



November 2013

FRAC
Food Research and Action Center

naesp
National Association of
Elementary School
Principals

Start the School Day Ready to Learn with Breakfast in the Classroom

Principals Share What Works

About FRAC

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition. FRAC has a long history of successful work to expand and increase participation in the School Breakfast Program, which is one of the most important federal nutrition programs. School breakfast participation has been on a steady upward trend for more than 20 years since FRAC launched a national school breakfast expansion effort in 1989.

For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's Weekly News Digest, go to: www.frac.org

For information about the School Breakfast Program, go to: <http://bit.ly/sbprogram>

About NAESP

The National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation is operated as the tax-exempt, charitable arm of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Established in 1921, NAESP serves elementary and middle school principals in the United States, Canada, and overseas. NAESP supports principals as the primary catalysts for creating lasting foundations for learning through policy development, advocacy, and resources for effective instructional leadership. NAESP seeks to advance the principalship and address issues in pre-K–3 alignment, principal preparation and evaluation, and building the capacity of new principals.

For more information about NAESP, please visit www.naesp.org.

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by Eyang Garrison, Crystal FitzSimons, Lucy Bertocci, and Jen Adach.

The Food Research and Action Center gratefully acknowledges major support of its work to expand and improve the School Breakfast Program in 2012–2013 from the following:

ConAgra Foods Foundation
Kellogg's Corporate Citizenship Fund
National Dairy Council/Dairy Management, Inc.
Newman's Own Foundation
Walmart Foundation

Additional support for our breakfast work in 2012–2013 was provided by the following:

California Endowment
General Mills Foundation
Hillshire Brands
Kraft Foods Group Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

This research was funded by the supporters listed above. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our supporters.

Report Summary

Principals are the leaders of their schools, responsible for shaping the learning environment and fostering student achievement. They often have the authority to determine which programs are implemented in their schools. And ultimately they are held accountable for their students' academic progress and success. A growing number of principals are embracing Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) as the best way to support student participation in the School Breakfast Program, and thereby ensure that their students start the school day ready to learn. This report provides guidance for principals interested in implementing Breakfast in the Classroom at their schools, and insights into the leadership they can provide to build a strong and sustainable program.

Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC): Two Models

- Breakfasts are delivered directly to the classroom where students eat during the first few minutes of the school day.
- Students grab a bagged breakfast from carts located around the school building and take the breakfast to their classroom to eat during the first few minutes of the school day, commonly called "grab and go."

“Breakfast in the Classroom has increased the number of students eating breakfast and it creates a positive atmosphere in the school building.” —Principal, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, KS

Nationally, the School Breakfast Program serves only half of the low-income students who participate in the National School Lunch Program.¹ While this is far better than 10 or 15 years ago, too many students still go hungry all morning. The traditional school breakfast program in which students are offered breakfast in the cafeteria before the school day starts misses too many students. Bus schedules, late arrivals, school security lines, students' desire to talk with or play with friends, or a sense that only low-income children participate in the cafeteria breakfast all contribute to low participation rates.

“We had more students eating breakfast and fewer students tardy.” —Principal, Des Moines Public Schools, IA

Breakfast in the Classroom—moving breakfast out of the cafeteria and making it part of the school day—has emerged as a crucial strategy for increasing school breakfast participation.² More principals and other members of school leadership are embracing this strategy, and a growing number of schools are choosing to implement it. Breakfasts either are delivered to the classroom, or students pick them up at a kiosk or in the cafeteria and bring them to the classroom. Schools with high percentages of students receiving free and reduced-price meals offer breakfast to *all* students for free. Students eat breakfast together at their desks, often during morning announcements, while their teacher takes attendance, collects homework, and goes over the lesson plan for the day.

“I love BIC! My students come in each morning ready to learn because they don't have to go to the cafeteria and wait in line. The students are much calmer and are ready to start the day now that we have BIC!” —Principal, Guilford County Schools, NC

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation (NAESPF) conducted a survey of 276 school principals from 15 school districts whose schools operate Breakfast in the Classroom programs. Breakfasts are offered free to all students, because the school or the school district has a high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. The survey assessed principals' experience with their schools' Breakfast in the Classroom programs, including challenges they encountered and factors that contribute to successful programs.

