



BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM: GOOD FOOD FOR ALL

Prepared in Partnership with National Dairy Council, Pasco County Schools, The Dairy Council of Florida and No Kid Hungry





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In the United States, one in seven children may not know where their next meal will come from. For the 11 million kids in the U.S. facing hunger, getting the nutrition they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.¹ The School Breakfast Program makes a positive difference for students who otherwise may not get a nutritious morning meal. School breakfast offers a solution and Kurt Browning, superintendent of schools in Pasco County, Florida, is leading the charge in his school district.

In the summer of 2017, the Pasco County Schools leadership team decided to implement Breakfast in the Classroom throughout the district to its highest need schools. This decision was made at the district level for a number of reasons, but first and foremost to ensure that hunger would not hinder any child's ability to learn.

Since then, Mr. Browning and his team have been tireless champions of this program. His "non-negotiable" approach has helped shepherd implementation of Breakfast in the Classroom to 44 schools, which is providing easy access to breakfast for 33,000 of the district's students. His leadership team has worked closely with principals, assistant principals, teachers and the food and nutrition team to ensure all schools have the resources they need to be successful.

Browning explained, "If you start talking about social emotional learning and trauma-informed care, you know that kids come to school with baggage and a lot of the times that baggage is an empty belly. So, if in fact we want to see student achievement increase in our district, and that is for me first and foremost, you can't have that conversation without talking about the physical needs of these kids. It just didn't make any sense for us NOT to do this."

Following Browning's decision to roll out Breakfast in the Classroom, his deputy, Ray Gaad said, "schools basically knew it had to be done. They are going to feed their kids." Now, Pasco County schools offers Breakfast in the Classroom at all grade levels: Kids pick up their breakfasts from one of several carts before entering their first-period classes.

After two years, more than 3,000 additional breakfasts are served every day, which means 3,000 more students are nourished, and the school district is receiving an extra \$1.5 million in federal breakfast reimbursements. But to Browning and his team, it is about much more than money.

Gaad added, "this is where the finances and 'doing the right thing' intersect, because doing the right thing benefits us financially. It's a win-win. We win, the kids win, we are better stewards of the taxpayers' money. It just makes perfect sense."

Pasco County is just north of Tampa on Florida's Gulf Coast. Some 75,000 students go to the county's public schools. In the 2016-17 school year, before Breakfast in the Classroom was offered district-wide, only a little more than half (54 percent) of elementary students ate a school breakfast on a typical day.

Nationwide, average daily participation in the School Breakfast Program is even lower at about 30 percent² with Florida falling slightly lower at 28 percent.³ Experts cite a number of reasons that participation lags. Fewer schools offer breakfast than offer lunch, though the gap has been closing. Students often do not have time for breakfast when it is offered in the cafeteria before school, often rushing from their bus to the classroom door. Experts agree there is often an unfortunate stigma attached to school breakfasts, driven by the stereotype that breakfast is only for low-income students.

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- Kurt Browning, Superintendent of Schools in Pasco County, Florida

Twenty-nine of the county's highest-need elementary schools were the focus of a special effort that included grants from No Kid Hungry, the Dairy Council of Florida and GENYOUth to purchase breakfast carts. Working with school officials, the groups analyzed Breakfast in the Classroom results after two years of implementation, comparing school years 2016-17 and 2018-19:

- **More than half of the Breakfast in the Classroom elementary schools improved their performance in achievement and learning gains and 25 percent improved by a full school grade. Other factors beyond breakfast may have contributed to this gain.**
- **Average daily participation in the School Breakfast Program rose 11 percentage points, from 54 percent to 66 percent of all students.**
- **Of the 29 schools, only three had an average daily participation below 60 percent, while 10 were above 70 percent and two were above 80 percent.**
- **Breakfast revenues grew 27 percent, from \$5.6 million before Breakfast in the Classroom to \$7.1 million in 2018-19, an increase of \$1.5 million.**
- **Among breakfast foods, yogurt saw especially strong growth, from 2,165 units served in 2016-17 to 470,487 units in 2018-19. The school district attributes the rise in yogurt consumption to the fact that it largely replaced cereal when breakfast was moved to the classroom, and was offered daily rather than optionally as before. The popularity of yogurt smoothies was also a factor, according to the district.⁴**

These schools know they are supporting students. Kara Smucker, principal at Quail Hollow Elementary School described, "Here student voices matter. We are truly here for kids first, I filter everything through this lens. We had concerns when we started but ultimately, we know this is best for kids. More children are eating, more children are learning, and we've helped to improve their well-being."

Higher participation also supports the community through higher revenue, since federal meal reimbursements are based on the number of meals served. Pasco County's school nutrition director, Julie Hedine, noted that "the local economy also benefits."

"With that increase in breakfasts, that comes out to an increase of approximately 136 labor hours a day spread throughout the district," she said. "So that's employment that we're giving to people." Hedine said the added job security "makes a huge difference to people who are working, knowing that they have that stability."

Another benefit being that two-thirds of students now eat a school breakfast in a common setting suggesting that the old stigma around the breakfasts is gone or going. As Hedine added, "kids aren't singled out. Everybody is eating together. It's what you do. It's part of the day."

Pasco County's experience is not unique. According to a recent USDA study, nearly 30 percent of elementary schools now serve their students in the classroom, though the percentage is lower for middle and high schools.⁵

For school districts that don't yet have Breakfast in the Classroom, Browning has some practical advice, "you've got to get to the superintendent," he said. "It doesn't have to be a complex decision. Kids need to eat. Look at the revenue side. And then you have the superintendent say, we're doing it, and that's it!"

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.....

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.....

\$1.5 million
in additional federal breakfast
reimbursements

“More children are eating, more children are learning, and we’ve helped to improve their well-being.” - Kara Smucker, Principal at Quail Hollow Elementary School



A Little Help from Friends

Pasco County's implementation of Breakfast in the Classroom received financial and in-kind support from several non-profit groups.

No Kid Hungry is a national campaign run by Share Our Strength, a nonprofit working to solve problems of hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world.

The Dairy Council of Florida, a division of Florida Dairy Farmers, provides a comprehensive approach to support healthy school environments by working to educate Florida's youth on the health benefits of milk and other nutrient-rich dairy foods.

GENYOUth is a non-profit organization that convenes a network of private and public partners to raise funds for youth wellness initiatives that bolster healthy, high-achieving students, schools and communities nationwide.

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Household Food Security in the United States in 2018.
2. USDA, FNS. Program Information Report (Keydata). Table 3: School Program Operations, FY2019
3. Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Food, Nutrition & Wellness. ADP calculated from FY18-19 datasheet.
4. All consumption statistics were provided by Pasco County Schools.
5. USDA, FNS. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study: Volume 1 – School Meal Program Operations and School Nutrition Environments (Summary). Page 2.

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