

Breakfast After the Bell Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are we moving breakfast out of the cafeteria and making it a part of the school day?

A: While schools have offered breakfast in the cafeteria for decades, not many students are participating due to a number of barriers, including lack of time to eat breakfast, late bus schedules, and stigma that the program is for “poor kids.” By moving breakfast out of the cafeteria, and making it a part of the school day, these barriers are removed, allowing more students to get the [academic](#) and [health](#) benefits associated with breakfast.

Q: How long will breakfast take out of the school day? Will it take away from instructional time?

A: The most common concern that teachers and administrators raise about breakfast after the bell is that the program will take away from valuable instructional time. In practice, breakfast after the bell generally takes about 15 minutes for children to eat, and is often done during morning activities, such as announcements, turning in homework, or individual reading time so that minimal instructional time is lost.

Teachers frequently report that breakfast after the bell significantly increases their students’ productivity and ability to focus. Less time is spent on distractions, such as behavioral problems or illnesses caused by hunger. Many schools report fewer visits to the nurse’s office and disciplinary referrals. Moreover, many schools have reported decreased tardiness and absenteeism as students tend to arrive on time to get their breakfast. As a result, teachers are able to spend more time teaching and less on classroom management issues.

Teachers also can choose to incorporate classroom instruction into breakfast time. Some ideas include oral language



exercises, chalkboard math problems, reading out loud, or lessons about hand hygiene, healthy eating, and table manners. Check out the NEA Foundation’s [School Breakfast Toolkit](#), for student activity ideas during breakfast, and [list of favorite books to read over breakfast](#).

Q: We don't have extra staffing in our school to serve breakfast after the bell. Will breakfast after the bell create additional work for teachers?

A: Many schools have successfully implemented breakfast after the bell models without hiring additional help. A common myth is that teachers have to work "off contract" to successfully implement breakfast after the bell. In reality, instructional or administrative activities occur during breakfast, thus making breakfast time "count" as allowable instructional time. The only extra requirement for teachers or paraeducators is to complete a daily accountability roster to note which students take full meals. The roster can be completed easily by the teacher during attendance or done by a paraprofessional. Teachers are not expected to handle the food served during breakfast and therefore will not need to get a food handling certification to participate.

Q: Does breakfast after the bell take away from time that could be spent addressing the goals of my state's curriculum standards and other national voluntary standards such as the Common Core State Standards?

A: Purposeful learning activities can be designed for students during breakfast. One such example is through the sharing of literature. Students can have books read aloud to them and be provided time to read independently during breakfast time. This is an excellent opportunity to provide students with additional exposure to informational text and to demonstrate how nonfiction literature can help students gain information that is important for their health. This meets both the goals of the Common Core State Standards and the National Health Education Standards. The Common Core State Standards call for a special emphasis on informational texts and the National Health Education Standards promote health literacy.

Q: Will breakfast after the bell make a mess in my classroom?

A: As long as students are provided with a structured routine for the service and cleanup of breakfast, these models have not been shown to make classrooms dirty. When adopting a

breakfast in the classroom model, teachers and paraeducators simply develop an in-classroom service plan that works best for their particular students. For example, teachers can choose a self-serve model where students pick items directly from an insulated bag at the front of the classroom, or choose to have student helpers or paraprofessionals deliver breakfast items to each student at their desk. Teachers also can enlist students to help with cleanup – each student cleans up his or her own desk after eating breakfast. Alternatively, student helpers or paraprofessionals can assist with cleanup of desks after breakfast is eaten. For younger students, teachers or paraprofessionals initially might need to model for students how to clean and dispose of breakfast items. After a few weeks, students develop routines and classroom eating manners, eliminating any initial issues with bringing food into the classroom.

Another reported benefit of Breakfast in the Classroom is an improvement in students' table manners and mealtime social skills. Check out the NEA Foundation's [*Hand Hygiene fact sheet and flyer*](#) that you can use in your classroom.

Q: How does breakfast after the bell fit in with my school's Integrated Pest Management plan?

A: Breakfast after the bell does not have to be at odds with Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The secret to success is clear, consistent communication between custodial and food service staff to ensure that breakfast foods are easy to eat, serve, and clean up.

Pest prevention strategies vary by school but might include the following:

- selecting breakfast menu items with less risk of spillage, especially for elementary schools;
- providing each classroom with basic cleaning supplies, and assigning students clean-up tasks, such as disposing of trash or wiping down desks; and
- placing breakfast trash in a separate trash can or bag to be placed in the hallway and collected promptly after breakfast.

Q: Will breakfast after the bell create additional work for custodians?

A: Many custodians have successfully worked with school administrators and staff to implement breakfast after the bell programs. A shift to breakfast after the bell need not require extra work for custodial staff as long as the breakfast program is properly implemented, which is why it's so important to have custodial staff working with you from the beginning to troubleshoot and anticipate any problems before they arise. Typical foods in a breakfast after the bell program are easy to serve, eat, and clean up, reducing the likelihood of spills and crumbs. Most schools provide large trash bags or a rolling trash bin to each classroom, which are then placed in the hallway or a central drop-off location after breakfast for custodial staff to collect. Custodial staff also benefit from not having to clean the cafeteria after breakfast before preparing for lunch. Many schools have common areas for lunch room and physical education classes, which often causes scheduling problems; in these cases, the breakfast after the bell program could actually reduce custodial clean-up time and allow for more effective use of common areas.