“We have really had a great experience with the program. Our teachers have appreciated the students being in class on time and being able to start instruction on time.” —Principal, Guilford County Schools, NC

The principals' responses were overwhelmingly supportive of Breakfast in the Classroom:

- Seventy-eight percent of principals surveyed said they would encourage other principals to consider Breakfast in the Classroom; 17 percent were neutral (neither encouraging nor discouraging); and only 5 percent disagreed.
- Principals noted an increase in breakfast participation (85 percent), fewer reports of student hunger (61 percent), fewer tardy students (40 percent), improved student attentiveness (37 percent), and an improved school (34 percent) and classroom (35 percent) environment.
- Smaller, but significant, percentages of principals also cited fewer visits to the school nurse (18 percent), fewer disciplinary referrals (16 percent), decreased absenteeism (13 percent), improved standardized test scores (13 percent), improved reading test scores (11 percent), improved math test scores (10 percent), and improved cognitive test scores (6 percent).
- Forty-seven percent of principals reported no challenges in implementing the program. Of those principals who reported challenges, the most common issues were after-breakfast cleanup (38 percent), limited janitorial staffing (31 percent), and resistance from teachers (23 percent). These issues commonly were addressed by adding additional trash cans, providing teachers with cleaning supplies, adjusting cafeteria and janitorial staff hours, working closely with teachers during implementation, and conducting teacher training sessions with food service staff.
- Open-ended questions to all principals surveyed and follow up phone interviews with selected respondents highlighted the importance of building school support for Breakfast in the Classroom; the role that greater access to breakfast has played in reducing reports of hunger; a reduced sense of stigma experienced by students as they enjoy eating breakfast in the classroom with their peers and their teacher; and the positive impact that classroom breakfast has had on student attentiveness and reduced classroom tardiness. Additionally, with more students arriving on time to fuel their bodies with a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day, many principals noted that teachers actually saw increases in instructional time as students are no longer distracted by headaches and stomachaches.

Incorporating breakfast into the school day is becoming the norm for a growing number of schools across the country. The principals surveyed for this report are seeing the positive impact of Breakfast in the Classroom on their students and school environments, and would recommend the program to other principals.

“Students were much more focused on the day's instruction, and there were fewer disciplinary referrals in the morning. The breakfast program also helped students stay more alert and ready to learn. Some students stated that they were happy to have two full meals a day that they could look forward to.” —Principal, Chicago Public Schools, IL

Introduction

The School Breakfast Program is an important tool for principals to support their students' academic success. Increased school breakfast participation improves the learning environment of a school by improving students' alertness; reducing distraction among hungry students; reducing "hunger headaches"; decreasing discipline and behavioral problems, visits to the school nurse, and tardiness; and improving student attendance.³ Additionally, students, who eat breakfast at school closer to test-taking time show improved performance on standardized achievement tests.⁴

“The Breakfast in the Classroom Program has made a positive change in attendance, time on task, and achievement. The number of students receiving Honor Roll certificates increased significantly.” —Principal, District of Columbia Public Schools

Participation in school breakfast provides countless educational and health benefits, yet only half of the low-income children who participate in school lunch eat school breakfast. The low participation is caused primarily by the barriers erected when schools offer breakfast in the cafeteria before the school day starts, as most schools do. Many students, regardless of income, do not arrive at school in time to eat breakfast due to parents' commutes, inflexible bus schedules, and long security lines. Moreover, when given a choice, students will often choose to socialize with friends outside or in the hallway rather than eat breakfast in the cafeteria, and many low-income students will choose to skip breakfast at school in order to avoid being identified as poor when breakfast in the cafeteria is seen as being “for the poor kids.”

