – 2 school, where tardiness cut into important learning time took place at the beginning of August. Children were arriving late, checking in at the office and classroom, then going to the cafeteria for breakfast. When all was said and done, they lost up to 15 minutes of class time. Bizzaro, who had heard of schools serving bagged Breakfasts in the Classroom, suggested it as a solution. On the first day of school, barely a month later, the program was in place.

Bizzaro uses a one-week menu cycle. Three days she serves cereal, another bagels and another lowfat donuts, so that kids get variety. Classroom breakfast counts are received at about 8:15 a.m., breakfasts are packed in coolers and wheeled to classrooms. Teachers account for meals by checking children's names off a roster provided by foodservice.

Though Bizzaro was compiling her first round of numbers when we interviewed her, it looks like the new program is making the grade. Breakfast counts have increased about 60 percent! Comments from parents and the administration

have been extremely positive. Teachers like the flexibility of fitting breakfast into the morning routine.

Declining Numbers Prompt Change

Declining numbers at two schools with the highest need prompted Burlington, Vermont foodservice director, Doug Davis, to change the breakfast service. All students in Burlington eat breakfast free regardless of eligibility under Provision 2 so cost was not a cause for lower numbers at his flagship schools for free breakfast. With some investigation, Davis found that kids were opting to play outside instead of coming to the cafeteria before school. With the help of the principal, he convinced the staff to give another option - Breakfast in the Classroom - a try. "We took the already allotted snack time and served a reimbursable breakfast instead," says Davis.

Davis uses a kid-friendly menu with items that kids can serve and handle themselves. All components are packed into coolers and wheeled to classrooms. A typical breakfast might be a bagel, cream cheese, fruit and milk. "We're always tinkering with the elementary menu because little ones are finicky," says Davis. Davis works with both students and teachers to fine-tune his menu. "One school asked us to try cheese and crackers and it's been a huge success," he notes. The kids like it, it's neat, it's easy and it meets requirements. Another item Davis was initially skeptical of was hard-boiled eggs, but they're pretty popular too!

The results are impressive. Participation is now nearly 100 percent of attendance in Breakfast in the Classroom schools. More importantly, there are fewer kids going to the nurse for hunger ailments, fewer discipline problems and fewer kids with heads on their desks. Five of Burlington's schools

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(continued from *Non-Traditional Breakfast Service Does More Than Nourish Kids*)

serve Breakfast in the Classroom and two more will be added.

Alternative options don't stop at the elementary level. One of the middle schools, where Breakfast in the Classroom turned out to be too cumbersome, offers breakfast in the hallway before class. The other has Breakfast in the Classroom, and this year, Davis is testing hot breakfast items in the classroom.

At the high school, block scheduling and administrative support has helped make breakfast available until about 10:15 a.m. Many of the teachers also let kids eat in the classroom. This, along with a menu that has plenty of teen-appeal, has resulted in huge participation increases. "We've gone from serving about 20 percent to 60 percent of the students – about 600 breakfasts a day," says Davis.

From a foodservice standpoint, the benefits go beyond increased breakfast participation. Since Provision 2 free breakfast started, Burlington's lunch counts have increased by 20 to 25 percent district-wide, which Davis attributes to kids being more comfortable and establishing friendship and rapport with the foodservice staff. Prior to free breakfast, some kids had never tried school meals!

Consider Other Options for Your System

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