

## A Decade of Funding: Meeting Large Equipment Needs in School Cafeterias

The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners for BIC) came together in 2010 in response to their shared passion for childhood nutrition and the benefits of its potential to improve educational outcomes and child health. Partners for BIC has worked with school districts across the country to increase school breakfast participation through the implementation of free breakfast after the bell models (breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance) that are offered to all students. This case study tells the story of funded districts that ultimately made a healthy breakfast more accessible to students.

### Introduction

One of the biggest barriers to implementing breakfast after the bell is outdated cafeteria equipment and infrastructure. Aging equipment presents many challenges:

- difficulty meeting meal pattern requirements;
- meeting or exceeding participation goals; and
- lack of storage space.

Updating a cafeteria’s kitchen equipment also can require upgrading the overall infrastructure – space renovation, plumbing, electrical – costing a district even more time and money, both of which are often in short supply. However, when a school is able to upgrade equipment for breakfast after the bell, it gives the school nutrition department the opportunity to make improvements to **every** program they offer, from lunch, to afterschool meals (CACFP), to summer feeding, and beyond.

### Large Equipment Needs in School Districts

#### Production Equipment

For some school districts, centralizing production in a larger and/or updated kitchen is the answer to making breakfast after the bell a success. Meals are prepared by school nutrition

staff in the central kitchen, and delivered to “satellite” campuses. This solution often makes sense for districts where many school kitchens are too small or lack the proper storage and cooking equipment to accommodate the increased participation brought about by implementing breakfast after the bell.

#### *Garfield Heights City Schools (Ohio)*

In Garfield Heights City Schools, a renovated kitchen at the high school became the central kitchen for breakfast after the bell production. In addition to having enough storage space,





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Garfield Heights' high school was able to accommodate two new overwrap machines, purchased with Partners for BIC grant funds. Two overwrap machines allowed school nutrition staff to prepare scratch- and speed-scratch meals for breakfast after the bell service on other campuses. Purchasing two smaller machines was more cost-effective than purchasing one machine, and they can be easily moved out of the way when it's time to begin lunch service.

### **Delivery Equipment**

In order to centralize production on one campus, a district also needs to find a way to deliver those meals out to other campuses. When Garfield Heights City Schools decided to centralize breakfast after the bell production at their high school, they needed a way to deliver meals out to satellite campuses for distribution to the classroom. Seeking a no-cost solution, the school district decided to use the band's instrument/equipment truck, which sat idle in the mornings on school days. Other districts report working with the transportation department to use existing vehicles and drivers to deliver meals to satellite campuses. On a few occasions, Partners for BIC districts used grant funds to purchase a delivery truck.

### **Fort Wayne Community Schools (Indiana)**

Equipment made up \$174,800 in spending out of an overall \$228,040 Partners for BIC grant in Fort Wayne Community Schools. The bulk of the equipment budget was spent on a large, refrigerated truck, capable of delivering meals for breakfast after the bell from the district's central kitchen to 31 elementary schools and 11 middle schools. Moving breakfast to the classroom was the only way to increase participation across 42 campuses in Fort Wayne Community Schools, according to nutrition services director Candice Hagar, MA, RD, CD.

"My cafeterias weren't going to hold everyone. I knew that an increase in participation would mean moving breakfast to the classroom," said Hagar.

### **Storage Equipment**

School nutrition professionals frequently cite storage as a challenge when implementing breakfast after the bell. Increased participation means an increased need to hold bulky items, like milk, that take up a lot of space. Large equipment grants helped several school districts implement large-scale upgrades, like outdoor freezers/coolers.

### **Alexandria City Public Schools (Virginia)**

Installing a new outdoor freezer at F.C. Hammond Middle School required demolition of a sidewalk, as well as pouring and installing a foundation and access ramp, and then creating interior access by cutting through the dry storage room into the new freezer.

A great deal of equipment was required to start direct-delivery of breakfast after the bell meals at F.C. Hammond Middle School, from classroom supplies, like wipes and trash bags, to delivery equipment, like wired racks on wheels and cold and hot delivery bags, but the freezer was the "last piece of the puzzle," according to Alexandria City Public Schools Grants Officer Greg Tardieu.

