

Perth Amboy Brings Breakfast to the Classroom

Perth Amboy Food Services Director Tim Linden made school breakfast a priority when he first came to the district in 2009.

Linden's first step was to make breakfast free to all students. At that point, breakfast was still being served in the schools' cafeterias. Making free breakfast available to all students increased participation, but many students still were unable to take advantage of this healthy start to the school day.

So Linden began the process of phasing in breakfast in the classroom. The first step was to get buy-in from others in the district, including the school board, the director of buildings and maintenance, the principals and teachers and the superintendent.

First, he sought support from the school board, knowing this would make it much easier to get others to go along with the plan.

"I was very fortunate because I had the backing of the school board and the business administrator," Linden said.

With that support in hand, Linden met with the maintenance director to discuss how they could efficiently handle clean-up logistics that would not overburden custodians. He also spoke to all the custodians at a meeting, explained how the program would benefit children and asked for their support.

Then, they came up with a simple plan to place garbage pails in the classrooms where students would throw the trash for custodians to pick up later. The pails are used only for breakfast and have made it easy for the children, teachers and custodians to keep the classrooms clean.

Next, Linden sought the principals' support and relied on them to help bring the teachers along. He explained the academic and behavioral benefits of classroom breakfast and laid out a plan that would keep

the process simple and respectful of instructional time — a concern many teachers had expressed.

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With support now from all corners of the district, Linden rolled out the program in phases, starting in the middle school and then moving to the district's preschools. This school year, he will roll out breakfast in the classroom in all the elementary schools so the program will be district-wide, with the exception of the high school, where breakfast is still served in the cafeteria.

Here's how it works.

In the morning, food service workers pack insulated totes with the breakfast bags, which usually contain cereal, graham crackers, juice, a spoon, napkin and straw. Milk cartons are provided in a separate tote. The totes are delivered to the classroom before school starts. When students enter the classroom, they grab a breakfast bag and a carton of milk and sit down to eat. When they're finished, they throw their trash in the garbage pails, which custodians pick up later.

"It's been a tremendous success," Linden said. "It's easy, clean and neat. The children are a lot less aggressive and more eager to learn. It has been a big win not only for parents and students, but for the district, as well."

