



# Offering Free Breakfast to All Students

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 how school districts offer free breakfast to all students, making a healthy breakfast more accessible to students.



## Offering Breakfast for Free

School districts can dramatically increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by offering breakfast at no charge to all students. Increasing school breakfast participation decreases hunger and food insecurity, and has been linked to improved child nutrition and health, school attendance, classroom behavior, and standardized test scores.

To capitalize on these benefits, while drawing down federal funding, school districts are prioritizing efforts to increase the number of students eating school breakfast.

Providing breakfast at no charge to all students helps remove the stigma often associated with means-tested school

breakfast (that breakfast in school is for “the poor kids”), opens the program to children from families that would struggle to pay the reduced-price copayment or the paid breakfast charges, and streamlines the implementation of breakfast after the bell models (breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance). Offering breakfast for free makes school meal program operations run smoother and eliminates concerns about unpaid school breakfast debt.

All of the Partners for BIC grantees, as well as thousands of other high-poverty schools, have chosen to offer breakfast at no charge to all students through community eligibility, Provision 2, or a non-pricing option.



## Offering Free Breakfast to All Students

### Community Eligibility

Community eligibility is the newest federal option for serving free meals (breakfast and lunch) to all students, and reimbursements are based on the percentage of students directly certified for free school meals. Schools using community eligibility do not have to collect, process, or verify school meal applications, or keep track of meals by fee category, resulting in significant administrative savings and increased participation. For more information on community eligibility, visit FRAC's [community eligibility webpage](#).

#### **COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY IN ACTION: Butts County School District (Georgia)**

Butts County School District, a school district with 3,500 students in Jackson, Georgia, implemented community eligibility in 2013. The district's leadership was very excited about the prospect of community eligibility but realized it was not a "slam dunk" financially. The district needed to increase and sustain higher breakfast participation in all schools, not just elementary schools where they had implemented breakfast after the bell, and that's when the school district decided to implement "grab and go" breakfast in their middle school. Together, community eligibility and breakfast after the bell proved to be the keys for breakfast success in Butts County. After implementing breakfast after the bell, participation at Henderson Middle school increased from 38 percent to 61 percent of all students. Butts County School Nutrition Director Nicole James cites dialing in to student preferences as a key strategy to success.

### Provision 2

Schools using Provision 2 (referring to a provision of the National School Lunch Act) do not need to collect, process, or verify school meal applications or keep track of meals by

fee category for at least three out of every four years. Schools collect school meal applications and count and claim meals by fee category during year one of the multi-year cycle, called the "base year." Those data then determine the federal reimbursement and are used for future years in the cycle. Provision 2 schools have the option to serve only breakfast or lunch, or both breakfast and lunch, to all students at no charge, and use economies of scale from increased participation and significant administrative savings to offset the cost of offering free meals to all students.

#### **PROVISION 2 IN ACTION: Grand Island Public Schools (Nebraska)**

Grand Island Public Schools in Hall County, Nebraska, serves over 9,800 students in 21 school buildings. With strong stakeholder support and assistance from the Partners for BIC, Grand Island implemented a "grab and go" model in 2017 through Provision 2. Director of Nutrition Services Kris Spellman decided to use Provision 2 to offer free breakfast to all students. Shortly after implementing her "grab and go" model, Grand Island's breakfast participation jumped from 300 to 800 breakfasts per day, and the growth continues. Teachers at Grand Island have noticed positive changes associated with the new breakfast model. One teacher noted "there is no stigma since everyone has the opportunity to get it." Other teachers noticed that students are more alert, interactive, and happier. Free "grab and go" breakfast under Provision 2 has strengthened the Grand Island community, with another teacher remarking that it makes the school "a more welcoming, supportive environment."



## Offering Free Breakfast to All Students

### Non-pricing

No fees are collected from students, while schools continue to receive federal reimbursements for the breakfasts served under the three tiers of federal fee categories (free, reduced-price, and paid).

#### **NON-PRICING IN ACTION:**

#### **Webb City R-7 School District (Missouri)**

Webb City R-7 School District consists of 12 schools that serve approximately 4,500 students from Webb City, Missouri, and several small towns in the surrounding area. After hearing about the impact of breakfast after the bell in other school districts, leaders in Webb City decided to offer the same benefit to their students with support from the General Mills Foundation. The district decided that non-pricing was the best option to offer free breakfast to all students. Although the district was concerned initially that their low free and reduced-price rate could result in financial losses, the food service department enacted successful meal planning strategies to ensure they would break even each month. To do so, the district keeps food expenses low by balancing costly meals with less expensive options, taking advantage of commodity foods, and responding to students' menu preferences to avoid food waste. The district also found that offering a cold and hot entrée every day helps keep participation high.

The district's hard work paid off. After implementing "grab and go" models throughout the district in September 2017, Webb City saw breakfast participation increase from 770 students in the year prior to implementation to 4,270 students in December 2018. The effect was especially strong in their high schools, where participation jumped from 1 percent to 42 percent – an increase of almost 500 students. The changes to the district's breakfast program have resulted in positive impacts in the school and the community. Students now take fewer trips to the

school nurse, and one elementary teacher reported a newfound sense of calm while students eat their breakfast in the classroom. Teachers have found that breakfast in the classroom has actually increased their instructional time, with students showing more focus during this time. Parents are thankful that offering second chance breakfast to junior and senior high students has solved the problem of older students not feeling hungry enough to eat at home or immediately upon arriving at school. Now, students who never used to eat breakfast can enjoy the benefits of a nutritious meal at a time that is more appropriate for their needs. Dr. Kevin Cooper, Webb City's assistant superintendent of business operations, remarked, "There's no question, this is what's best for kids."

### 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>.