

# A Guide to Starting or Expanding a School Breakfast Program



For more information about starting a School Breakfast Program, call the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Nutrition, Health and Safety at 781-338-6498 or their Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread at 617-723-5000

## What is the School Breakfast Program?

The School Breakfast Program is a federally funded meal program that provides reimbursement to any public or non-profit private school that serves breakfast. The program is subsidized by both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and is administered in the state by the Massachusetts ESE. Participating schools must comply with federal nutrition standards and make breakfast available to all students. Schools in Massachusetts with a high percentage of low-income children are mandated to offer the breakfast program.

The School Breakfast Program functions in the same way as the School Lunch Program. Depending on family income, a child may be eligible for a free or reduced priced meal. Those who do not qualify for either of these options may pay for a morning meal. However, some schools offer breakfast to all students free of charge regardless of household income through the Universal Breakfast Program. All students are welcome to eat breakfast at school. No advance sign-up is necessary.

## Why serve breakfast at school?

It is extremely important for students to start each day with a nutritious breakfast. However, many children find that they and their parents are too rushed in the morning to prepare something to eat. Others are not hungry until they have been awake for several hours, and some families simply do not have enough food at home for a morning meal. No matter what the reason, students who do not eat breakfast are often hungry by the time school begins, and this can negatively affect their behavior and concentration. More than 15 studies have shown that children who eat breakfast every day **learn better, behave better, and perform better** than those who do not eat breakfast. In fact, students who increase their breakfast participation have been found to have higher math grades, less frequent school absences and tardiness, and fewer emotional and behavioral problems.

For those who do not have the time, appetite, or household income necessary to eat before arriving at school, the School Breakfast Program provides an excellent opportunity for all students to start the day with a healthy meal. A good breakfast gives students the energy they need to succeed in school.

## School Breakfast Models

There are a variety of ways to serve breakfast at school. The model that works best for your school may depend on the availability of cafeteria space or staff. Other considerations may include your school's start time or how students arrive to school. No matter which model you choose, make sure that all students have an equal opportunity to participate in the breakfast program.

- **Breakfast as part of the school day** –Breakfast is served between the first bell, signaling the start of school, and the second or 'late' bell. Schools that make breakfast part of the school day ensure that all students start each day ready to learn.
  - ***The Best Way: Breakfast in the classroom***  
Students eat their morning meal in the classroom, usually during homeroom.
  - ***A Great Way: Grab n' Go breakfast bags***  
Easy to eat breakfast foods are put in individual bags for students to take as they enter the school building.
  - ***A Good Way: Breakfast in the cafeteria after the bell***  
Students eat their morning meal in the cafeteria once school has begun.
- **Breakfast in the cafeteria before the bell**- Breakfast is served before the school day officially begins. Students arrive to school early in order to eat breakfast. However, students taking the bus often do not arrive in time for breakfast when it is served before the start of the school day.



## Where to Serve School Breakfast

### In the Classroom

- ✓ Breakfast in the classroom after the first bell eliminates the stigma often associated with school breakfast and gives all students the opportunity to eat a healthy morning meal.
- ✓ Classroom teachers can take attendance, collect homework, and accomplish other administrative tasks during breakfast **without interfering with “time on learning.”**
- ✓ Students can also use this 10-15 minute time period to work on homework or reading assignments.
- ✓ Student representatives from each class can pick up pre-packed meals from the cafeteria and deliver them to the classroom in carts, crates and/or coolers.
- ✓ Teachers can invite students to take their breakfast from the cooler or have one student distribute the meals to the rest of the class.
- ✓ Teachers can record the meals taken while taking attendance. Student representatives can then bring the empty carts, along with the attendance sheet with meal information, back to the cafeteria.
- ✓ Students can be responsible for cleaning their eating area and disposing of all garbage in a sturdy trash bin with a lid.
- ✓ Once breakfast is complete, bins can be put in the hallway for the custodian to collect during the time that would have otherwise been spent cleaning the cafeteria. This will ensure that classrooms are kept clean and that there won't be any potential for rodent problems.

