

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE



KURT MILLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Students at Madison Elementary School in the Riverside Unified School District roll breakfast carts to their classrooms.

Schools eye BREAKFAST in classrooms

RIVERSIDE CAMPUSES ARE GETTING MEALS TO MORE KIDS BY GOING BEYOND THE CAFETERIA.



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On a recent Friday after the morning school bell, Madison Elementary School teacher Sarah Francis sat at her desk checking homework and preparing for the day.

Meanwhile, her sixth-graders read or talked quietly while munching on warm taco-nadas, a breakfast empanada filled with meat and cheese. Then they washed them down with milk.

A free breakfast in the classroom has started the day for the Riverside school's estimated 725 students since August 2012.

A little more than 2½ years la-

ter, Principal John McCombs said he made the right decision to give up some class time every morning to ensure that all his students start the day with a nutritious meal.

"We lost a couple of minutes from the school day, but it more than balances out," McCombs said. "I don't have specific data. But I'm seeing less referrals to the office and less discipline problems."

The program also meets a critical need, McCombs said. From 85 percent to 87 percent of Madison students are eligible for free or discount-



BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL

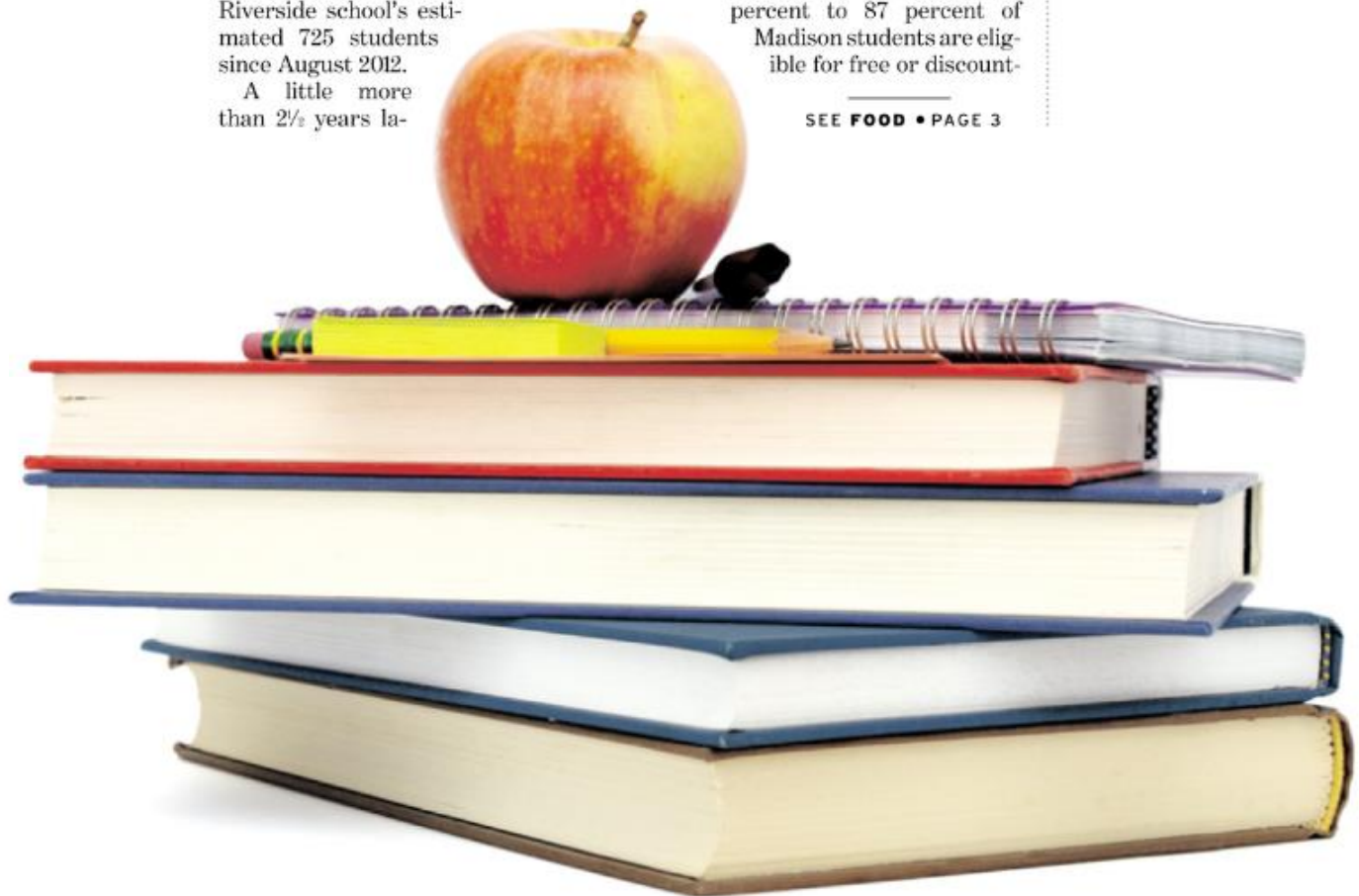
Assembly Bill 1240 does not mandate breakfast in the classroom, but offers different models to ensure that students get a nutritious breakfast after the start of the school day.

