

Friendship Public Charter School, Southeast Academy In-Classroom Breakfast Program

When asked what advice he would pass along to another school thinking about incorporating breakfast during the school day, Jerry Haley says, "Just do it." Although it's easy to think about the obstacles, he points out, it's best to just jump in and deal with challenges as they come along.

Jerry Haley, Director of Food and Nutrition Services for Friendship Charter Schools, is constantly asking himself how his office can give students the best. So when he attended the 2006 School Nutrition Association conference and heard about how many more students he could reach by serving breakfast in the classroom, he was hooked.



Haley realized the importance of making breakfast available to as many children as possible. Friendship Southeast has 527 students grades K-6, 82 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced price meals. Many of these children, whose families may not have the resources or time for a healthy morning meal, arrive at school unable to focus and learn. By incorporating breakfast into the school day rather than serving it before school, Haley figured he could significantly increase the number of children that could participate in the program. Parents wouldn't have to struggle to get their kids to school early, and breakfast would be a routine part of every student's day.

In the fall of 2007, Friendship Southeast became the first school in the District to incorporate breakfast as part of the school day. With the implementation of the program, a full 60 percent of students are now starting the day with a healthy meal, a tremendous jump from the 32 percent participating in 2006.

The Logistics

Frankie Jenkins, the cafeteria manager, and her team arrive at 6:00 a.m. to transfer milk cartons into coolers donated by the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association. Her staff members load the coolers, as well as crates filled with meals, onto rolling carts. At 7:30 a.m., the carts are rolled to the classrooms.

Teachers often have a student helper set food out onto each table or in a central area. In the lower grades, the teacher will sometimes pour the milk into the cereal beforehand to avoid spills.

At 8:00 a.m., the students come in to the classroom and start the day with a healthy breakfast. Meals consist of cereal, low fat milk, fruit juice, and pretzels or graham crackers. The teacher marks on the attendance record which students take a meal. The children then have 15 minutes to eat, during which time the teachers hold a Morning Advisory Meeting and discuss goals for the day.

Benefits of the Program

Jenkins observes that in-classroom breakfast ensures that all students get a meal with minimal disruption, since tardy students can come straight to class rather than go to the office to get a pass to go to the cafeteria.

Teachers also are positive about the program and believe it results in benefits for their students and classrooms. They note that learning is more focused and that classroom behavior is noticeably improved. Challenges have included dealing with spills by younger students and adjusting to the new routine.



The breakfast expansion efforts at Southeast have been accompanied by ongoing nutrition and physical activity education. Haley works on a wellness team with PE teachers and others, and places nutrition information on the school website and on the menus that go home to parents. He also has actively participated in National School Breakfast and Lunch Weeks, displaying posters, providing jump ropes and hula hoops, and distributing nutrition education games and activities.

Planning & Implementation

According to Haley, implementing the in-classroom breakfast program required careful planning and consensus-building among teachers and facilities personnel.

Close communication with maintenance personnel was required to address concerns about additional trash removal and pest control. A start-up grant helped cover some maintenance costs.

Teachers and school administrators also had to be convinced that the program could be run efficiently, without infringing on instructional time. To address this issue, the cafeteria staff has worked particularly hard to ensure a timely meal delivery schedule.

Finally, Haley switched vendors, since his old vendor did not carry the convenient, individually packaged breakfast items that would make serving the meal quick and simple.

But the effort has been worth it. Haley is looking to expand the program to other Friendship Charter Schools next year.

In Conclusion

Haley and his staff are continuing to work in partnership with school administrators and teachers to monitor the program and ensure its success. As the first school in D.C. to adopt in-classroom breakfast, Friendship Southeast can serve as a model for other schools that want to increase breakfast participation and provide all of their students with a nutritious start to the day.

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