### In the Cafeteria

- ✓ Breakfast in the cafeteria allows students to socialize with their friends during breakfast.
- ✓ Food service directors (FSDs) are able to offer a greater variety of breakfast items when the morning meal is served in the cafeteria, e.g., hot or “messy” foods.
- ✓ Breakfast can be served in shifts if the school cafeteria is too small to accommodate all of the students at once.
- ✓ To maximize the number of students who participate, the school can make the cafeteria the mandatory morning gathering place or only allow students to enter the school through the door closest to the cafeteria.

### In the Hallways - Grab n' Go

- ✓ Grab n' Go breakfasts allow students the flexibility to eat their morning meal whenever they arrive at school.
- ✓ Bagged or individually wrapped breakfasts can be served from mobile carts or tables at school entrances, courtyards, or high traffic areas.
- ✓ Coolers on carts can also be placed on each floor of the school so that students pick up their breakfast on their way to class.
- ✓ Students can take their breakfasts with them to eat on the playground or in the classroom.



## When to Serve Breakfast

### During the School Day

- ✓ Breakfast after the first bell ensures that all students have access to a healthy morning meal since students do not have to arrive early in order to eat.
- ✓ Buses and parents are more likely to drop off students in time for breakfast if it is offered at the start of the school day, rather than before school begins.
- ✓ Research shows that eating breakfast closer to instruction time has a greater impact on student success.

### Before School

- ✓ Breakfast before school can be combined with student activity group meetings to boost participation levels.
- ✓ Teachers can meet students in the cafeteria for tutoring sessions and other meetings.
- ✓ Coaches and advisors can supervise students who eat breakfast in the cafeteria during these morning sessions.

- **Serving breakfast during the regular school day increases the number of students that can participate.**

## What to Serve for Breakfast

### Hot Food

- ✓ Serving hot food adds variety to the menu and often attracts more children to breakfast.
- ✓ Many schools without kitchens receive pre-made hot foods from a satellite kitchen and use hot boxes or other warmers to keep the food at a safe temperature.
- ✓ Hot food can be served in classrooms using warmers to transport. Hand held items such as breakfast sandwiches and egg burritos are perfect for the classroom.

### Cold Food

- ✓ Low sugar cereals, granola bars, yogurt, fresh fruit, dried fruit, applesauce, trail mix, low fat cheese sticks, and whole wheat bagels with cream cheese or peanut butter require little preparation.
- ✓ Cold foods can easily be put in Grab n' Go breakfast bags for students to take as they enter the school building.

- **Variety and choice are key factors for a successful breakfast program. Surveys and taste tests can help to determine what breakfast foods students would like to eat.**
- **For more specific product suggestions and recipes to serve at breakfast, please see the "Promotion" section of this document on page 7.**



## Start-Up Costs for Breakfast

### Equipment for Breakfast in the Cafeteria

- ✓ Since all schools in Massachusetts serve lunch, most of the necessary equipment for breakfast is already in place, including ovens, heat trays refrigerators, and freezers.
- ✓ Commercial toasters and other equipment specific to breakfast may prove helpful for offering a varied menu.

### Equipment for Breakfast in the Classroom

- ✓ Schools that serve breakfast in the classroom may need to invest in sturdy trash bins to accommodate solid and liquid food waste.
- ✓ The food service department may also choose to purchase insulated bags and/or coolers with wheels to transport food.

## How to Staff Breakfast

### Cafeteria Staff

- ✓ Serving breakfast at school requires cafeteria staff to prepare and serve food. Some schools also rely on cafeteria staff to supervise students during breakfast.
- ✓ Most of the prep work for breakfast is completed in the morning before students arrive. However, cafeteria staff often begin preparing in the afternoon for the next day's breakfast. For instance, for schools that offer breakfast in the classroom, coolers can be packed with milk the night before and put in the walk in fridge.
- ✓ If cafeteria space is limited, breakfast may need to be served in shifts. This may mean additional supervision costs.

### Teachers / Aides / Volunteers

- ✓ If cafeteria staff are unable to provide supervision, aides or teachers may be needed for this purpose.
- ✓ Teachers can eat breakfast with students in the cafeteria or complete their morning work during breakfast.
- ✓ Parents or volunteers could also be asked to help with supervision at breakfast.

