

Teaming Up With Ohio's Best - Breakfast Success Stories

What better way for adults and children to power up their day than with a good nutritious breakfast? Why all the fuss over breakfast? Studies show that skipping breakfast has a negative impact on students' school performance. Breakfast skippers experience more stomachaches, headaches, and irritability – all leading to an inability to concentrate in school.

Here are some interesting facts on breakfast. It's easy to see how your school breakfast can serve up a solution to the following:

- Most children eat breakfast. As they move into their teens, they spend more time getting ready for school and neglect breakfast.
- Mothers have the most influence on matters of nutrition and health in the household. If moms eat and promote breakfast, so will their children.
- Social ties can get more people to eat breakfast. For example, eating breakfast with a friend can promote breakfast eating.
- Many people think that skipping breakfast is related to poverty, but it's not. It's more a time factor.

School breakfast offers the social ties that students need before their day begins. It also offers a solution to households that just don't have time to prepare breakfast and provides students with rushed schedules the opportunity to "get their day going" with something nutritious.

In 2002, the Ohio Department of Education, Office of Child Nutrition Services mailed a survey to Ohio's Food Service Directors to gather information on innovative and successful breakfast programs. Ohio has many dedicated food service professionals involved in promoting breakfast at their schools. They have overcome barriers to starting a program and are continuously striving to increase participation with new and creative breakfast promotions. Take a look at just a few of the superstars of Ohio's breakfast programs.

Breakfast Success Stories

***Phyllis Griffith, Food Service Director
Columbus Public Schools
Kent Elementary School
Franklin County***

Kent Elementary School in Columbus teamed up with the Rotary Club of Columbus and the Children's Hunger Alliance to increase their breakfast participation rate. Before intervention, Kent had a breakfast participation rate of 60 percent. After breakfast promotion activities were implemented, the rate increased to 96 percent. All students receive a free breakfast at Kent Elementary. This amazing feat was achieved with strong organization and the push of key collaborators, cooperation of school staff, and strong incentives to engage students in breakfast activities. Some teachers were hesitant to participate, but after receiving positive comments from those teachers who offered a classroom breakfast, they were soon on board. Melissa DeFilippo was the on-site coordinator of the breakfast project.

Breakfast Promotions Implemented at Kent

- Classroom promotions were based on breakfast participation and children arriving at school on time. Students who ate at home were also included in breakfast participation. Awards were distributed on Friday, so students could think about starting off the following Monday "the right way".
- Students were encouraged to display weekly good behavior according to set guidelines. The top student from each classroom was selected to receive breakfast prepared by their principal on Friday.
- Color-coded ribbons were awarded to the classrooms based on their breakfast participation, with a blue ribbon for the highest participation (90 percent or above) and white for 70 to 90 percent.
- The Rotary Club was instrumental in providing incentives for the teachers serving breakfast in the classroom. Rotary Club members dressed in tuxedoes and served breakfast to the teachers to show appreciation of their efforts to increase breakfast participation. Hope Taft, Ohio's First Lady, also attended the event. The Rotary Club also provided gift certificates to local dining establishments to the teachers for supporting breakfast in the classroom.
- The students decorated their own breakfast placemats with the "why breakfast is important" theme. The placemats were laminated and used by the students to protect their desks while enjoying their breakfasts.

Kent's Challenge for the 2002-2003 School Year

To encourage parents to eat breakfast with their children, parents will be invited to eat free breakfast with their children on Wednesday mornings.

For more information on the Kent Elementary School Project, [click here](#).

***Paula Montgomery, Food Service Director
Fairborn City Schools
Greene County***

"I love to invite members and special guests of the community to eat breakfast with the kids"

Paula Montgomery, Food Service Director of Fairborn City Schools in Greene County is full of creative ideas. Paula loves working with her students and it is evident in all the nutrition education experiences she creates.

In appreciation for the work the local firefighters did with the disaster on September 11th, 2001, Paula and her cafeteria crew baked cookies for the firefighters. The firefighters appreciated the thought and as a 'thank you' they sent a surprise visitor

to eat breakfast with the students - Sparky the Fire Dog. Sparky told the students about the importance of eating breakfast. Will students listen to a talking dog over their parents? Probably!

To commemorate the Olympics in 2002, Paula invited the mascot, Tony the Tiger for breakfast. How? During an art contest held in the cafeteria, judges selected Gold, Silver, and Bronze winners. Paula purchased medallions and ribbons in the school color and invited Tony the Tiger to do the judging. Winners stood on boxes, just like in the Olympics and Tony awarded the prizes. What a GRRRRREAT idea!

