

Breakfast at the Best Time and Place

Contact: Tia Shimada at tia@cfpa.net or 510-433-1122 ext. 109



The Benefits of Breakfast

The federal School Breakfast Program provides a rare trifecta of benefits: it fosters academic achievement, routes federal funds to public school districts, and supports student health, including healthy body weight. With kids throughout California facing hunger, obesity, and poor academic achievement – often simultaneously – we cannot afford to dismiss evidence-based solutions.

Who's Missing Out

In 2010, a nationally representative survey by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association) found that 42 percent of White children; 59 percent of African-American children; and 42 percent of Hispanic children (ages 8 to 17) do not eat breakfast every day, whether at home, school, or elsewhere.^[1] In California, over 90 percent of public schools operate the federal School Breakfast Program, but we fail to serve 70 percent of our low-income students.^[2]

Barriers and Solutions

When school breakfast is offered only in the cafeteria and only before the start of the school day, a host of barriers – from transportation schedules to a palpable sense of stigma – keep students from eating. Models like Classroom Breakfast are known to dramatically increase student participation by serving meals at the most effective times and places. Classroom Breakfast is also known to decrease absenteeism, tardiness, and lost instructional time due to illness or behavioral issues. By improving access to breakfast and supporting productive learning environments, Classroom Breakfast bolsters academic achievement for all students.

Running on Empty

Recent concerns that some students may be eating two breakfasts (one at school and one elsewhere) have called into question the benefits of serving Classroom Breakfast. There are many reasons why a student might eat twice in the same morning. For instance, students who travel significant distances to school or who attend child care before school may eat at home very early in the day and be hungry again before lunch. While there are currently no robust studies that show the extent and impact of students eating “double breakfast” through the Classroom Breakfast model, the detriment of missing breakfast is incontrovertible.

- Students who don't eat breakfast are more likely to be obese or overweight compared with their peers who eat breakfast.^{[3][4][5]}
- Students who don't eat breakfast demonstrate poorer cognitive function than their more well-nourished peers.^{[6][7]}
- Students who don't eat breakfast have overall diets that are less healthy compared with students who eat breakfast.^{[8][9]}

Moreover, research shows that breakfasts served at school are often more nutritious than breakfasts served at home or elsewhere.^{[10][11][12][13]} This trend will continue as schools begin to implement new federal standards for the School Breakfast Program, which include increased whole grains, reduced sodium, calorie minimums and maximums, lower fat milk, and increased servings of fruit.

Putting Breakfast First

School breakfast programs should be tailored to meet the needs of students and schools. CFPA supports all service models that bring the health and academic benefits of school breakfast to more students. We recognize Classroom Breakfast as a strategy that has maximized student breakfast participation in many schools. For its ability to mitigate hunger, support academic achievement, and promote health, including healthy body weight, all while bringing federal resources to California school districts, Classroom Breakfast is a viable and valuable means of operating the School Breakfast Program.

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