



STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION AT MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

Middle and high school students have different needs and preferences than elementary school students. This resource highlights strategies for building a school breakfast program that is appealing to middle and high school students and ultimately increases their participation in the program.

1. IMPLEMENT BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL

Breakfast After the Bell (BAB) makes breakfast a part of the school day, just like lunch, and moves breakfast from the cafeteria to where students are, like classrooms and common areas. BAB helps eliminate common barriers that may prevent students from accessing breakfast when it is served in the cafeteria before the start of the school day, like students arriving late to school and students preferring to socialize with their friends rather than eat in the cafeteria. BAB is one of the most effective ways to boost breakfast participation.

Consider which of these three BAB models is the best fit for your school and students:

Grab and Go: The Grab and Go model allows students to pick up breakfast from mobile carts or stations in high traffic areas, such as hallways or entryways. Quick cafeteria lines can also be utilized if the cafeteria is conveniently located within the school building. This model is a speedy, easy way for students to pick up breakfast when they arrive at school, without going out of their way, which makes it popular among middle and high school students. Students can eat in their classroom or in a common area.

Breakfast in the Classroom: Breakfast in the Classroom involves breakfast being offered and eaten in the classroom. Breakfast is generally delivered to the classroom by school nutrition staff, teachers, or students. Serving breakfast in the classroom meets students where they are and helps to reduce stigma by offering all students the option of eating breakfast together rather than requiring students to go to the cafeteria for breakfast, which may lead to them feeling singled out.



Second Chance Breakfast: Second Chance Breakfast shifts the time breakfast is served to later in the morning, often between first and second period, or midway between breakfast and lunch. This model can be appealing to students who are not hungry first thing in the morning. Schools can serve breakfast in the same manner as they would with Grab and Go or can they reopen the cafeteria to serve breakfast and allow students time to eat. To accommodate Second Chance Breakfast, some schools lengthen the passing period (the time allotted for students to move throughout the school from class to class) between first and second period to accommodate a quick stop at a kiosk or cart to pick up breakfast on the go.

2. ENGAGE STUDENTS

Get to know the students and encourage them to eat breakfast. They are your customers, consider how to make the program more appealing to them so that they are more likely to participate. Not sure what they'd like? Ask them! Bring students into the conversation to gain buy-in and empower them to help shape the breakfast program.

Solicit student feedback. Regularly solicit student feedback through mechanisms like surveys and taste tests. Ask for their feedback on new and existing menu items, as well as the operational aspects of the breakfast program. Offering students the opportunity to lend their voice can generate buy-in and inform improvements to the program. Not sure where to begin? Consider working with a group of student leaders like the student council. They can help inform and support a broader plan to gather student feedback.

School Meals Design Guide

This [online guide](#) from No Kid Hungry features ready-to-use activities and tools to help make school meal programs more student-centered. Within it are assets like a survey question library, QR code generator, customizable logos and more to help you engage students.



3. OFFER APPEALING & CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE MENUS

School breakfast programs serving middle and high school students are often competing with nearby coffee shops, fast-food restaurants, and meal delivery services. Offer breakfast items that resemble popular commercial items and use attractive packaging. Showing students that school breakfast can be just as appealing as store-bought breakfast, but cost less and be more nutritious, can be a win-win for school nutrition programs and students.

It is important for school meals to include foods that reflect the cultural and religious demographics of your school community (e.g., Kosher, Halal) as well as dietary preferences (e.g., vegetarian, vegan). Offering more diverse and culturally appropriate school meals is a great way to connect with your students and show them you understand and celebrate who they are. It can also be a great way to increase participation.



4. PROMOTE BREAKFAST

Marketing is an essential component to increasing school breakfast participation. It's important to promote your school breakfast program on an ongoing basis, but it is particularly important to communicate any new information like menu changes or special events.

Host contests & challenges. Offer contests and challenges to build excitement around the breakfast program. This strategy is good for short-term participation boosts and is best paired with other promotion strategies for sustained participation increases. If you offer prizes, ensure they align with middle and high school interests. Not sure what prizes will get students excited? Ask them! Engaging students for input can help reduce your guesswork and set you up for success. For contest and challenge ideas, check out our [School Breakfast Promotion Strategies resource](#).

Market the program. Both students and parents may be unaware of the breakfast program, including the breakfast models being implemented, the menu items being served, and the time and cost of breakfast. Display posters around school, send home flyers, and include breakfast details in the school's morning announcements. Social media can also be a great way to connect with students and parents.



Additional Resources

To access additional resources, visit the [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices website](#). There you'll find additional information, tools, and resources to support your school breakfast program.

