

Expanding School Breakfast in NJ

A healthy breakfast helps students focus in class, score higher on standardized tests and avoid trips to the school nurse. When children are hungry, they struggle to concentrate on a reading assignment or solve a math problem.

Over the past four years, New Jersey has made great strides in ensuring more students begin their day with a healthy meal. In 2015, the state moved up to 28th nationally for its student participation, after being nearly last in the nation for years.

This progress is the result of a growing number of New Jersey districts switching to serving “breakfast after the bell,” rather than before school, when most students have not yet arrived. This approach, typically done in the classroom during the first few minutes of the school day, significantly boosts participation, giving more kids the nutritious start to the school day that can help them concentrate and learn.

Since the program is federally funded, most districts with high concentrations of low-income children can feed all students at little or no extra cost, significantly leveraging the considerable investment New Jersey makes in public education.

Perceived Barriers to Breakfast After the Bell

District officials often erroneously believe that serving breakfast after the bell, usually in the classroom, is logistically impossible. This is not true.

Three common concerns are easily overcome:

Cost. Districts with high concentrations of eligible children are usually able to cover the cost of providing breakfast to more students since federal meal reimbursements increase, while operating costs remain relatively stable.



Clean up. Districts worry that serving breakfast in the classroom will cause sanitary issues, but districts with after-the-bell breakfast have easily overcome this challenge. Breakfast products usually come in a bag or box, providing nutritious meals that are easy to serve and easy to clean up.

Lost Instructional Time. Typically, breakfast takes 10 to 15 minutes from start to finish. The New Jersey Department of Education recently issued guidance stating that districts can avoid losing instructional time by serving breakfast during morning activities, such as announcements, attendance and individual or out-loud reading time.



Fresh Ways to Serve School Breakfast

Different models exist to serve breakfast after school has started to reach more hungry children. District officials should explore which option works best for their district. Many districts use different models in different schools, depending on need, logistics and other factors. Here are three commonly-used methods that increase student participation in this critical child nutrition program.

Breakfast in the Classroom

This model typically involves food services staff packing meals into insulated containers for each classroom. These containers are delivered to the classroom either by food service staff or students. As students come into the classroom, they grab a breakfast and a milk and sit down to eat. Students dispose of their trash in cans used specifically for breakfast waste. Custodial staff pick up the trash cans.

Grab and Go Breakfast

Breakfast carts are stationed at the entrance of the school or in other high traffic areas. Children “grab” a meal and “go” to their first period class. This model is often used in middle and high schools.

Second Chance Breakfast

Teenagers may not be hungry when they first wake up in the morning or when they arrive at school. Serving breakfast after first period, commonly known as “Second Chance Breakfast,” allows students to eat when they are hungry. Students are offered meals, usually grab and go style, either between classes or during a “nutrition break” that occurs later in the morning.

Help is available!

New Jersey school districts may qualify for grants and other technical assistance through various organizations to implement more effective school breakfast programs. For more information, go to the **Food For Thought School Breakfast Campaign** website at njschoolbreakfast.org . Or contact Arleen Ramos-Szatmary at the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 984- 0692 or arleen.ramos-szatmary@ag.state.nj.us.

When children eat breakfast at school, everyone wins. Districts that serve

Breakfast After the Bell report:

- ✓ Better academic performance
- ✓ Less disruptive student behavior
- ✓ Fewer trips to the school nurse
- ✓ Increased attendance
- ✓ Reduced tardiness