

Universal Breakfast



The Basics:

★ How Does Universal Breakfast Work?

When Universal breakfast is offered, breakfast is available at no charge to all students, regardless of their household income. It is usually offered at schools that have a high percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced price meals and often goes hand in hand with breakfast in the classroom, although this is not mandatory. Breakfast is given free to any student who wants it that day; however, the school claims the federal reimbursement at the correct income category for that student. This knowledge is obtained from their lunch applications.

Universal breakfast can be offered with any other serving method – traditional breakfast in the cafeteria before the bell rings, in the classroom, grab ‘n go, or as a mid-morning nutrition break. The serving method depends on the needs of the school. Menus depend on the serving style, but are offered as reimbursable meals.

Many schools find that universal breakfast increases participation so drastically that they don’t actually realize a loss from otherwise paying students. Some schools combine universal breakfast with Provision 2 or 3, which decreases the paperwork involved with offering breakfast in schools with minimal growth from year to year.

★ Why Serve Universal Breakfast?

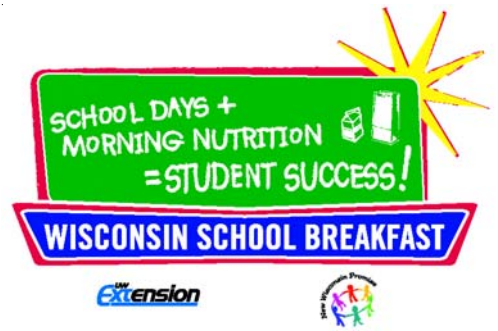
Most importantly, when you offer universal breakfast, more students eat breakfast. Universal breakfast reduces the stigma attached to eating breakfast at school. It makes breakfast available to those students who may not want to participate in the program for fear of being labeled “poor.” It also provides breakfast for those students who cannot afford the cost of a reduced price breakfast and lunch. In addition, children who participate in universal breakfast tend to have improved attendance, less tardiness, and increased test scores. The quality of their diets also improves. While serving universal breakfast increases labor needs, the overall labor costs per meal are actually less with universal breakfast than with traditional service methods.

★ When Does Universal Breakfast Work Best?

Universal breakfast works well in schools with greater than 75% of students eligible for free and reduced price meals. However, schools with fewer eligible students have operated the program successfully. If the following situations are present your school, universal breakfast is likely to be a success for you:

- Stigma appears to be a factor in low participation rates
- The percent of students eating reduced price breakfast is much lower than expected
- Teachers are supportive of breakfast and realize its importance to learning
- Cafeteria space can accommodate increased participation or breakfast in the classroom is an alternate option

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Success Story:

School: Riverview Elementary School
District: Wautoma Area School District
Contact: Carrie Spees,
 Food Service Director
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 Principal: Ann Fajfer
 (fajfer@wautoma.k12.wi.us)
 Grades served: K-3
 Enrollment: 337
 Free/Reduced: 59%
 Breakfast Participation: 74%
 Lunch Participation: 84%

Five years ago, the food service director for the Wautoma Area School District, realized that many of the students at Riverview Elementary School were coming to school without having eaten breakfast. At that point, there was no breakfast offered at Riverview. In fact, some of the school’s staff would keep snacks for children who complained of hunger or were not able to pay attention in class. The school’s new principal and the school district administrator wanted to do something about it. They had read about universal breakfast and thought that with Riverview’s high free and reduced rates, that it would be a great fit. The food service director talked with the principal and administrator about this possibility and they decided to give it a go.

Each day, breakfast is offered in the cafeteria before the bell rings. A variety of foods are offered including, white or chocolate milk, juices, fresh fruit, cereal and a hot entrée. Hot entrée choices included scrambled eggs, French toast sticks, pancakes, and breakfast pizza. Daily choices are posted on the monthly menu, so that students know what hot entree is available each day. Students eat their food in the cafeteria before heading to class. Students enjoy eating in the cafeteria because they can make their own food choices, which means they are happy and eat better.

It takes staff a total of two hours of labor a day to prepare breakfast for about 250 students. To help with the additional storage needed, the school was awarded a grant to help increase refrigeration space to store all the extra breakfast food.

Carrie Spees, the current food service director, has found that the staff, principal and parents are very supportive of the program, regardless of family income level. Because of the success of the program at Riverview, the other three schools in the district, including a middle and high school, now offer universal breakfast.