Breakfast in the Classroom improves the traditional breakfast model by making breakfast part of the school day and moving breakfast out of the cafeteria and into the classroom. Breakfast is delivered to the classroom, or picked up by students from carts in the hallway or in the cafeteria and taken to the classroom. Students eat together at the start of the school day, while announcements are made and the teacher takes attendance, collects homework, or conducts a short lesson plan.

Providing the opportunity to eat breakfast during the first part of class prevents students from missing breakfast when they don't arrive at school early. Students no longer have to choose between socializing with friends and eating breakfast. Schools with high percentages of low-income students are able to offer Breakfast in the Classroom at no charge to all students, dramatically increasing breakfast participation and removing the stigma associated with eating breakfast in the cafeteria.^{5, 6} Schools around the country that have successfully implemented Breakfast in the Classroom find that more children are eating healthy meals each morning, giving students and schools opportunities to reap the educational benefits associated with greater school breakfast participation.

“I am a principal in an urban setting. The academic readiness and school/classroom culture of our school improved tremendously. BIC created a sense of urgency for students to be on time and ready to learn because teachers created engaging rituals and procedures around BIC and morning meeting to make sure students valued, appreciated, and benefited academically and socially from this time.” —Principal, Memphis City Schools, TN

As the school leaders charged with supporting the educational achievement of their students, principals are on the front lines of implementing and supporting Breakfast in the Classroom programs. Indeed, many of the successful Breakfast in the Classroom programs benefited from strong leadership by principals in bringing this program to their schools. Our survey focused on principals' experiences with Breakfast in the Classroom to provide insight into its benefits, the common challenges associated with implementing it, the strategies to overcome those challenges, and the role principals can play to ensure a strong Breakfast in the Classroom program.

Survey Design

In June and July of 2013, 276 principals with Breakfast in the Classroom programs in their schools were surveyed about their experience with the program and about the effect the program had on their schools and students.

Breakfasts are delivered directly to the classroom in 53 percent of the schools and students picked up their breakfast from a cart or kiosk, commonly called “grab and go,” in the other 47 percent of the schools. All schools offer the breakfasts free to all students.

Most of the principals had more than one year of experience with Breakfast in the Classroom—25 percent of the principals surveyed had been running it for three or more years, 38 percent for two years, 34 percent for one year, and 3 percent for less than one year.

Findings

Breakfast in the Classroom Improves the Learning Environment

“I have only positive things to say about the program and I would recommend it to other principals.” —Principal, Memphis City Schools, TN

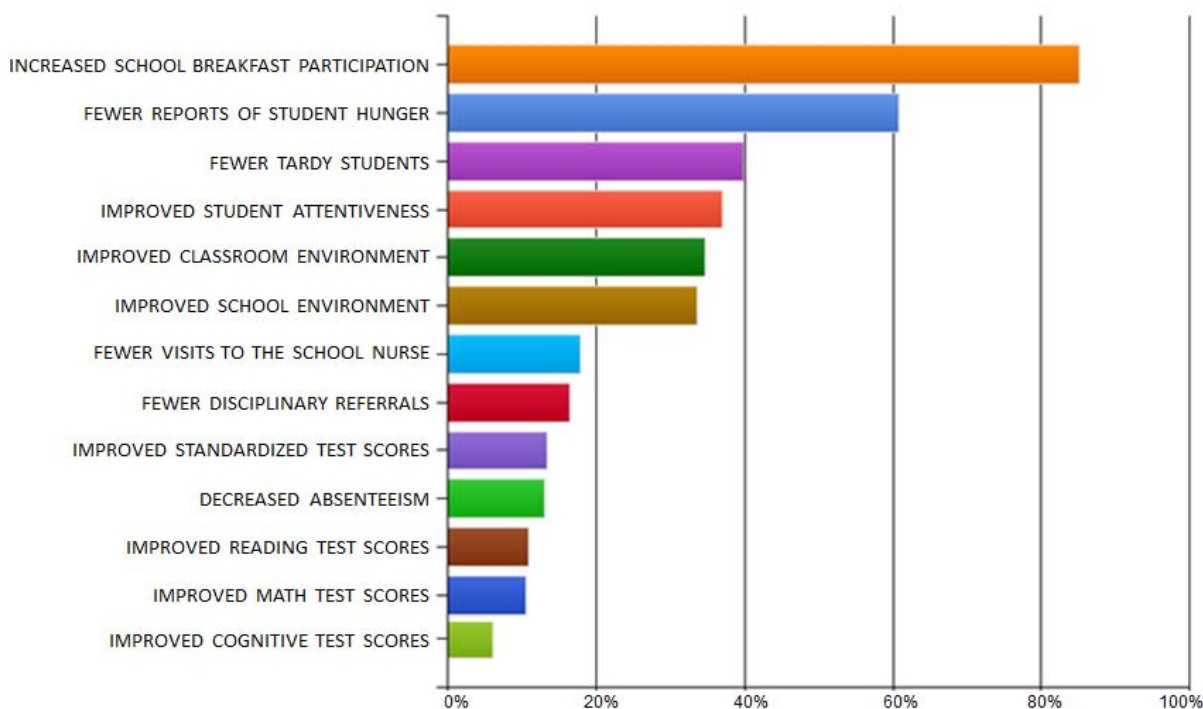
The surveyed principals reported many positive outcomes from Breakfast in the Classroom. Principals reported:

