

The breakfast club
Program offers nutritious food to students

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A program that runs every weekday morning at Thomas Simpson School helps ensure that no student starts their day hungry.

Wandering into the school's kitchen at 8:30 a.m., Damaris Guinn stops by a counter and picks up a muffin and a few slices of peaches. Eating at the school's breakfast program is part of the Grade 7 student's daily routine.

Guinn said she prefers to eat breakfast at the school compared to at home because it's calmer without her younger brother bothering her. Her favourite breakfast foods include banana muffins and a bit of fruit.

Jordanna Snider, also in Grade 7, uses the program about once a week. Having something to eat before classes – kiwi is her favourite – helps her feel more awake, Snider said.

Michel Benoit, a shop and cooking teacher at the school, is the person behind the program. Benoit arrives half an hour early every morning to lay out a selection of breakfast foods for students to eat before their first class.

Benoit has been running the program on a volunteer basis since a few weeks into the school year. Research has shown students learn better if they have breakfast in the morning, he said.

"It makes a big difference, for sure," he said.

On any given morning, students can choose between a variety of cereal, fresh fruit, toast with optional peanut butter or jam and muffins that students bake in Benoit's cooking class. Prior to Christmas, when the school's waffle machine broke, students were also able make waffles from homemade batter. Between four to 13 students eat breakfast, depending on the day.



Teacher Michel Benoit, right, and students Tim Gargan-LaCasse, Quinlan Kidd, Damaris Guinn and Jordanna Snider stand beside the selection of food available every weekday morning as part of Thomas Simpson School's breakfast program. - Roxanna Thompson/NNSL photo

The program is funded by Breakfast for Learning, a national non-profit organization. **Devonian Metals Inc.**, a junior exploration company with three mining leases near Wrigley, also donates \$50 a week that is used specifically to purchase fresh fruit as well as frozen fruit that is used in the muffins.

'Big commitment'

In addition to preparing the food for the program, Benoit goes shopping two to three times a week to buy the fresh fruit and other necessary supplies.

"It's a big commitment for the year but it's worth it," he said.

Benoit said he sees the program's benefits in the classroom. Because he sees and interacts with them every morning in the kitchen, Benoit said he's built relationships with the students that use the program.

"The kids see you in a different way," he said.

The school has had a breakfast program almost every year. Last year a snack program, in which students could buy healthy snacks for a small price, was offered instead.

Principal Freda Blyth said having the program definitely helps students feel more awake and attentive and learn more.

Some students use the program because they're late for school and didn't have time for breakfast, while others just come in to eat together, she said.