

Engaging Students to Maximize Breakfast Participation

The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners for BIC) came together in 2010 in response to their shared passion for childhood nutrition and the benefits of its potential to improve educational outcomes and child health. Partners for BIC has worked with school districts across the country to increase school breakfast participation through the implementation of free breakfast after the bell models (breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance) that are offered to all students.

This best practice shares innovative strategies school districts have utilized to engage students to further maximize participation in their school breakfast program, which ultimately made a healthy breakfast more accessible to students.

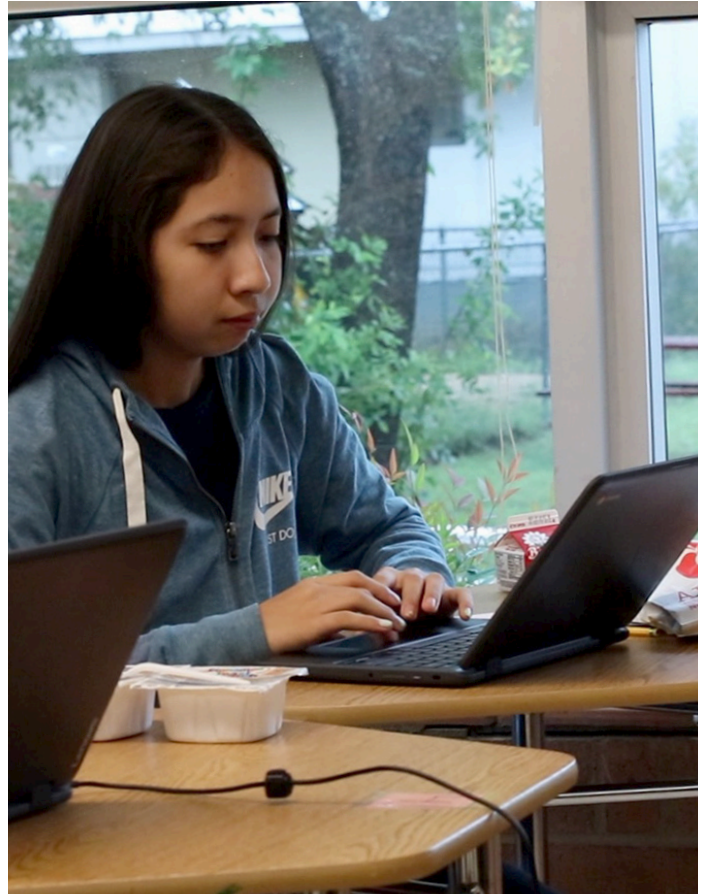
Engaging Students

Students are a school district’s No. 1 customer, so it is critical to make sure they are excited and know about their district’s program and menu offerings. Here is a snapshot of tactics districts have used to get students excited about eating school breakfast while building a sustainable program that is responsive to the needs of students.

Make breakfast a leadership opportunity

Create a **student advisory committee** to ensure you continuously get feedback from students on what’s working and what’s not – on all your programs, but especially breakfast.

Frances C. Hammond Middle School in Virginia created the **“Breakfast Ambassadors”** program when they started breakfast in the classroom as an incentive and reward for



students. As ambassadors head to class, they pick up and bring their assigned bag and cooler to their classroom. Not only do students get excited about breakfast, and work to achieve “Breakfast Ambassador” status, other stakeholders see benefits as well. For example, because they are delivering carts to hallway stations rather than individual classrooms, school nutrition staff can head back to the cafeteria sooner to start preparing school lunch. Breakfast ambassadors also help distribute and clean up in the classroom, leaving teachers to focus on other tasks.



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A principal in Texas holds **interviews for breakfast captain** positions – creating a leadership opportunity, building buy-in to the program, and teaching useful life skills.

Charleston County School District in South Carolina uses **breakfast duty as a reward for good behavior**. All of the instructional staff reported that even kindergarten students were completely responsible for distributing breakfasts and cleaning up.

