



# Breakfast After the Bell for Schools That Cannot Offer Breakfast for Free

School breakfast helps students start the academic day with the nutrition they need to learn and succeed, but barriers exist that restrict access to traditional school breakfast in the cafeteria, leading to low participation. Through extensive experience working with school districts, data show the best way to increase access and participation in school breakfast is to remove those barriers by serving breakfast after the bell through various delivery models, such as direct delivery breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance; and offering breakfast at no charge to all students.

## **Paid Breakfast Works!**

Not all schools are financially able to provide free breakfast to all students, but that doesn't mean those schools cannot increase breakfast participation. Moving breakfast out of the cafeteria to make it more accessible to students significantly increases participation, regardless of whether or not breakfast is offered at no charge to all students.

## **Emphasize the Benefits**

Know your audience! Offering a nutritious breakfast at school can support families with busy schedules and tight budgets. For facts to share about the health and learning benefits of school breakfast, see FRAC's [Breakfast for Learning](#) and [Breakfast for Health](#) research briefs. School nutrition programs also benefit from increased breakfast participation, with revenue increases resulting in increased purchasing power for menu improvements and labor.



## **Engage Stakeholders**

In addition to school nutrition staff, the support of stakeholders, like teachers, administrators, students, parents, and custodial staff, is important to incorporating breakfast into the school day successfully. Define clear roles for each stakeholder and regularly gather and respond to their feedback.

## **Choose the Right Place and Time**

Shifting out of the traditional cafeteria model allows schools to overcome the timing barriers that cause low participation, including rushed morning schedules and late buses.

Schools should choose a breakfast after the bell model that integrates breakfast into the school day in a way that makes

sense for their students, staff, and environment. For guidance on choosing a meal service model, see FRAC's [How It Works: Making Breakfast Part of the School Day](#).

Consider starting breakfast after the bell after winter break or during [National School Breakfast Week](#) in early March. This timing gives schools the chance to publicize the program to families, train staff, and generate excitement among students.

## Marketing Matters

Marketing is key. And communication to parents should be a priority. Speak at back-to-school nights, set up robocalls, and communicate on social media. Get the word out that this transition is happening to preempt any parents unprepared for meal charges. Students may have other dining options, so marketing plays an important role in a successful paid breakfast program. Focus groups with students can inform branding, outreach strategy, and menu choices. Leverage social media and host contests to get students engaged in school breakfast.

## Popularize Menus

Offer a variety of menu options to improve student choice and buy-in. Hold taste tests and distribute materials to parents at open houses and PTO meetings. When possible, implement "offer vs. serve," a policy that allows students to decline certain required food components, to further increase student choice. Students may respond well to familiar brand names on the menu and if items mimic something they would find at a fast-casual restaurant. Continually survey students and teachers for feedback on menu items.

## Go Cashless

Forgoing cash payments keeps meal service speedy, maintains privacy, and removes any stigma associated with different school meal charging eligibility status. Students who take a school breakfast are counted using the point-of-sale system or a manual list. Money is then deducted from the accounts of full- and reduced-price students. Some operators have seen success with pre-ordering. Others have worked with the same data system that teachers use for taking attendance, and added a column for breakfast to streamline counting and claiming.

## Demonstrate Value

Track outcomes of interest that are associated with increased breakfast participation, including academic growth, absenteeism, tardy rates, and behavioral incidents. Describe how increased revenue has improved the school's nutrition program. Communicating these successes can build support for school breakfast programs, especially breakfast after the bell programs.

Participation increases the most when breakfast after the bell is free for all students. Read FRAC's [Offering Free Breakfast to all Students](#) to learn how schools can "break even" when serving free breakfast.

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Partners for BIC Webinar: [Nonuniversal and Universal Breakfast in the Classroom Data-Driven Decisions and the Numbers Behind Breakfast in the Classroom](#).

Check out the [Partners for BIC Self-Assessment Guide and Calculator](#) to see what works best for your school.