Second chance breakfast: Serve students during a midmorning break.

Grab 'n' Go breakfast: Lets students grab quick and healthy meals on the way to class.

Breakfast in the classroom: Serve breakfast when and where all children are able to eat.

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"We're allowing 5-year-olds to make a choice between playing with their friends and going to class hungry. What do you think they're going to choose?"

RODNEY TAYLOR
RIVERSIDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

FOOD

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ed meals, which means their families struggle financially.

Breakfast in the classroom is part of a national movement to boost the number of students getting a morning meal. Nutrition experts say that children who eat a well-balanced breakfast do better academically and have fewer behavioral issues and absences. Locally, some districts have tried serving in classrooms or are hoping to introduce the program.

In California, assuring that school children eat a good breakfast has taken on such importance that legislation was introduced earlier this month that would require schools in which 40 percent to 60 percent of students are eligible for free or discounted meals to provide breakfasts.

Assembly Bill 1240, called the Breakfast After the Bell bill, also would require that schools where 60 percent to 80 percent of students are eligible for the meals must offer breakfast after the start of the school day. Campuses where more than 80 percent of students are in need would have to offer free breakfasts after the first bell.

School districts commonly use state and federal dollars to pay for campus meals.

TRADITIONAL BREAKFAST

Most Inland school districts provide a traditional breakfast served in the



George Sanchez, 11, does work as he eats breakfast in class at Madison Elementary School last month.

KURT MILLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

cafeteria.

Proponents of breakfast in the classroom offer myriad reasons why schoolchildren don't eat breakfast at home or at the school cafeteria: a hectic morning routine, bus schedules, a preference to socialize with friends.

Rodney Taylor, nutrition services director for Riverside Unified School District, called the traditional cafeteria breakfast program before the school bell "a failed model."

"We're allowing 5-year-olds to make a choice between playing with their friends and going to class hungry," Taylor said. "What do you think they're going to choose?"

Taylor said he would like to see breakfast served during class at all Riverside

schools, but concerns about crumbs attracting ants and other vermin and lost instruction time have blocked the idea.

Six of the Riverside district's 30 elementary schools have breakfast in the classroom.

In schools with traditional cafeteria breakfasts, 18 percent of students eat. In schools with breakfast in the classrooms, 88 percent of children are fed, Taylor said.

Dorothy Chen-Maynard, director of the nutrition and food sciences program at Cal State San Bernardino said children "are practically fasting" when they are sleeping.

"A good breakfast nourishes the body and gives the brain the glucose it needs to get going," Chen-Maynard

said.

"Studies show that children are more alert, engaged and function better when they eat breakfast," she said.

MIXED RESULTS

Perris Elementary School District introduced breakfast in the classroom in 2011 at two schools but switched back to traditional cafeteria breakfasts two years later, said Jodi Yager, the district's nutrition director.

"It just wasn't for us," said Yager, adding that breakfast in the classroom limits choices and results in wasted food.

Because of the high number of students who qualified for free and discounted meals, Perris began offering free traditional break-



Kim Wall, left, and Principal John McCombs move a breakfast cart at Madison Elementary School.

fasts and lunches to all students through a federal program.

Depending on the school, 40 percent to 65 percent of children get breakfast, Yager said.

Mike Bynum, director of food services for the Jurupa Unified School District, called breakfast in the classroom "a great idea."

While he is eager to launch a pilot program, he hasn't been able to bring all the parties together.

"You need a buy-in from the principals, teachers and custodians," Bynum said. "They are all impacted."

Teachers and principals make it a point to feed children during testing week, "but not while they are learning," he said.

The San Bernardino City Unified School District piloted breakfast in the classroom at two schools about nine years ago but then dropped it, said Adriane

Robles, director of nutrition services.

"We thought it was cleaner and healthier for children to eat in the cafeteria," she said.

The district's enrollment is just under 50,000, and it serves breakfast at all 72 campuses.

On average, 14,000 breakfasts are served every day.

About 93 percent of its students qualify for free and discounted meals, she said.

Robles said the district is trying different strategies to encourage more children to eat breakfast, including twice-monthly promotions and sending menus home.

"There is a need for us to provide meals for kids, but ultimately it's the child's choice," she said.

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