

Take Action Project: Breakfast Club

By: Angela Holt

Step 1: Identify Your Concern

When I set out to take action, I headed to the office to chat with the vice principal, and the community schools representative, because I wanted to do something within the school to help out. Making my field of interest as narrow as I could on my own without being incredibly specific, the community schools representative told me about something that went on every morning of the week upstairs in the foods lab. Breakfast Club was put in place to feed kids who might not get the chance to eat breakfast before they catch a bus or get dropped off at school, and I know from experience that it is really hard to focus and learn anything in school when all you can focus on is your growling stomach. The Breakfast Club was in need of volunteers for this year, so I decided this would be my way of taking action.

Step 2: Research Your Concern

As far as research goes, I mainly talked to the community schools representative, and also with the resource teachers, as they were the primary teacher volunteers for the club. The main points I was given were: every morning during the week, we get to school a bit early and prepare cereal, toast, fruit, and drinks for any students who might come want breakfast. Normally there are between three to four different kinds of cereal, and some mornings we prepare grilled cheese sandwiches for the students. The students have to be out when the bell rings, we clean everything up, and carry on with our days. Everyone I spoke to about the issue had nothing but positive things to say about the program, as it feeds anywhere from ten to thirty kids breakfast in the mornings.

Step 3: Find Out Who Supports You

I let the other teachers working on the club and the community schools representative know

that I was definitely on board, and received a schedule informing me of my days to set out/prepare breakfasts, and I've been working with them ever since. Other supporters of the Breakfast Club are our local Sobeys, as they donate some foods, and provide the program with preloaded grocery cards to go get other food we need, and Mrs. Dunsters donates bread. We also work alongside volunteers from Crosswinds, who are members of our local community who have a learning disability or a mental illness. Generally two people from the organization come in and help serve breakfast to the kids.

Step 4: Create A Plan

My plan for taking action wasn't overly expensive, as I was given a schedule and expected to show up. I proposed a budget because I had originally wanted to do something else, but due to my limited amount of time with the students and scheduling of certain classes, it didn't work out as I had initially hoped, and I no longer had a need for a budget, as everything would already be taken care of by the school.

Step 5: Take Action

In order to implement my plan, I showed up early in the mornings I had been assigned and would begin to set up bowls of cereal and glasses of juice and milk, and then start making toast. The kids come in once the bell rings, and we serve them breakfast. Anywhere from ten to thirty kids show up, and some even come just to grab a glass of apple juice and sit with their friends until the next bell. Most mornings things ran very smoothly. The kids were aware of the rules, and the consequences for breaking any of them.

Step 6: Evaluate The Plan

My initial thoughts when I first heard about the program were 'No way will that many kids show up. They're 11-14 years old. They wouldn't be caught dead having to eat breakfast at school by their friends.' I have since come to realize that it is quite the opposite. There doesn't seem to be any sort of stigma that comes along with eating at Breakfast Club, and from time to time some teachers stop in and grab a slice of toast and chat with the kids. It really is a great program, and our students

definitely benefit from it.

There isn't a whole lot I would change about the program, except for maybe more of a variety in the foods available each morning. I know the kids are so excited when they walk into the hallway and can smell the grilled cheese cooking, and maybe they could even do pancakes some morning, instead of the same old boring cereals.

Step 7: Apply Your Learning

From being a part of Breakfast Club, I've learned that there are a fair number of students in my school who have a need for it. When I attended the school many years ago, no such program existed. I think every school should have something like this in place (and from my understanding, many of them do), and if I am ever working at a school who has yet to implement one, I'd definitely suggest something like it. There hasn't really been any great change, except for the fact that less students spend their morning classes being hungry, and are actually able to learn in the classroom.

Link to NB Curriculum

To link this project to New Brunswick programs of study, I looked at the Foundation for Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum and found a couple things that could be related. For the section of outcomes for Culture & Diversity, a thing to do could be to “discuss why and how stereotyping, discrimination, and pressures to conform can emerge, and how they affect an individual (p. 18). One doesn't have to specifically mention the Breakfast Club, or point out anyone who participates in it, but I bet if you asked a class about stigmas that are associated with people in poorer countries who don't have a lot to eat, and whether or not it was a reflection of who they were as a person, they'd have some good discussion. Another link was under the Interdependence section, by having students “identify causes, consequences, and possible solutions to universal human rights and other selected global issues (p. 22). If the global issue of hunger is looked at, and the students are asked how they would solve world hunger, I bet you'd get some suggestions of implementing programs like Breakfast Club to help people out.

To my knowledge, this program runs every year in my school. If I ever end up there, be it as a teacher or a volunteer, Breakfast Club will be my first stop on the list of things I can help out with. I hope it stays around forever, as I've seen so many many students benefit from it already, and as time goes on I'm sure it will help out so many more.