"The last item was the big-ticket item of the walk-in cooler, for about \$96,000," he said. Grants officer Tardieu describes himself as a "professional seeker of school funds," noting there is "never enough money" for schools, and credits the Partners for BIC grant with providing the funding required to complete such a large-scale upgrade.



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### No-Cost or Low-Cost Breakfast After the Bell Strategies

It is possible to start breakfast after the bell with no- or low-cost equipment solutions, assuming your storage and production equipment are up to the task.

- **Repurpose existing equipment:** Could a salad bar or cart you already own double as a breakfast kiosk? A “grab and go” style breakfast after the bell program can be as simple as pre-bagged breakfasts served off a cart near an entrance as students arrive.
- **Use your line:** Though cafeteria location can be a barrier to accessing school breakfast, it may still be possible to run a “grab and go” service through your existing line.
- **“Second Chance” model:** Test out a pilot of “second chance” breakfast to gauge interest. Testing the logistics of a “grab and go” kiosk with a small pilot program is a good way to try breakfast after the bell without a huge financial commitment.

### Impact

During the life of the Partners for BIC grant, nearly 90 percent of grant dollars were spent on upgrading and investing in equipment – more than \$9.5 million out of more than \$11 million over a 10-year period. Although districts were allowed to allocate funds to four different “pots” – equipment, marketing, training, and staffing – equipment was by far the biggest requirement to implementing a successful breakfast after the bell program. Equipment upgrades were able to benefit other school meal programs as well (through increased storage and/or production capacity, for example).

### Conclusion

The vast majority of Partners for BIC grant funds were spent on equipment upgrades and installation, ranging from big-ticket items, like walk-in freezers/coolers and overwrap machines, to smaller items, like soft-sided transport bags and disinfectant wipes for classrooms. Many schools around the country are still in need of large-scale equipment and infrastructure upgrades, but lack the budget to do so.

Some equipment needs are ongoing; for example, soft-sided coolers for direct classroom delivery require replacing every 5–6 years or so. Each new school year, classrooms need to be supplied to accommodate breakfast after the bell with things like disinfecting wipes, trash bags, and signs. Equipment needs for all schools are ongoing to maintain breakfast after the bell and other school meal programs. School nutrition operators cite a continuing need for access to grants that would allow them to upgrade kitchens with new equipment and, when necessary, new infrastructure to support it.





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### Words of Wisdom

*“Even with the best planning, equipment chosen during the early stages can fail to meet your needs once you roll out a breakfast in the classroom program. Be prepared to look for a plan B, or even a plan C, when shopping for equipment to serve breakfast after the bell.”*

*“Older equipment requires more labor from your staff, but with the right equipment, you can free up staff time that can be used to prepare and serve meals. A great piece of equipment can help you allocate funds and time to develop menus and do more cooking.”*

*“Our investment in an overwrap machine allowed us to increase student satisfaction with more scratch- and speed-scratch cooking. The increased participation led to increased staff morale when they saw how much students enjoyed the new menu items, and we were able to reinvest additional revenue from increased participation back into the program.”*

*“Every school has a unique footprint, with a unique set of challenges and factors to go along with it. Each campus needs its own separate assessment to determine what equipment will facilitate breakfast in the classroom and, hopefully, support the school meals program overall. On one campus, you may need a walk-in cooler, but down the road at another, you may just need a kiosk to get started on breakfast after the bell.”*

*“Not all equipment needs are huge or expensive. A small plastic colander for the classroom sink to catch cereal, or raincoats for staff who need to move food between buildings in inclement weather – these are affordable equipment solutions for common breakfast after the bell challenges.”*

*“The custodial staff was a really supportive part of our team. One piece of equipment we offered to help them with was a large, rolling garbage bin – about \$400 – to make it easier to collect the hallway trash.”*

### About Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom

The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners for BIC) is a consortium of national education and nutrition organizations, including the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the School Nutrition Foundation (SNF), the NEA Foundation, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Foundation.

With the generous support of the Walmart Foundation, Partners for BIC has provided technical assistance and over \$11 million in funding to support the implementation of breakfast after the bell models in more than 500 schools in 70 districts, leading to over 100,000 additional children eating a healthy school breakfast since 2010.

More information on Partners for BIC, as well as information on how to increase participation in your school breakfast program, can be found at [breakfastintheclassroom.org](http://breakfastintheclassroom.org).