

# Teachers, parents serve mixed reactions to breakfast in classrooms

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.06.15

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Students are served breakfast at the Stanley Mosk Elementary School in Los Angeles, California, April 8, 2015. Photo: AP Photo/Nick Ut

More and more schools across the country now serve breakfasts to students, an increase driven largely by a change in how districts deliver food. Over the last two decades, the number of breakfasts served in the nation's schools has doubled.

It used to be that schools provided low-income students free or reduced-priced breakfasts in the cafeteria. Now they are increasingly serving all children in the classroom instead. Food policy advocates say the change is fairer since all kids eat together.

## **Many Say Classrooms Are For Learning**

The program has caused a backlash from parents and teachers. People who oppose the new programs say that serving food in the classroom takes up class time that should be devoted to learning. They also argue that it wastes food by serving it to kids who don't want or need it.

Lilian Ramos, a mother of two elementary school children in a working-class Los Angeles neighborhood, said she takes offense at the district's assumption that she has not fed her children since she serves them a traditional Mexican breakfast each day.

"They say if kids don't eat they won't learn," Ramos said. "The truth is that many of our kids come to school already having eaten. They come here to study."

The Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest with about 650,000 K-12 students, has been expanding its breakfast program quickly. By the end of the school year, the LA district will be serving breakfast in class at nearly every school. The growth here mirrors the increase unfolding across the nation. Since 1994, the number of breakfasts served in schools has climbed from about 1 billion annually to 2.3 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Across the country, 51 percent of children are considered low-income, up from 32 percent in 1989. In a number of school districts, the vast majority of those children qualify for a free or reduced-price meal.

## **Financial Incentives Are Involved**

Proponents of serving breakfast in the classroom believe it is the most effective way to make sure all children are ready to learn and are fed. Students who come to school hungry, they argue, are at a disadvantage since it is harder to learn when you have not been fed.

There's also a financial incentive for districts to expand breakfast programs. The federal government reimburses schools for the cost of each meal they serve.

At Stanley Mosk Elementary, a school in Los Angeles, teachers help distribute the meal, check off which students are eating and show a video offering a nutrition lesson, all in 10 minutes. Stanley Mosk is considered to have a model food distribution program that other schools should follow. On a recent morning, students were given apples, cereal and a small, packaged breakfast sandwich. But by the end of the meal, there was a large cooler filled with uneaten breakfast sandwiches.

"I think it's a good way for students to eat here because sometimes at home they're in such a rush," said 10-year-old Fatima Nassar. "Sometimes I see students throw it away."

## **Evolution Of Classroom Breakfast**

In Los Angeles, parents from wealthier schools in the district organized a group to protest the morning breakfasts. They won, which means that 32 schools in the district can opt out of program as long as fewer than 20 percent of their students fall below the poverty line.

Parents at UCLA Community School also organized, claiming the program took away instructional time from low-income and English-learner students, a group that scores persistently lower in reading and math. They also worried about unsanitary classrooms.

About a decade ago, school and food policy advocates began drawing attention to the low participation in the nation's school breakfast programs. Some districts did not offer it, while others provided it before class, forcing students to arrive early.

"Breakfast in the classroom evolved as a smart response," said Jim Weill, president of the nonprofit group Food Research and Action Center.

### **Program Has Mixed Reactions**

A 2013-14 survey found 52 of 62 school districts nationwide offered free meals to everyone, regardless of income, at some or all schools. Fifty had breakfast in classrooms.

Not everyone has embraced it. In New York City, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg opposed serving breakfast in class over concerns that children would eat twice. The current city mayor, Bill de Blasio, has expressed support, but the program has only been implemented in 301 schools of about 1,600 across the entire district.

At the UCLA Community School, parents plan to continue fighting the decision.

"We want them to serve it in the cafeteria," Raquel Martinez, a mother of three, said. "That's what the cafeteria is for."

## Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph does the author include in the section "Financial Incentives Are Involved" to explain how the breakfast program works?
- 2 Which is the MOST important method the author uses to develop the idea that people disagree about school breakfasts?
  - (A) surveying students and providing anecdotes about their breakfast experience
  - (B) interviewing current and former New York City mayors about their opinions of breakfast
  - (C) describing school breakfast programs and parent reactions in the Los Angeles area
  - (D) providing facts about how many low-income students regularly eat breakfast
- 3 What is the purpose of including the last paragraph in "Financial Incentives Are Involved"?
  - (A) to introduce facts about which students eat at school
  - (B) to provide a student's firsthand perspective
  - (C) to prove that students know what is best for them
  - (D) to explain why students should eat breakfast at home
- 4 Which point of view is MOST emphasized by the last section of the article "Program Has Mixed Reactions"?
  - (A) the perspective of New York City schools
  - (B) the perspective of the students' parents
  - (C) the perspective of those who are against breakfast in classrooms
  - (D) the perspective of those who support breakfast in classrooms

## Answer Key

- 1 Which paragraph does the author include in the section "Financial Incentives Are Involved" to explain how the breakfast program works?

**Paragraph 9:**

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