### Student Assistance

- ✓ When offering breakfast in the classroom, students can transport meals to the classroom and return the empty coolers to the cafeteria. Students can also help count the milks for their classmates when they pick up the meals.

- **Serving breakfast in the classroom eliminates the need for additional supervision.**



## How to Pay for Breakfast

Federal Reimbursement	State Reimbursement	Revenue from Paying Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ As with lunch, USDA provides reimbursement for each complete meal served based on students' free, reduced and paid status. Payment categories are established by annual School Meals Applications.</li> <li>✓ Federal Severe Need Schools are those in which 40% of the lunches served two years prior were free or reduced-price meals and therefore, qualify for a higher level of reimbursement. FSDs do not need to submit documentation of breakfast costs to receive this reimbursement. Instead, they can check off a box next to each severe need school listed on their reimbursement claim in order to indicate eligibility for the additional reimbursement. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education confirms eligibility status.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Commonwealth of Massachusetts offers additional funding for State Mandated breakfast schools. These are schools that eligible for federal severe need AND have an enrollment where at least 50 students were eligible for free or reduced price meals in October of the prior year. These schools are eligible for up to \$.14 per meal for breakfast costs that exceed the federal severe need reimbursement. FSDs must submit documentation of breakfast costs to the ESE each month to receive this reimbursement. Types of allowable costs include food preparation, food service, cleanup, supervision, extension services, enrichment activities, etc.</li> <li>✓ Universal Breakfast (UB) is a program that enables schools to offer breakfast to all students at no charge, regardless of household income. In Massachusetts, a state mandated elementary school with at least 60%* of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals and serving breakfast during the school day may apply for UB funds from the ESE at the beginning of the school year. All meals served as part of UB (free, reduced, and paid) will be given an additional reimbursement of 18 cents per meal based on cost documentation. This money is above and beyond the federal severe need and state mandated reimbursements. UB funds are distributed to schools twice per year, five months worth of funds at a time. FSDs must submit documentation of breakfast costs to the ESE each month to receive this reimbursement. Types of allowable costs are the same as for state mandated schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Unless a school offers breakfast free to all students regardless of income, the food service department will receive revenue from students who pay either the full or reduced price for school breakfast.</li> <li>✓ When setting breakfast prices, consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The maximum charge for a reduced-price breakfast is 30 cents.</li> <li>○ The charge for a full price breakfast should not exceed the actual cost of preparing the meals minus any federal and state reimbursement.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

☆ **Reimbursement rates in 2011-2012 are as follows:**

**Free – \$1.51      Reduced - \$1.21      Paid - \$.27**

☆ **Federal severe need reimbursement rates in 2011-2012 are as follows:**

**Free – \$1.80      Reduced - \$1.50      Paid - \$.27**

*\*In order to establish a school's free and reduced percentage, the ESE will review the school's enrollment data from the previous year.*

To calculate the potential costs of starting a breakfast program, please contact the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread.

For tips on decreasing food and labor costs and increasing revenue for school breakfast, please visit the USDA's website at [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/Default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/Default.htm). This useful site also details school breakfast regulations, menu planning, and income eligibility guidelines.

Child Nutrition Outreach Program  
145 Border Street | East Boston, MA 02128  
617-723-5000 | [cnop@projectbread.org](mailto:cnop@projectbread.org)  
[www.meals4kids.org](http://www.meals4kids.org)



The Child Nutrition Outreach Program (CNOP) is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the support and collaboration of Project Bread. Project Bread is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## How to Promote Breakfast

- Advertising your breakfast program to both students and parents through a variety of channels is critical to its success. Without marketing efforts, most parents are unaware of school breakfast and its many benefits. A great first-hand way to promote your program is to offer samples of your breakfast items at parent open houses or parent-teacher conferences. During the tastings, be sure to reinforce that the program is available to *all* students regardless of socioeconomic status.
- It's also essential to get principals, teachers, custodians, and staff to understand the importance of school breakfast, especially how it relates to academics. Speaking at staff meetings and offering food samples allows them to see the quality of your breakfast program and then they can support it by encouraging students to participate.
- To help you promote the School Breakfast Program, ESE's Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread offers two helpful toolkits at no charge: the Breakfast Start-Up Folder and the Marketing Healthy Foods Toolkit. Both kits include numerous strategies to increase participation levels and customizable promotional materials. Please use one of the following methods to order:

Website: [www.meals4kids.org](http://www.meals4kids.org)  
 Email: [cnop@projectbread.org](mailto:cnop@projectbread.org)  
 Phone: 617-723-5000

## How to Sign Up

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Nutrition, Health, and Safety Unit provides technical support and assistance with all aspects of the School Breakfast Program. To request an application to start a School Breakfast Program, please send a letter with your school district's agreement and site number to the following address:

Kathleen Millett, Administrator  
 Nutrition, Health, and Safety  
 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
 75 Pleasant Street  
 Malden, MA 02148

**For more information:**

Phone: 781-338-6493  
 Website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/>

Nearly 1200 schools in Massachusetts already serve breakfast to their students. Speaking to other food service directors and principals in neighboring districts about what works and what doesn't can save you time and energy.

Child Nutrition Outreach Program  
 145 Border Street | East Boston, MA 02128  
 617-723-5000 | [cnop@projectbread.org](mailto:cnop@projectbread.org)  
[www.meals4kids.org](http://www.meals4kids.org)



The Child Nutrition Outreach Program (CNOP) is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the support and collaboration of Project Bread. Project Bread is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# Frequently Asked Questions about Breakfast in the Classroom

## 1) “Time on learning” is a high priority for schools. Won’t a classroom breakfast take time away from teaching?

Students can’t concentrate or learn when they are hungry so the extra time that it takes to serve breakfast is an investment in their education. If breakfast is served in the classroom, this time does not have to be “wasted” as students can perform a variety of tasks while eating such as working on homework or reading assignments. Teachers could also use this time take attendance, collect homework, and accomplish other administrative tasks. Breakfast usually takes only 10-15 minutes in the morning and will ensure that your students’ attention lasts until lunch.

## 2) Won’t serving breakfast in the classroom be messy and lead to pest and rodent issues?

Each classroom should contain a spray cleaner, a sponge, and paper towels in case of spills as well as a sturdy trash bin with a lid and heavy duty trash bags. Students should be taught responsibility for their actions by being required to clean up after themselves. This includes wiping their desk, disposing of all leftover items and packaging into sturdy trash bins, and putting the bins in the hall for custodians to collect.

## 3) My food service budget is extremely tight. Won’t this new type of breakfast increase my labor costs?

Labor costs don’t necessarily have to increase as long as you are using your staff efficiently. For schools that are already serving a cafeteria breakfast, your staff is more than likely doing some of the next day’s breakfast preparation in the time between breakfast and lunch or after lunch is served. Shifting to breakfast in the classroom will require slightly different preparation, but not more work. Enlisting the help of students to pick up meals in the morning and return the empty coolers to the cafeteria following breakfast will ensure that your labor costs do not increase. Perhaps most importantly, breakfast in the classroom is a great way to increase breakfast participation. The more students that participate in your meal programs, the more federal dollars you will bring in to your budget.

## 4) I am interested in implementing breakfast in the classroom, but how do I respond to resistance from teachers, custodians, and/or food service staff?

Any major change will generate resistance among stakeholders yet often these are the individuals who stand to benefit the most. Teachers, principals, and food service directors all have unique concerns when it comes to serving breakfast in the classroom. Diminished time on learning, pest infestation, and additional labor are the typical reasons cited for not adopting this unique breakfast delivery model. But all three of these issues are avoidable when breakfast in the classroom is implemented in an efficient and thoughtful manner as described above.

Breakfast in the classroom is beneficial to all members of the school community. Teachers who were once skeptical of the program have explained that serving breakfast in the classroom actually saves time. Instead of arriving late to class when coming from the cafeteria, students tend to come on time to get their breakfast. Additionally, providing 10 or 15 minutes for breakfast and morning activities gives students a chance to settle down and prepare for the day. Participating principals also find that more time is spent on learning when students have eaten since there are fewer disruptions from students misbehaving or requesting to see the nurse for a hunger-related headache or stomachache. Finally, food service directors that serve breakfast in this manner acknowledge that they benefit financially from the program, as breakfast participation increases significantly once it is moved into the classroom.

