

First Class Learning

This lesson covers the value of eating breakfast. Breakfast should be the first class children have for learning. School decision makers need to be convinced of the value of breakfast and its role in learning. This lesson may be presented by a food service director to the superintendent or school board or may be given to the superintendent to present to the school board. Determine who would be the most appropriate person to present this material to the target audience. A disk with a Power Point presentation is included with the lesson and can be used or you can use the included handouts. See Breakfast Assessment (next lesson) before doing your presentation.



- To increase awareness of the link between eating breakfast at school and improved student academic performance, attendance, behavior and overall health
- To motivate school decision makers to support and promote a School Breakfast Program



Target Audience

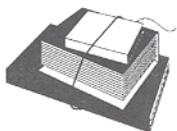
School boards, superintendents, administrators, principals, parents, teachers and the community



Time

Lesson time: 15-20 minutes

Preparation time: 30-40 minutes to review material and set up presentation or make overheads or handouts. The Breakfast Assessment lesson should be completed prior to using this lesson, in order to include school data on breakfast consumption in this presentation.



Materials

Overhead projector or computer and equipment to project Power Point presentation (disk included) and/or flip chart

Handouts: Presentation Handouts
What You Can Do Checklists



Script

The script on the following pages is provided for your use. Notes to you are in ***bold italics***—they are not part of the script. Handouts can be made into transparencies or copied and distributed during your presentation.



Script

(Display or hand out “School Breakfast for First Class Learning” slide #1.)

Breakfast is the one meal that can be most closely correlated with academic performance. ***(Display or hand out “9-15 Year Old Students Breakfast Consumption per Week” slide #2.)*** However, a 1995 Gallup survey found that about 50% of 9-15 year olds skipped breakfast at least one day per week, and 15% skipped breakfast four or more times per week. An astounding 65% skipped breakfast on a regular basis. ***(See the Breakfast Assessment lesson to determine how many children in your school currently eat breakfast. If the results show many children skip breakfast, include that information here.)*** Unfortunately, studies show that kids who skip breakfast have lower time-on-task, lower test scores and are 7-12 times more likely to have conduct disorders.

Breakfast is vital to meeting the National Education Goal, set by Congress in 1994, which states that “all children will start school ready to learn.” The breakfast program helps prepare students of all ages for learning. Remember, hungry children don’t learn. Why just serve or promote breakfast during times of testing? Shouldn’t all kids eat breakfast every day for optimal learning?

There are many reasons children don’t eat breakfast on a regular basis. ***(Display or hand out “Reasons for Not Eating Breakfast” slide #3.)*** Some of the reasons for not eating breakfast may include: the child overslept, hectic mornings, socialize before school instead of eating, no School Breakfast Program, children are not hungry when they first get up, they have to leave very early to catch a bus or have practice first thing in the morning. Whatever the reason breakfast is skipped, children are often hungry by the time school starts.

(Display or hand out “Hungry Children Don’t Learn” slide #4.) Hungry children don’t learn. Breakfast consumption positively influences tasks requiring aspects of memory. ***(Display or hand out “Hungry Children Are:” slide #5.)*** Hungry children are less attentive, less well-behaved and are more frequently absent and tardy.

Breakfast is extremely important to children’s health, learning and behavior. ***(Display or hand out “Skipping Breakfast or Inadequate Breakfast = Transient Hunger” slide #6.)*** We all need energy to learn. Many of you may experience symptoms of hunger at work when you skip breakfast – such as stomachaches, headaches, irritability, or difficulty concentrating. But adults can work through these symptoms, or perhaps they have access to food that can hold them over until lunch. Children do not have this option. They need to



Script

continue working through their classroom assignments even though it may be difficult to do so. Children also have a higher incidence of behavioral problems when they are hungry. Hunger not only prevents the child from learning, but may disrupt the entire class.

(Display or hand out “Concentration Suffers” slide #7.) Children who skip breakfast are likely to have gone for as many as 14 hours without eating. As the time between meals increases, concentration suffers. If a child eats a very small amount of food for breakfast, then s/he will have symptoms of hunger later in the morning.

As adults, we can make a difference in whether or not children are ready to learn in school. The School Breakfast Program can help. It provides a nutritious breakfast and offers a variety of foods necessary to maintain a child’s energy level until lunch. When breakfast is served at school, children can eat a nutritious meal close to the time of learning. School breakfast must meet federal nutrition guidelines and provide one-fourth of a child’s daily recommended levels for protein, carbohydrate, fat, calcium, iron, Vitamins A and C and calories.

(Display or hand out “Energy Release of Sugary Food” slide #8.) A breakfast that consists only of fruit or juice or sugared soda causes a quick rise in blood sugar and energy in children. In about one hour, blood sugar and energy levels decline rapidly, bringing on symptoms of hunger. So, if a child has a piece of fruit at 7:00 am, by 8:00 am s/he can experience symptoms of hunger. These symptoms can make the child less attentive in class and cause them to visit the nurse due to uncomfortable hunger symptoms.

