

## Food For Thought: School Breakfast Campaign

# Fact Sheet

### 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.

Despite strong evidence of the benefits of school breakfast, New Jersey ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation for its participation in this federally-funded child nutrition program. In the 2010-11 school year, just 28 percent of New Jersey's eligible children ate breakfast at school, compared to about 85 percent participation in the school lunch program.

Children enrolled in the school lunch program are automatically enrolled in school breakfast. The problem is that most New Jersey school districts serve breakfast in the cafeteria before school starts when most children have not yet arrived at school. This method, while easier for school districts, fails to reach hungry kids.

Some school districts in New Jersey and around the country are overcoming this logistical challenge by serving breakfast right after school starts. Known as "breakfast after the bell," these models significantly increase participation rates, improving both student achievement and health.

### 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](http://njschoolbreakfast.org) . Or contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 984-0692 or [janet.hawk@ag.state.nj.us](mailto:janet.hawk@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