- An increase in breakfast participation (85 percent);
- Fewer reports of student hunger (61 percent);
- Fewer tardy students (40 percent);
- Improved student attentiveness (37 percent);
- Improved school (34 percent) and classroom (35 percent) environments;
- Fewer visits to the school nurse (18 percent);
- Fewer disciplinary referrals (16 percent);
- Decreased absenteeism (13 percent);
- Improved standardized test scores (13 percent);
- Improved reading test scores (11 percent);
- Improved math test scores (10 percent); and
- Improved cognitive test scores (6 percent).

These observations align with the research on the positive effects of school breakfast participation—improved attendance, behavior, and standardized achievement test scores as well as decreased tardiness.⁷ The reduction of student hunger in the surveyed principals’ schools also helps to support the learning environment, as children experiencing hunger are more likely to be tardy and absent, and to experience behavioral and attention problems like hyperactivity more often than other children.^{8, 9}

Districts of Surveyed Principals
Charleston County School District, SC
Chicago Public Schools, IL
Dallas Independent School District, TX
Denver Public Schools, CO
Des Moines Public Schools, IA
Detroit Public Schools, MI
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC
Elgin School District U-46, IL
Guilford County Schools, NC
Jefferson County Public Schools, KY
Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, KS
Knox County Schools, TN
Memphis City Schools, TN
Orange County Public Schools, FL
Prince George’s County Public Schools, MD

Table I: Impact of Breakfast in the Classroom



Broad Support for Breakfast in the Classroom

“Initially there were many reservations about implementing Breakfast in the Classroom. However, working together the school staff (teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff) was able to develop a system that worked. Soon it became a routine part of our day.” —Principal, Elgin School District U-46, IL

Most principals reported that the school community is supportive of Breakfast in the Classroom, with 76 percent of principals reporting that teachers are supportive, 80 percent that parents are supportive, and 84 percent that students are supportive.

Startup Challenges and Solutions

“My program has been very successful due to lunchroom staff and teacher collaboration.” —Principal, Detroit Public Schools, MI

Breakfast in the Classroom requires schools to rethink how they provide breakfast and to incorporate it into the start of the school day. It is not uncommon for schools to experience some challenges that need to be addressed, but many such issues can be overcome through careful planning prior to implementation. The survey asked principals to identify challenges they experienced and explain how they addressed them.

- Nearly half the principals surveyed (47 percent) reported they did not encounter any challenges when implementing Breakfast in the Classroom.
- Thirty-eight percent of principals reported that post-breakfast cleanup is the most common challenge, and 31 percent of principals reported limited janitorial staff for sufficient cleanup. This was overcome by increasing the number of trash bins in the school building and classrooms, supplying teachers with cleaning supplies, and adjusting janitorial staff hours.