(Display or hand out “Energy Release of a Balanced Breakfast” slide #9.) On the other hand, a balanced breakfast containing sugar, starch, protein and fat gives a sustained release of energy in children. A balanced breakfast delays the symptoms of hunger for several hours, so that children can concentrate on learning until it is time to refuel at lunch.

A School Breakfast Program obviously benefits the children that participate but you may have concerns about the cost of running a program. The School Breakfast Program can and should be operated to break even. Federal per-meal reimbursement, as well as cash payments from reduced price and paid students, can offset the costs for food, labor and supplies. **(See the Money Counts lesson for more detailed breakfast cost information.)**

(Display or hand out “Research Supports Breakfast” slide #10.) Numerous recent research articles support the benefits of eating



Script

breakfast. A recent State of Minnesota School Breakfast study found that students who ate breakfast at school had a general increase in math grades and reading scores, increased attentiveness, fewer visits to the nurse's office and almost a 50% reduction in discipline referrals. This and other recent studies have shown that there are many benefits to a School Breakfast Program. ***(Distribute the breakfast-related research summaries from the Breakfast Fuels Learning lesson. Tell your audience that this is a compilation of recent breakfast research that further supports the benefits of breakfast and the link between nutrition and learning.)***

You may be wondering who can participate in the School Breakfast Program. Some people believe that it is just for children from at-risk families. However, school breakfast is for all children, regardless of family income. It benefits all students that may not eat at home for whatever reason. What benefits will we gain from supporting the implementation of a School Breakfast Program in our school or district? ***(Display or hand out "School Breakfast Program Benefits" slides #11 and #12.)***

1. Better overall performance in class
2. Children are more alert
3. Fewer complaints of stomachaches and headaches and fewer trips to the nurse
4. Less absenteeism and tardiness
5. Nutritious breakfast
6. Link between school breakfast participation and higher test scores in reading and math
7. Improved daily nutrient intake especially of key nutrients such as calcium, iron, Vitamins A and C

(Invite a neighboring school to share their successful experiences in operating a breakfast program.)

Children in our community are going to school with no breakfast or an inadequate breakfast. How can you ensure that children are ready to learn? You can support a School Breakfast Program!

(Distribute appropriate "What You Can Do" checklist.) I am passing out a checklist that will help identify ways you can ensure that children are ready to learn at the start of the day. If there is a way that you would like to help, please let me know after our meeting or feel free to contact me. ***(Give out business cards or list your phone number so people can contact you if they want to get involved.)*** Your support is greatly appreciated.

(Don't forget to fill out an evaluation form for this lesson and mail it to your state agency.)

What You Can Do as a Superintendent

- Check the actions you will take.
- Require a School Breakfast Program in every school.
- Be supportive as a liaison between principals and the school board.
- Showcase your outstanding breakfast programs at the school board meeting.
- Let your principals and teachers know you support and recognize the educational value of student participation in school breakfast.
- Promote positive local media coverage of the School Breakfast Program.
- Make necessary capital outlay purchases to accommodate School Breakfast Programs.

What You Can Do as a School Board Member

- Check the actions you will take.
- Eat breakfast at schools to reinforce support of programs.
- Adopt a board policy supporting child nutrition programs for all children.
- Recognize student achievement, attendance and behavior in schools where breakfast programs are successful.
- Support breakfast expansion, both the number of schools and the number of students who participate.
- Convey positive messages about the value of school breakfast for all students regardless of socioeconomic level.
- Invite community leaders, school food service personnel, interested parents and the media to board meetings for discussion of school food programs and to publicize the School Breakfast Program.

What You Can Do as a Principal

- Check the actions you will take.
- Encourage all teachers and staff to support the breakfast program.
- Ensure class and bus schedules facilitate full participation.
- Establish student and teacher teams to work with food service personnel in promoting school breakfast.
- Eat breakfast with the students frequently.
- Set goals to increase your school breakfast participation.
- Invite parents to join their children at school for breakfast.
- Schedule breakfast or a nutrition break during or between classes.
- Encourage teachers to use the cafeteria for student activity meetings during the breakfast period.
- Deliver breakfast announcements over the school's PA system.

What You Can Do as a Parent or Community Member

- Check the actions you will take.
- Encourage principal, superintendent and school board to support breakfast.
- Volunteer to help with school breakfast supervision.
- Eat breakfast at school with your child at least once a quarter.
- Help establish a program if one does not exist.
- Read and discuss the menu with your child.
- Talk with your child about the importance of school breakfast for good nutrition and classroom learning.

What You Can Do as a Teacher

- Check the actions you will take.
- Encourage principal, superintendent and school board to support breakfast.
- Volunteer to help with school breakfast supervision.
- Eat breakfast with your students.
- Make breakfast a part of the school day by eating during announcements.
- Read and discuss the menu with your students.
- Teach your students about the importance of school breakfast for good nutrition and classroom learning.
- Establish a task force with other school faculty and evaluate the need for a breakfast program in your school.
- Have in-class discussions about breakfast with games to promote healthy lifestyle habits while teaching kids about nutrition and fitness.