Q: How can schools ensure the safety of students with life-threatening food allergies?

A: Schools should create and implement Food Allergy Management and Prevention Plans (FAMPP) that address the daily management of food allergies; emergency response; bullying of and discrimination against students with food allergies; and education for staff, students, and parents/guardians. These plans should be based on school district policy and implemented by a food allergy management team or an existing health and safety team. Team members should represent various job categories, including (but not limited to) nurses, food service workers, custodians, counselors, bus drivers, and teachers or paraeducators.

Schools should consider carefully food allergies when building their school breakfast programs and work closely with families to determine the best course of action. Some schools will choose to eliminate certain food allergens from

their breakfast menus (and other meal menus) altogether. Schools can work closely with food allergy experts to address school meals and service models, including breakfast after the bell.

Q: Shouldn't it be the parent's responsibility to feed their child breakfast at home?

A: Parents who choose to have their children eat breakfast at school are responsible parents! Busy parent lifestyles and bus and commuting schedules can interfere with children being fed breakfast at home. In addition, many children report not feeling hungry first thing in the morning but have a larger appetite later in the morning. Serving breakfast at school, after the opening bell, provides all students with the morning nutrition they need to start their day.

Q: Breakfast is already offered in the cafeteria at my school and hardly any students participate. Does moving breakfast into the classroom really increase participation?

A: One of the greatest benefits of breakfast after the bell is that it can dramatically increase participation. In fact, the breakfast in the classroom model is associated with the highest school breakfast participation rates, which can be as high as 98 percent of the school's enrollment. With traditional models that serve breakfast before school and in the cafeteria, it may be difficult to attract students due to bus schedules and drop-off times. Often the students are in a rush and preoccupied with getting to class and talking to friends, so even if they are hungry, they do not take the time to go to the cafeteria. In addition, there is often a stigma that students eating school breakfast in the cafeteria are low-income, which keeps many students away regardless of their income level. When breakfast is served to all students in the classroom, after the opening bell, many stigma and schedule issues are removed.

Q: How will breakfast after the bell affect my labor hours?

A: Every breakfast after the bell program is going to be unique. The cost of labor varies across the country. There are a variety of factors that impact labor decisions in a school nutrition program, such as service times, labor pool, benefits, administrative support, and menu. In some cases, schools can use existing staff to implement breakfast after the bell programs by rearranging schedules. In many instances, once participation increases in your program, you may have additional revenue to increase your labor. The best way to approach labor and other changes is to do a self-assessment. Use the [Partners for BIC Self-Assessment Guide and Calculator](#) to create a successful implementation plan.

Q: What types of items can be served through breakfast after the bell models? Does this mean we can no longer offer a hot breakfast?

A: Meals served through the School Breakfast Program must meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [nutrition guidelines](#). After deciding to implement a breakfast after the bell model, school nutrition departments may have to make significant changes to their traditional breakfast menus. If meals are to be served in the classroom or from kiosks or carts, they should be easy to prepare, serve, and eat in order to limit issues with spills, crumbs, and trash.

Foods that require minimal preparation and also work well when served in the classroom include low-sugar cereals, granola bars, yogurt, fresh fruit, dried fruit, applesauce, trail mix, low-fat cheese sticks, and whole-wheat bagels with cream cheese.

Many schools are able to offer hot options for breakfast as well, either prepared on site or reheated and served. Schools without on-site kitchens receive pre-made hot foods from a district satellite kitchen or food service company, and use hot

boxes or other warmers to keep the food at a safe temperature if using a "grab and go" service model. For breakfast after the bell, food can be kept warm by transporting it to the classroom in insulated bags. Portable, hand-held items, such as breakfast sandwiches and burritos, are easy for students to eat in the classroom.

Q: As an educator, why is it important that I have to make sure each child takes every component?

A: A breakfast served through the School Breakfast Program includes four food groups: grain, milk, fruit, and protein. The USDA requires students take a minimum of three different food groups for your school to be reimbursed for that meal. When students show their selection to you, it is important to double-check that the meal follows the guidelines for reimbursement and record the meal on your roster before a student can eat their breakfast. If the student's meal does not meet the guidelines, then ask them to select additional items as needed. You should ask your school nutrition department if you have any questions about what counts as a reimbursable breakfast and the process for counting meals.

Q: Whose responsibility is it to implement breakfast after the bell successfully?

A: A successful breakfast program depends upon the collaborative efforts of administrators, principals, teachers, school nutrition staff, custodial staff, and parents or guardians. Engaging these groups early in the process can open up communication and help address any issues as they arise so they do not jeopardize the implementation process. The Partners for BIC have a number of resources to help you build stakeholder support at www.breakfastintheclassroom.com.