

Seeing Students Thrive with One Simple Change...Serving School Breakfast in the Classroom

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It's hard to concentrate on an empty stomach. I've seen this firsthand from a career focused on advocating for kids struggling with food insecurity. Each day, children's achievement, well-being and behavior are tied to their nutrition—and it's not just what they eat, but if they eat at all. Sadly, millions of children across the country start their school day hungry, not ready to learn. Research from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) shows that children from [food-insecure households](#) are more likely to be apathetic, withdrawn, non-responsive and more likely to receive mental health counseling than their food-secure peers.

The federally funded School Breakfast Program is critical to addressing childhood hunger and food insecurity. While most schools participate in the program, many students are reluctant to eat breakfast in the cafeteria before school starts—the traditional service delivery model for school breakfast. This reluctance is due to a variety of factors, including wanting to socialize with friends, not being hungry first thing in the morning and barriers such as hectic morning schedules and the stigma of school breakfast being associated with “the poor kids.” As a result, nearly half of low-income children eligible for a free or reduced-price breakfast through the School Breakfast Program are not eating it, according to FRAC.

To combat this, four of the top organizations in education, food insecurity and school nutrition came together to form [Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom](#), with the support of the Walmart Foundation. The Partners, which include FRAC, the School Nutrition Foundation, the NEA Foundation and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, are working to address barriers to school breakfast consumption through an innovative solution: serving breakfast in the classroom.

Breakfast in the classroom reworks how school breakfast is delivered by moving it out of the cafeteria and into the classroom after the first bell rings. Breakfast is offered free of charge to all students, regardless of their household income. Students eat during the first 10–15 minutes of class during morning announcements or while the teacher takes attendance or reviews lessons. This approach ensures children who need school breakfast the most receive it without being singled out, and makes hectic schedules and other obstacles a nonissue.

Today, more than 100,000 students in more than 76 school districts across the country have benefited from the Partners' efforts.

Notably, these efforts have paved the way for other school districts to adopt similar programs, and the benefits are paying off.

Research shows that providing students with breakfast in the classroom is associated with fewer disciplinary office referrals, lower tardy rates and improved attendance. Breakfast in the classroom also has been shown to significantly increase school breakfast participation.

Breakfast is a fundamental ingredient to success, and in my role, I've seen how breakfast in the classroom gives young people and their families reassurance and security in knowing that when students get to school, they can get the nutritious food they need to learn and thrive in the classroom.

