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## Soaring number of students participate in school breakfast program

The number of South Williamsport Area School District students participating in the breakfast program has tremendously increased by serving breakfast in the classroom.

At Central and Rommelt Elementary, almost one in two students qualify for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Unfortunately, less than one in ten students were taking advantage of the breakfast program, said Dr. Mark Stamm, district superintendent. To make the breakfast program more accessible to students, the food is now brought to them.

Each morning the food service staff at Central and Rommelt elementary schools prepare special coolers of milk, juice, fruit and a main course for every student in each classroom. Breakfast can range from confetti pancakes, sticky buns or jelly-filled pastries. All the products follow federal Healthy and Hunger Free Kids guidelines.

“We need all hands-on deck in the morning,” said Ms. Luci Steinbacher, food service worker at Central Elementary School. “We are doing almost as many breakfasts as we are lunches.”

In the first 10 days of school, there were 2,073 breakfasts served to elementary school students in their classroom, according to Mrs. Jamie Mowrey, assistant business manager. Last year, there were only 859 breakfasts served in the first 10 days of school. Almost 40 percent of those meals are being pick-up by students who qualify for free / reduced meals.

Ms. Tara Stryker, food service director with Nutrition Group, said she was surprised by the huge increase of students getting breakfast. She could not believe the immense growth that has happened by changing the location.

In Mrs. Nancy Wirth’s second grade class at Central, handing out breakfast has become a small part of the morning routine.

When her students enter the classroom, she asks if they would like breakfast or not. If they want breakfast, she checks off their name from her class roster so it can be charged to their account. Breakfast costs \$1.05 and the reduced amount is 35 cents.

“Unless a child’s basic needs are met, they are not going to be able to learn,” Mrs. Wirth said. “Kids can’t learn



Students in Mrs. Wirth’s second grade classroom at Central Elementary School get their breakfast and enjoy it at their desk.

to read or do math if they are hungry.”

In the past students would come in with empty bellies which made it difficult for them to pay attention to the day’s lesson.

Last year elementary students would eat breakfast in the cafeteria then go to their classrooms. If students were late getting to school or thought they would be late for class, they would skip breakfast all together, she said. Providing breakfast in the classroom alleviates any worries about being late to class. They all get around a half hour to eat before the school day officially begins at 8:45 a.m.

Serving students the most important meal of the day ensures that everyone is ready to learn and work to the best of their abilities.

Whether academic, behavioral, or nutritional, as a school we need to meet kids where they are and help them grow. If moving breakfast from the cafeteria to the classroom enables more kids to eat before the day begins, then it’s the right move to make. The volume of sales clearly shows we are making the right move for kids, said Dr. Stamm.