# Universal Free Breakfast

BREAKFAST SERVICE MODELS

## How Does Universal Free Breakfast Work?

When Universal Free 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 data is obtained from their lunch applications.

Universal Free 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 Free Breakfast increases participation so drastically that they do not actually experience a loss from otherwise paying students. Some schools combine Universal Free 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 Free Breakfast?

Most importantly, when you offer Universal Free Breakfast, more students eat breakfast. Universal Free 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 Free Breakfast tend to have improved attendance, less tardiness, and increased test scores. The quality of their diets also improves. While serving Universal Free Breakfast may increase labor needs, the overall labor costs per meal are actually less with universal free breakfast than with traditional service methods.

## When Does Universal Free Breakfast Work Best?

Universal Free Breakfast works well in schools with greater than 70% 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 in your school, Universal Free Breakfast is likely to be a success for you:

- Stigma appears to be a factor in low participation rates.
- The percent of students eating free and 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.