- Twenty-three percent of principals reported some teacher resistance when Breakfast in the Classroom was implemented. In response, principals built teacher support by working closely with them during the early phases of implementation, and food service staff conducted training to prepare teachers for implementing Breakfast in the Classroom.
- Eighteen percent of principals reported limited cafeteria staff for preparation, counting and claiming of meals served, and/or delivery of meals to classrooms or pick-up stations. To accommodate cafeteria staffing limitations, some schools adjusted the work hours of their cafeteria staff.

Other, less frequently identified challenges and solutions included:

- Implementing the program in a school with multiple floors (20 percent), frequently addressed by switching from classroom delivery to a grab and go model;
- Student dissatisfaction with menu items (17 percent), commonly addressed by surveying students or conducting taste tests (note that some menu dissatisfaction occurs with cafeteria-served meals as well);
- Difficulty serving menu items (9 percent), commonly addressed through adjusting cafeteria and/or janitorial staffing; and
- Resistance from parents (6 percent), often addressed by sending letters to the parents explaining the benefits of Breakfast in the Classroom.

Less than 2 percent of principals reported the loss of instructional time as a barrier to Breakfast in the Classroom.

“Students were able to adjust to the routine, creating more time for teacher instruction.” — Principal, Jefferson County Public Schools, KY

