

# Feeding Kids is Part of the Fabric at Greater Brunswick Charter School



"The first day of a book drive, a school earned \$10. Each day after that, the amount tripled from the day before. How much did the school earn from a 4-day book drive?"

That is the question 4<sup>th</sup> graders grappled with as they munched on bagels and bananas one morning at the Greater Brunswick Charter School, where classroom breakfast is paired seamlessly with learning.

"Breakfast is part of the fabric of our school," says Vanessa Jones, education director. "There's a system. It works. It's just part of our routine."

The school was among the first charters to jump on the breakfast after the bell bandwagon more than seven years ago. School officials knew that hunger was a barrier to learning for their students, with nearly 90 percent coming from low-income homes that struggle to put food on the table. Teachers often spent their own money on snacks for hungry students or students went to the school nurse for crackers or other tidbits.

No more.

"The need to have a snack has faded away," Jones says.

Everyone pitches in to make breakfast work. Teachers devise lessons that incorporate easily into breakfast time. Parents encourage their children to eat at school. Kitchen staff pack the meals in refrigerated containers the night before. The head custodian delivers the meals to the classrooms each morning.

As a result, the school's 88 percent participation rate is more than double the statewide average of just 42 percent.



■ Greater Brunswick Charter Schools get some school work done while they eat breakfast.

*Photo courtesy of Greater Brunswick Charter School*

**"Bus and family schedules and other factors prevented early arrival for most students. That's why breakfast served during the regular school day really boosts student participation, while eliminating the stigma associated with coming to school early to eat breakfast."**

*—Dean of Students Carmen Rine*

Before breakfast after the bell was implemented, many students simply could not get to school early enough to eat breakfast before the first bell rang, says Dean of Students Carmen Rine, who oversees the district's food service.

"Bus and family schedules and other factors prevented early arrival for most students," she says. "That's why breakfast served during the regular school day really boosts student participation, while eliminating the stigma associated with coming to school early to eat breakfast."

"Mornings are hectic," adds Susan Jackson, chair of the school board and mother of a Greater Brunswick Charter 4<sup>th</sup> grader. "Knowing that you don't have to fight that battle is one less thing to worry about. Plus, the kids love it. They look forward to certain days when their favorite food is on the menu. It also helps with the stigma. Everybody eats."

When classroom breakfast was first introduced, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Zoe Coleman was concerned it would interrupt instructional time. Instead, it has enhanced it.

"We have a problem for students to solve during breakfast time, usually math but sometimes science," she says. "They enjoy their breakfast and they're more alert for the rest of the morning. Prior to that, we had hungry kids we had to send to the nurse for a snack. Now we don't have that."

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And the kids love it.

"I like when we come in the morning and have breakfast," says 4th grader Janessa. "A lot of mornings I don't have time to eat before school. When we're doing our warm-up we can eat at the same time."

"I like that you can work and eat and don't have to rush," adds classmate Nicole.



First grade teacher Trish Mollema used to stock up on snacks because so many of her students were hungry. She says she was "thrilled" when the school began serving breakfast after the bell.

"We saw a need," she says. "This eliminates one pressure on our families and students."

Classroom breakfast also helps students develop life skills, says Lilia Fabila-Guilbot, family coordinator.

"In some classrooms, the students help with putting out the napkins, serving the meals or taking out the trash," she says. "Those are good lessons for life."

Most importantly, school staff rest assured knowing students begin their day with a healthy meal.

"Breakfast gives our students the foundation they need to have a successful day at school," Jones says. "That obstacle is gone."

