

Reading, writing – and breakfast

September 11, 2019



All of the students at Mary Peacock Elementary School this year will have breakfasts in their individual classrooms, instead of in a schoolwide cafeteria.

Because of the Community Eligibility Provision program, the students at Mary Peacock have had free breakfast provided to them for the past few years. This year, the school will take that a step further and deliver the food in insulated bags to each classroom, where the students will eat their breakfast in small-group comfort.

The breakfast in the classroom concept reportedly is spreading throughout U.S. schools, as research from national food organizations touts its benefits. It came to Del Norte County last year when two classrooms at Mary Peacock Elementary piloted the program.

“Nationwide, educators are realizing the importance of making sure that kids have access to food, good-quality food at the beginning of the day,” said fifth-grade teacher Paige Thompson.

Thompson had heard of breakfast in the classroom's popularity, and last year approached Principal Lara Hirt to propose implementing the idea. Hirt readily agreed.

First-grade teacher Lisa Sedgwick also was interested. Since she and Thomson have "buddy" classrooms, it only made sense for the two teachers to pilot the program together.

Throughout last year, they saw numerous benefits as a result: children had a better attention span, they didn't interrupt class as often, and more students participated in the free breakfast plan.

"When I saw that my entire class was eating breakfast in my room, and now all of a sudden their focus is right there, they're ready to learn come 8:15, they're able to get their work done... I was like, this is clearly what is helping my kids be more successful in school," Sedgwick said.

They saw particular improvement with students prone to being distracted easily, and those who have difficulty dealing with loud or chaotic environments. The smaller crowds eating in the classroom made it easier for those students to have breakfast in peace.

"We still have breakfast every day in school," said Thompson, "but a lot of kids don't take advantage of it, because they're either feeling rushed or they're feeling anxious because it's a bigger room with a lot of kids.

"Being in the classroom, in a smaller setting, is a huge factor in them deciding to take food."

"It went super well in both classrooms and then the interest really spread," said Hirt. "So, I was interested in expanding it and then really pleasantly surprised when most staff members said, 'Yeah, we really want to do this.'"

With the help of Del Norte County Unified School District's nutrition services director, Deborah Kravitz, the staff worked on preparing the entire school for participation in 2019-2020.

The first couple weeks of school, they held breakfast in the traditional manner, to let everyone prepare for the year. But this Monday morning, they implemented breakfast in the classroom schoolwide.

Students ate their cereal while teachers made announcements and prepared for the day. "I think it's easier than having breakfast in the lunchroom. It's definitely quieter," said fifth-grader Marlina Thompson.

Her friend and fellow fifth-grader, Tessa Bigham, added, "It's more fun, because then it's easier to sit by your friends."