Table II: Challenges Faced During Implementation

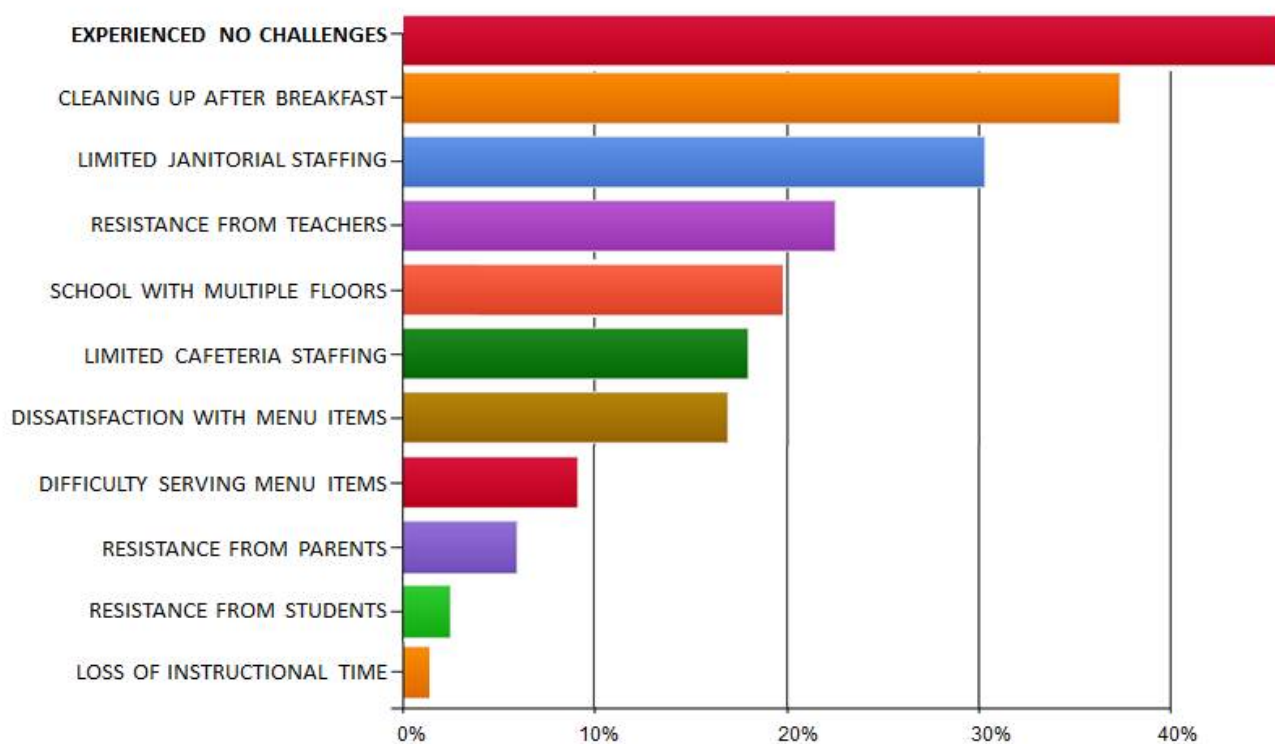
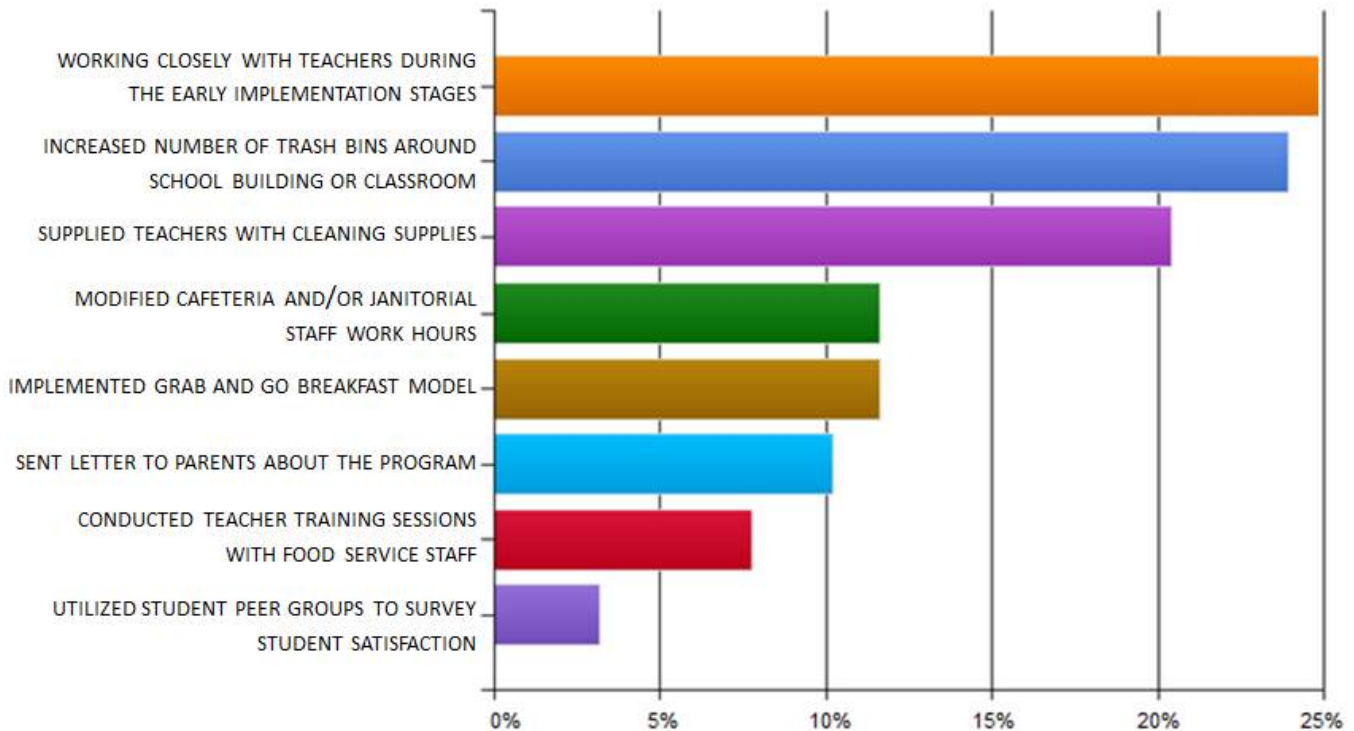


Table III: Overcoming Challenges



In Focus: Memphis City Public Schools

The Memphis City Public Schools implemented Breakfast in the Classroom as part of the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom project, funded by the Walmart Foundation. The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom—the Food Research and Action Center, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Education Association Health Information Network, and the School Nutrition Foundation—provide technical support on implementing Breakfast in the Classroom, funding to cover startup and implementation costs, and assistance in developing community support for Breakfast in the Classroom.

