



**DISTRICT:** Frederick County Public Schools,  
Frederick, Maryland

**FOOD SERVICE OFFICER:** Cheri Dattoli

**ALTERNATE BREAKFAST SERVICE:** Breakfast in the Classroom

## ★ BACKGROUND

### MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

Frederick County Public Schools is one of several counties participating in the Maryland breakfast pilot program. Called Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA), the program offers Breakfast in the Classroom to all students at no charge, regardless of family income. It began in a few counties in Maryland in 1998, with just six schools. To be eligible, at least 40% of each school's enrollment must qualify for free and reduced meals, but participation is voluntary.

### FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Cheri Dattoli, food service officer at Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) had two elementary schools and one middle/high school that qualified to be part of MMFA (concurrently, an additional elementary school received Breakfast in the Classroom, at no charge, funded by FCPS.) With a total enrollment of 1,124 in these schools, only 19% were partaking in breakfast when served in the cafeteria. The low numbers appeared to be due to late buses and the time it took to drop off books and coats in the classroom, before going to the cafeteria. Dattoli saw Breakfast in the Classroom as a viable solution.

## ★ IMPLEMENTATION

### FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Initially, the Breakfast in the Classroom idea met with a moderate level of apprehension. Teachers were concerned about the level of additional work and program implementation. Dattoli communicated vigilantly with the various groups, making certain everyone understood the implementation plan.

The food was transported to classrooms by foodservice staff. Milk was delivered on ice trays and warm menu items were sealed in aluminum foil, placed in hot bags and delivered in insulated hot carriers. The meals included items from all the required food groups. Featuring kid-friendly foods like French toast sticks, sausage and pancakes on sticks, Nutri-Grain® bars, and assorted cereals, Dattoli subscribed to the theory that "Food is only nutritious if it is eaten."

The individual teachers determined what the children did during breakfast. Some allowed students to do their homework, others, especially in the lower grades, had children sit together at tables, socialize and learn by helping each other.

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## **IMPACT**

### **MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT**

Perhaps no other breakfast program has been evaluated more extensively than the MMFA program. With more than 90 schools in the program and 22,000 children participating daily, findings\* based on studies done by Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School (2001-02 school year) are compelling:

- Composite Index scores on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program improved significantly more in MMFA schools than in a matched group of comparison schools.
- Tardiness has declined 8% in the first three full months of the school year.
- Suspensions were down from an average of 4.4 to 2.8 days per month, three months after the start of classroom breakfast.
- More than eight out of 10 school staff members surveyed reported the school learning environment had improved as a result of MMFA.
- Staff members surveyed in first-year MMFA schools reported positive changes: 72% said student behavior improved; 73% said student attentiveness improved.
- Second and third year MMFA staff members reported that these benefits continued, and in some cases, increased over time.
- 91% of the staff expressed the desire for the program to continue in their school

### **FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Looking just at Frederick County, the test school results were “amazing,” according to Dattoli, with breakfast participation being approximately 65%-75% of enrollment. After implementation Dattoli, along with several principals, presented their results at a public board meeting, explaining the success of the program and commending the state’s decision to support Breakfast in the Classroom. Methods of delivery and menus have been modified where needed. For example, foods that worked in the elementary schools weren’t substantive enough at the middle/high school, so breakfast sandwiches are served.

“An unexpected benefit that has been incredible is the relationship our foodservice staff has developed with teachers and students because of Breakfast in the Classroom,” emphasizes Dattoli. “There was never time or a reason to interface. Now teachers talk to foodservice staff about what their favorite breakfasts are, and the environment in the classroom. Students offer to help deliver breakfasts. Everyone knows each others’ names. The program has been a catalyst to bring the whole school community together.”

## **WORDS OF ADVICE**

### **FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

“Don’t have what I call a catastrophic fantasy when considering a program that takes breakfast outside the cafeteria!” cautions Dattoli. “As foodservice people, we attend to so many details its easy to worry about things before they happen. How am I going to provide these services with so little labor, inadequate equipment, etc.? This approach makes the overall concept seem overwhelming. What worked for us was starting in reverse and figuring out what the small things were that we needed—like, how many carriers do we order—and from there we assembled all the building blocks to pull together the whole concept.”

\*All findings cited from J. M. Murphy et al., Maryland Meals for Achievement Year III Final Report, October 2001