“Our students love the ambassador program. They take great pride in picking up and delivering the meal. They also help with distribution of the food, and students usually participate if their peers are leading the program. It also helps to use the students to offset the amount of labor it would take to have the meals delivered by staff.”

– Principal, Francis Hammond Middle School, Alexandria City Public Schools, Alexandria, Virginia

Offer exciting menu items

Successful menus have a variety of options, including items prepared in-house, and reflect the students’ cultural tastes. If possible, implement “offer verse serve,” a policy that allows students to decline certain required food components, to further increase student choice.

Plan a food show and do taste tests with students

Ensure that your menu includes items that students want to eat. Houston County School District in Georgia hosts a **food show** every year, where a select group of students get to taste options from vendors and help the school nutrition

team decide what to offer students. It’s also a fun way to get students excited and engaged in the program. [Click here for a video of Houston County’s food show.](#)

Organizing **taste tests** with students is also a great way to get honest feedback without having to plan an event. Prior to committing to a new breakfast item, consider including students from the student council, the local wellness committee, or another organized student group in a taste test. Offer breakfast item samples during the lunch hour and gather feedback. Ask about elements that the students like or don’t like to guide future breakfast item selections.

Host a contest

There is nothing like competition to generate interest and excitement. You don’t need a huge marketing budget to make an impact. Organize a contest among students for a breakfast campaign, logo, or brand. Get ideas from students on how to engage their peers.

Poster contest: Tap into your students’ creativity and talents. Put a call out for students to design your breakfast logo, a poster promoting breakfast, or even a menu for the month.

Recipe contest: Put a call out for students to submit recipes they would like to see on the menu. Have students vote on their favorite through a special event, and start incorporating the winning recipes into your menu temporarily or even permanently.

Cooking competition: Minneapolis Public Schools in Minnesota hosts a [Junior Iron Chef](#) competition to raise awareness about the district’s shift to healthier, fresh, scratch-cooked meals, and build students’ excitement around good food and cooking.



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Market your program and menu offerings

Create a marketing strategy that incorporates students. Livingston Parish Public Schools in Louisiana established “The Breakfast Club” to market their breakfast after the bell program as an exclusive group – one that everyone wants to be a part of. The district found a marketing strategy of this nature worked in all their schools, but especially their high schools, where branding was critical. A student apprentice class designed the logo and printed t-shirts that recognized “club” members. Club members include child nutrition staff that complete specific breakfast after the bell training requirements; stakeholder advocates (administrators, teachers, and board members) continually share their success story to inspire growth in their breakfast in the classroom program; and students are nominated as “Breakfast Champions.” These students display enthusiasm and initiative to promote the breakfast in the classroom program through school promotions and show exceptional kindness to the child nutrition staff. The district kicked off “The Breakfast Club” during National School Breakfast Week. For School Lunch Hero Day, one student decorated the cafeteria to read “The Breakfast Club is the best club.”

Make sure to use the **social media platforms** that students use to engage them – students are more likely to use Instagram and Snapchat than Facebook. Share what you’re doing, and include surveys in your content.

Continuously ask for feedback

Create a brief survey to ask students what they like and don’t like about the menu items and program. Respond to their ideas and always have a way for them to provide feedback. Also, make sure you always have channels open with school staff who are present when students eat. Connect with teachers, paraprofessionals, and students about which items are the most and least popular on the current menu. Check out the [Partners for BIC District Tools](#) resource for best practices in developing and collecting surveys.

About Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom

The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners for BIC) is a consortium of national education and nutrition organizations, including the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the School Nutrition Foundation (SNF), the NEA Foundation, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Foundation.

With the generous support of the Walmart Foundation, Partners for BIC has provided technical assistance and over \$11 million in funding to support the implementation of breakfast after the bell models in more than 500 schools in 70 districts, leading to over 100,000 additional children eating a healthy school breakfast since 2010.

More information on Partners for BIC, as well as information on how to increase participation in your school breakfast program, can be found at <http://breakfastintheclassroom.org>.