*“The students are so much calmer in the mornings after having breakfast in their classroom.”
—Principal, Memphis City Schools, TN*

Survey results from principals in Memphis City Public Schools were among the most supportive and reflected enthusiasm around implementation of Breakfast in the Classroom.

- Ninety-seven percent of principals encouraged other principals to explore Breakfast in the Classroom.
- Seventy-one percent of principals surveyed experienced no challenges when implementing their Breakfast in the Classroom program.
- Sixty-eight percent of surveyed principals experienced fewer reports of hunger, 58 percent saw improved student attentiveness and improved classroom environments, 55 percent had fewer tardy students, and 25 percent experienced improved scores on standardized tests.
- Principals also reported broad support of Breakfast in the Classroom among school community members, with 92 percent reporting teacher support, 95 percent reporting student support, and 86 percent reporting parent support.

Through the support provided by the Partners for BIC, Memphis was able to increase breakfast participation by more than 3,000 students per day in 20 schools during the 2010-2011 school year, thanks to stakeholder engagement and effective implementation of Breakfast in the Classroom. This partnership helped bring together all major stakeholders in

the district—administrators, principals, teachers, custodians and parents—to build a strong and sustainable Breakfast in the Classroom program.¹⁰ The ongoing work of the district’s School Nutrition Department has helped expand the program to over 70 schools.

Principal Success Stories

Several principals who participated in the initial survey also took part in in-depth, follow up interviews, providing a more complete picture of their experiences with the Breakfast in the Classroom program.

Building Support for Breakfast in the Classroom

Gaining the support of all school building staff is essential to implementing a successful Breakfast in the Classroom program. At Taylor Elementary School in Chicago, Ill., Principal Bill Truesdale built support by focusing on the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child. Dr. Truesdale also met prior to implementation with teachers and cafeteria and janitorial staff to address concerns about food spills and additional cleanup. To build parental support, he invited parents to join their children for breakfast in the cafeteria to demonstrate how long it took students to get through the breakfast line each morning; sent letters about Breakfast in the Classroom home to educate families about the changes; and made monthly reports to the community. Dr. Truesdale found that having continual support from faculty, staff, parents, and the rest of the community enabled everyone to work as a team and ensured the success of Breakfast in the Classroom. “At Taylor Elementary, we emphasize the importance of nutrition and eating breakfast,” says Principal Truesdale.

Ending Hunger in the Classroom

At Mooreland Heights Elementary School in Knoxville, Tenn., Breakfast in the Classroom has helped significantly reduce student hunger. Before implementation, Principal Roy Miller kept late-arriving students fed by stocking his office refrigerator with breakfast bars and milk. Now that breakfast is provided in the classroom, all children have the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day. The teachers are happier because their students start the day on-task, and breakfast time has become an opportunity to check in with students. “Overall, the culture has improved through the BIC program,” says Principal Miller. “The mornings are quiet, orderly, and the children enjoy the engagement with their peers.”

Improving the School Environment

At Blueford Elementary in Greensboro, N.C., Principal Gradesa Lockhart saw many students skipping breakfast when it was served in the cafeteria because they didn’t want to participate in a program that they saw as being for “poor kids.” Now that children eat breakfast in the classroom in the morning, the stigma has been lifted. Participation in school breakfast has dramatically increased, and student behavior has improved. Teachers also have reported that students are much calmer and enjoy coming to school to eat breakfast. For Principal Lockhart, “There is now a community atmosphere since all of the students are eating together like a family.”

Conclusion

The very large majority of principals surveyed in this report (78 percent) encourage other principals to explore implementing Breakfast in the Classroom as a way to build stronger schools. The School Breakfast Program already provides a critically important educational and health support for millions of low-income children, who without it may not receive a nutritious morning meal. But it still misses too many children. Breakfast in the Classroom boosts participation in this important program, providing more students with the educational and health benefits that a nutritious breakfast supplies. Research has shown that increasing school breakfast participation results in improvements in student attendance, behavior, achievement on tests, and nutritional intake. These benefits in turn help principals ensure that students meet important health and educational goals.

