

Free Breakfast, That's What's Up at Kimball Elementary

In January 2011, D.C. Hunger Solutions visited Kimball Elementary where students start the day off right with free breakfast in the classroom.

The room is quiet for 8:45 a.m. on a Monday morning. Students are in their seats busily munching away at their breakfast cereal and yogurt while sipping at low-fat milk. As they begin to finish, two students stand up and start to collect leftover milk, pouring it all into one container. The "trash" mat gets placed outside the door and while one student takes the leftover milk to the restroom for disposal another ties the now full garbage bag and places it on the mat to be collected. Each student wipes down their colorfully created plastic placemats and with bellies full and bodies energized, these third graders are ready for a day of learning.



Students at Kimball Elementary in Southeast D.C. have been receiving breakfast in the classroom since the program piloted last spring as part of the Healthy Schools Act. Principal Sheil'a West-Miller is an enthusiastic supporter of Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) and is proud of her school's implementation. In a school of approximately 325 students and a maze of hallways and stairwells, the conditions are less than ideal for the program. But with Principal Miller onboard, her staff and the community are as well, and the students at Kimball are a shining example of this program at work.

Principal Miller makes it enthusiastically clear that benefits of BIC go beyond the nutrition students receive from the "most important" meal of the day. Principal Miller has also seen many of her third through fifth grade students grow and mature as they are given responsibilities as "Breakfast Bunch" workers. These students apply for the position and are treated as employees, receiving their payment in incentives such as a roller-skating party and even a trip to the White House to meet the First Lady and White House chef Sam Kass. Miller says she sees growth in each one of these students who are in charge of collecting and delivering the food bags and milk crates to each classroom and ensuring the room is cleaned up properly.



Miller credits an extreme drop in student tardiness to the program as well. Students are in their seats and ready to learn by 9:05 a.m., she says, whereas before BIC the long line of tardy students waiting for passes would cause major delays to the start of the school day. First through fifth grade students begin the day in their classroom with breakfast served at 8:40 a.m. During breakfast teachers give morning announcements, warm-up exercises and short lessons. Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students eat with their teachers in the cafeteria where Breakfast Bunch workers come to retrieve their insulated coolers and crates of milk to bring back to their

classroom. BIC is more work to set up than breakfast in the cafeteria, but it's paying off, Principal Miller says.

In May 2010, D.C. Council passed The Healthy Schools Act to improve health and wellness of students attending D.C. public and public charter schools. The Act ensures free breakfast for every student and removes all co-pays for students who receive reduced price lunch. At the start of the 2010-2011 school year, all public elementary and public charter elementary schools with 40 percent of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals were required to serve breakfast in the classroom every morning. And the students at Kimball Elementary know, it's a great way to start the day.

For more information regarding Breakfast in the Classroom or the Healthy Schools Act visit www.dchealthyschools.org or the DC Hunger Solutions website at www.dchunger.org.