



FLEXIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION ARE THE KEYS TO BREAKFAST SUCCESS AT THE LITERACY ACADEMY AT CLEVELAND

When Principal Michelle Kristick realized she needed a way to strengthen relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves, at her Kindergarten to 5th grade elementary school in Port Huron, MI, she turned to the school breakfast program. Kristick launched The Literacy Academy at Cleveland's Grab and Go breakfast program during the 2016-2017 school year, and it did exactly what she had hoped. Students could grab breakfast upon arrival at school and enjoy their morning meal in their classroom with their peers and teachers, creating a family environment. Teachers were also able to use that time to check in individually with students, adding a level of support.

To make Grab and Go as efficient as possible, Kristick and her teachers studied the traffic patterns of students as they arrived at school and made their way to class. By strategically placing Grab and Go stations where the natural traffic patterns formed, they were able to literally meet the students where they were at to provide breakfast. Tardiness was reduced, and younger students were able to start their day more grounded knowing they would be having breakfast every morning in the classroom with their peers — something Kristick's teachers highly prized. Once Grab and Go was implemented, it helped reinforce the school's morning routine, rather than working against it.

It wasn't a seamless transition to Grab and Go though. Teaching students how to eat breakfast in their classrooms was an obstacle at first. Each classroom received strainers for the sinks and students were taught how to properly dispose of uneaten cereal by pouring the milk down the sink and disposing of any leftover cereal in the trash. The school also incorporated students into the logistics of the program by assigning student leadership roles, such as *Sanitation Captains*, where students were responsible for bringing breakfast trash out into



the hallway for custodians to collect. Teachers created student leader rotation schedules that met the needs of their classrooms, rotating out the *Sanitation Captains* on a weekly, monthly, or trimester basis. Adding *Sanitation Captains* reduced the work of the custodians by not having to go into each classroom to collect trash, and removed any food items from the classroom immediately after breakfast service to avoid rotting food or unwanted pests.



Kristick attributed breakfast success to many things, but most importantly to clear communication with teachers and parents. Kristick regularly debriefed with teachers as a group so issues could be identified quickly. Most of the time, teachers successfully addressed any issues themselves, Kristick noted, but debriefing as a group enabled teachers to share their strategies with each other and develop best practices. In terms of parent communication, Kristick found that educating parents about the school breakfast program was key. Parents could now rely on a healthy morning meal for their kids every school day, and thanks to district-wide implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision, all

students at the Literacy Academy, which have a free and reduced rate of 95%, received breakfast at no cost to them, which was a huge win for parents. As a result breakfast participation skyrocketed to nearly 100% of its 250 students, whereas before when breakfast was served in the cafeteria before the school day started it yielded only 60% participation.

Since implementing Grab and Go, the Literacy Academy has transitioned to operating Kindergarten to 2nd grade only in school year 2018-2019, bringing the enrollment to 216 students. Kristick and her teachers once again studied the student traffic patterns to determine if any changes to the Grab and Go program would better accommodate the younger students. The assessment resulted in one additional Grab and Go station being added, bringing the total to three; and, each grade level was assigned a specific Grab and Go station based on their traffic patterns. This addressed the problem of long wait lines for students, and behavioral issues that were caused by excessive lines. Keeping in line with strong parent communication, parents received a map with the locations of breakfast at the beginning of the school year and anytime breakfast procedures were altered. One of the most important things to remember, Kristick stressed, is to understand the *why* but remain flexible with the *how*.



To learn more about Breakfast After the Bell, visit No Kid Hungry's [Center for Best Practices](#). If you'd like help with your Michigan breakfast program, contact Stephanie Willingham at WillinghamS@michigan.gov.