But Paula's ideas don't stop there. Paula also promotes family eating with "Muffins for Moms" and "Donuts for Dads." Parents can see the importance that breakfast plays in getting their children, as well as themselves, off to a good start. Paula invited local school board members and the school principal to get their day off to a good start with breakfast. The event was topped off with a musical called "Feeling Your Oats."

Paula's Challenge for the 2002-2003 School Year

Keep creating new and different breakfast promotions.

***Wilma Woltz, Food Service Director
New Lexington City Schools
Perry County***

"School Breakfast Promotions Increase School Breakfast Participation"

Wilma Woltz, Food Service Director from Junction City Elementary School in Perry County admits that school breakfast promotions definitely increase student breakfast participation. Promotions that Wilma offers during National School Breakfast Week (March) help increase participation rates. Wilma likes to offer a Grab "n" Go Breakfast, served in a colorful bag. "The students like all the color and activities on the bags - I tuck a prize into several of the bags on a special day. A simple prize can increase breakfast participation."

"Planning ahead to serve breakfast in classrooms during proficiency week helps limit chaos."

Breakfast is served in the cafeteria during the school year, but is taken to the classroom during Proficiency Testing Week. Items are loaded into milk crates and then delivered to the classrooms. To make this move smoother, Wilma plans for extra volunteers to assist in the classrooms. Preparing custodians for extra duties and assigning aides special duties all help during this week.

Wilma's Challenge for the 2003-2003 School Year

Wilma's challenge for the 2002-2003 school year is to increase breakfast participation in her high schools. "I see the students line up for candy bars from the vending machines for breakfast. I want to buy a breakfast cart so students can easily purchase Grab "n" Go items from the cafeteria. We received a \$500 breakfast grant from the American Dairy Association & Dairy Council Mid East. I can have my milk cart and food cart to offer the students healthier choices than they get from the vending machines. "

**Scott Limburg, Food Service Director
Riverview Local Schools
Coshocton County
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"We always feed our students breakfast during proficiency week, so why not continue breakfast every week?"

Scott Limburg, Food Service Director at Riverview Local Schools in Warsaw was instrumental in getting breakfast in the classroom at one of his elementary schools. Scott began by doing his homework before approaching the superintendent and school principal. He documented national research on the academic and health benefits of breakfast and emphasized the stigma of being labeled 'free' that the students experienced when they ate their breakfast in the cafeteria. Breakfast in the classroom eliminates this negative connotation.

How Does Breakfast in the Classroom Work?

Students arrive at school and go directly to the cafeteria and pick up their Grab "n" Go Breakfast bag, then head to their classroom. To make breakfast time easy, Scott uses prepared foods.

Overcoming Teachers' Concerns

"At first the teachers at the school were reluctant to offer breakfast in the classroom - no one had seen it work. In the end, even the most reluctant teacher agreed that it was a success."

The teachers were concerned with cereal/milk in the classroom and the potential for spills and messes. Scott compromised and agreed to substitute their favorite hot food items for the cereal.

The teachers were also concerned about the potential for milk squirts from milk pouches. These did not prove to be a problem. Paper towels were provided for the teachers to clean up spills as well as moist towelettes for dirty little fingers.

Once the teachers were convinced that their students' behavior improved after eating breakfast, word of mouth spread from one teacher to another, and even the most reluctant teacher agreed that breakfast in the classroom was a success.

Scott's Challenge for the 2002-2003 School Year

Scott tried breakfast in the classroom in one school with success, so he plans to extend the program to other schools in the 2002-2003 school year with the help of a grant from the American Dairy Association & Dairy Council Mid East.

**Nancy Wallace, Food Service Director
Southern Local
Perry County**

"If you have a special talent, use it!"

Nancy Wallace, Food Service Director at Southern Local feels it's important to bring your special talents to the cafeteria. Nancy incorporates theme days in her cafeteria. During circus day, Nancy exhibited her special talent as a juggler to entertain the children with a fruit toss. "This makes the day start off happy! Teachers appreciate happy children first thing in the morning," she said.

Nancy also offered a World of Adventure as a theme day in her cafeteria. She set up a pup tent with a fake fire and read to the students. For National School Breakfast Week, Nancy decorates the cafeteria. In the 2001-2002 school year, Nancy downloaded the theme for National School Breakfast Week from the American School Food Service Association's web site and made tee shirts. Nancy purchased inexpensive tee shirts at a discount store, along with iron-on transfers. She photocopied the image onto the iron-on transfer and used her finished projects as prizes in the cafeteria.

"It's important to talk to the kids in the cafeteria. If they feel someone cares about their opinions, they will come back."