“We have many more students eating breakfast, and fewer are experiencing hunger. Surely there are many more positive outcomes that we have not yet correlated to our implementation of BIC.” —Principal, Elgin School District U-46, IL

The principals surveyed point to the health, educational, and general school environment benefits of implementing Breakfast in the Classroom. Their students are less hungry and more attentive. The principals also reported strong community support among parents, teachers, and students in most schools, which is a critical component of the program’s success. The principals who did encounter challenges often were able to address them with simple solutions, increased communication, and creative thinking. Most importantly, principals were able to provide their students a nutritious meal, allowing them to start the school day ready to learn.

“With 89 percent of our students qualifying for free and reduced-priced meals, we went from serving 27 percent of our students to serving 95 percent in one year.” —Principal, Denver Public Schools, CO

These results should be encouraging to principals concerned about the logistics of implementing a Breakfast in the Classroom program. It is never too late in the school year to make the transition to Breakfast in the Classroom. Principals can start taking important steps now so their schools also can reap the benefits of this program, including talking with their district’s superintendent, chief financial officer, school nutrition director, and other key administrators to bring breakfast into the classroom at their school.

Technical Notes

The Principals’ Survey on Breakfast in the Classroom was administered by the Food Research and Action Center in June and July of 2013. The survey tool was developed and distributed via SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, and was sent to all elementary school principals in Chicago Public Schools and Detroit Public Schools, and the District of Columbia Public Schools (districts where nearly all elementary schools have the program). It was also sent to principals at schools known to be operating Breakfast in the Classroom in Charleston County School District, SC; Dallas Independent School District, TX; Denver Public Schools, CO; Des Moines Public Schools, IA; Elgin School District U-46, IL; Guilford County Schools, NC; Jefferson County Public Schools, KY; Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, KS; Knox County Schools, TN; Memphis City Schools, TN; Orange County Public Schools, FL; and Prince George’s County Public Schools, MD. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Some principals chose to identify themselves in the survey, and of those principals, a small group were contacted to be interviewed for this report.

¹ Hewins, J., Levin, M. “School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2011-2012.” Food Research and Action Center 2013.

² Hewins, et al., 2013.

³ Powell, C.A., Walker, S.P., Chang, S.M., Grantham-McGregor, S.M. “Nutrition and Education: A Randomized Trial of the Effects of Breakfast in Rural Primary School Children.” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 1998; 68:873-9.

⁴ Vaisman, N., Voet, H., Akivis, A., Vakil E. “Effects of Breakfast Timing on the Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students.” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 1996; 150: 089-1092.

⁵ McLaughlin, J.E., Bernstein, L.S., Crepinsek, M.K., Daft, L.M., Murphy, J.M. “Evaluation of the School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Findings from the First Year of Implementation.” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. October 2002. Report No. CN-02-SBP.

⁶ Murphy, J.M., Pagano, M., Bishop, S.J. “Impact of a Universally Free, In-Classroom School Breakfast Program on Achievement: Results from the Abell Foundation’s Baltimore Breakfast Challenge Program.” Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, 2001.

⁷ Murphy, J.M. “Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review.” *Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science* 2007; 3(1): 3-36.

⁸ Murphy, J.M., Pagano, M., Nachmani, J., Sperling, P., Kane, S., Kleinman, R. “The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning: Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Observations in an Inner-City Sample.” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 1998; 152:899-907.

⁹ Murphy, J.M., Wehler, C.A., Pagano, M.E., Little, M., Kleinman, R.F., Jellinek, M.S. “Relationship Between Hunger and Psychosocial Functioning in Low-Income American Children.” *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 1998; 37:163-170.

¹⁰ Levin, M. “Breakfast in the Classroom Fact Sheet.” Food Research and Action Center 2009.