

The Human Effect: Stories from the Field

Breakfast in the Classroom

A hungry student cannot learn effectively. With a free/reduced price meal rate at 90 percent, Percy-Hughes K-8 School in the Syracuse City School District had many hungry students. The district successfully applied for an AASA/Walmart Foundation alternative school breakfast grant, which provided them funding to build a self-sustaining program by serving breakfast in the classroom in all elementary schools.

AASA staff recently conducted focus groups with students at the district's Percy-Hughes K-8 school. Second and third graders described a chaotic cafeteria environment before implementation of breakfast in the classroom. "[The cafeteria] was loud and crazy," said one student. The students talked about how there would be fights in the cafeteria during breakfast time. They also said children would throw food, run around and be very noisy.



When asked about in eating the classroom, one student said, "I like it better in the classroom. No fights, no stabbing with forks, people stop screaming, no jumping on tables."

"Now we just talk to each other," added another student.

Eating in a classroom creates the feel of a community. The children mentioned the benefits of eating breakfast in the classroom, which range from social interaction to academic benefits. One little girl, reflecting the reality of her neighborhood, said that she liked breakfast in the classroom because "We can talk about something serious, like how a guy got stabbed last night." While breakfast in the classroom feeds hungry minds, it also allows children to get adult-level worries off of their minds so that they are more ready to learn.



"I have a heart for making sure that students who have so little actually have an equal opportunity to learn, by having a meal," said Superintendent Sharon Contre-ras.

Today, all children in the district are entitled to free meals under the community eligibility provision, which is administered by the USDA.

AASA's Children's Programs department works to support where learning happens by providing professional development to members to ensure leadership for healthy, safe and engaged students. Learn more at: www.aasa.org/ChildrensPrograms.aspx.