When Nancy was considering a breakfast program at her school she advertised breakfast by placing breakfast items on a cart outside the cafeteria doors. There was such a demand for breakfast that Nancy immediately started a program in the cafeteria.

The Key to Serving Breakfast in Nancy's Cafeteria:

The key to serving breakfast in Nancy's cafeteria is the flow of kids and coordination with their bus schedules. The third and fourth graders go directly to breakfast when they get off the bus. The first and second graders, who are typically slower eaters, arrive next to eat breakfast. The slowest eaters (the kindergarteners) eat last.

Nancy has two lines going through the cafeteria - one with servers and the other is self-serve.

"Parents are amazed at the look and taste appeal of the school's breakfasts."

Nancy is from a small district and invites parents to the cafeteria during open house. She sets up a display with examples of meals. As parents sample the meals, they are

surprised at how different the menu items look and taste from the stories their children tell them about the school meals.

"It's important to 'sell' breakfast to teachers."

Nancy markets breakfast to teachers and charges the same price as for students. "Keeping the breakfast price low for teachers encourages them to eat with their students. When the "cool" teachers eat breakfast, the kids want to join in!"

***Donna Smaldino, Food Service Director
Youngtown City Schools
Mahoning County***

"Teachers can accomplish more one-on-one with students when the students hands and mouths are busy."

When Donna Smaldino, Food Service Director of Youngstown City Schools introduced breakfast in the classroom at the fifth grade at Hillman Middle School, she could not believe the positive results.

- Tardy students are more likely to eat breakfast when it is eaten in the classroom; tardiness puts these students at an academic disadvantage. If they can't eat breakfast because they aren't on time, they are increasing their disadvantage for learning.
- A calm, relaxed tone is set for the day.
- Breakfast eating in the classroom creates a family atmosphere.
- The students' focus on learning is increased, especially in first period class.
- Test scores of low achievers are now equal to comparative classes and are steadily increasing.
- The teacher now has more quality time to accomplish necessary tasks, like attendance, and to focus one-on-one with the students.
- There is a dramatic reduction in physical complaints such as headaches.
- More students are eating breakfast.

During breakfast, the students often watch an educational program.

Advice from Donna:

The first step is to meet with the teachers and the cafeteria manager. Donna also met with the principal to discuss the transport of food from the cafeteria to the classroom.

Advice from teachers:

"Breakfast in the classroom should be a teacher option."

Here are the steps that Donna uses to efficiently serve breakfast in the classroom:

- The manager boxes the food items the day before for the total number of students in the classroom. A list of students' names accompanies the food

box. Absent students are marked by the teacher and the meal components are returned. A milk crate is used to take the breakfast to the classroom, which consists of milk, juice and cereal.

- School breakfast is scheduled from 7:10 to 7:30 a.m. Students can eat until 8:00 a.m.
- Students are assigned to pick up and return the breakfast box along with the classroom list.

Tips from Other Foodservice Directors

***Philip Moore, Food Service Director
Franklin Local Schools
Muskingum County***

Philip uses Offer versus Serve and offers two to three hot items daily. "The students like the hot items. I also serve to accommodate bus schedules."

***Lynn Rinderle, Food Service Director
Coldwater Exempted Village
Mercer County
(419) 678-2611***

"The cooks at the school wear aprons with advertisements for school breakfast. Purchase plain white aprons and have a 'decorate the apron' contest with the students. Pick the top six designs, photocopy to an iron-on transfer and present to the servers and cooks to wear. Hold the contest several times during the school year."

***Sharon Beaver, Food Service Director
Southwest Licking Local
Licking County***

"Our breakfast program has been successful because I've worked together with the principal and director of transportation to overcome transportation obstacles." Input from the principal and director of transportation was a smart move. Sharon also had a sample breakfast for them to eat.

***Judy Farmer, Cafeteria Manager
Parkway Local
Mercer County***

"We have a meeting before school starts when the students meet their new teacher. Samples of breakfast items are passed out for students. We have balloons and posters from the American Dairy Association & Dairy Council Mid East."

"When the school principals saw the free equipment offered through grants from the Dairy Council, they were in support of breakfast. They also realized that more children were coming to school hungry and recognized the need for breakfast."

***Kelly Minnick, Food Service Director
Painesville Township Local
Lake County***

Kelly attributes the success of her breakfast program to a 'Student Group' in the high school that helps with recipe selection and menu design.

***Pam Donnelly, Food Service Director
Cambridge City Schools
Guernsey County***

Pam Donnelly, Food Service Director at Cambridge City Schools uses a theme bag to pack her breakfasts. Pam puts a yogurt, peanut butter and jelly wafer, juice, milk and a favorite of the students - a sticker of the school mascot - in the theme bag.