

ADDRESSING HUNGER AND NUTRITION

A Tool Kit for Positive Results



National
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School Breakfast Program

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Started as a pilot program in 1966 and made permanent in 1975, the School Breakfast Program is a federally assisted meal program that operates in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. Research has shown that students who eat school breakfast perform better academically, have better diets and behavior, are absent and tardy less often, and visit school nurses less often.

The School Breakfast Program operates in the same manner as the National School Lunch Program. School districts and independent schools that participate in the breakfast program receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve a breakfast that meets federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced price breakfasts to eligible children.

Team Nutrition, a Web-based USDA service, provides schools with:

- Technical training and assistance to help school food service staff prepare healthy meals.
- Nutrition education to help children understand the link between diet and health.

The School Breakfast Program is administered at the federal level by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). At the state level, the program is administered by state education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with local school food authorities in schools and institutions.

Currently, 17 states have mandates that require at least a portion of the schools in the state to serve school breakfast; 22 states provide additional state funds to supplement federal funds. The Food Research and Action Center has compiled a list of state legislation at http://www.frac.org/School_Breakfast_Report/2004/Table_5.pdf.

Eligibility

Any child who is enrolled at a participating school can purchase a meal through the School Breakfast program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes

between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

Schools may charge no more than 30 cents for a reduced-price breakfast. Schools set their own prices for breakfast served to students who pay the full price; though they must operate their meal services as nonprofit programs.

No immigration restrictions exist for child nutrition programs; children may obtain meals regardless of their immigration status. Since free and reduced-price meals qualify as a non-cash benefit, receiving them will not prevent the child's parents from receiving a "green card" or legal permanent residence.

Participation and Cost

For fiscal year 2003:

- Congress appropriated \$1.63 billion for the School Breakfast Program.
- The program served 8.4 million children.

Challenges

Local Wellness Policies

Recognizing that schools play a critical role in promoting student health and preventing childhood obesity, Congress passed a law that requires each school district that participates in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast program to establish a local wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. These wellness policies should include: nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus, assurance that the guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set by the U.S. secretary of agriculture, and goals for nutrition education and physical activity.

Team Nutrition Program Web-based Clearinghouse

The Team Nutrition Program's Local Wellness Policy Clearinghouse contains a number of resources to assist school districts in formulating their wellness policy. The clearinghouse contains reference materials, sample policies, information on funding and implementation tools and resources. It can be accessed at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>.

Breakfast Participation

During the 2001-2002 school year, less than half the low-income students who received school lunch each day received school breakfast. Many children, regardless of family income, come to school hungry. Reasons for low breakfast participation include parents' job demands, long commutes to school, busses that arrive too late for breakfast, overcrowded cafeterias, tardiness, insufficient time to eat before class begins, and school budget constraints that can lead to elimination of school breakfast programs.

Promising Practices**Increasing Breakfast Participation**

The Columbus, **Ohio**, public schools implemented several innovative strategies to increase participation in the school breakfast program during the 2003-2004 school year. These strategies included adding more fresh fruits to the menu, offering breakfast in the classroom to the middle school (which resulted in an additional 45,000 meals served annually), offering an additional day for a hot breakfast per week, increasing universal breakfast from 32 schools to 49 schools, implementing Grab'n'Go breakfast at several high schools, and working with principals to determine the best time to serve breakfast. Columbus Public Schools also collaborated with the Mid East Ohio Dairy Association to implement an electronic family application.

Through these strategies, the support of teachers and principals, and creative promotion and incentive programs, the district increased the number of breakfasts served by 8.75 percent for the school year. A case study on the Columbus Public Schools and other Ohio schools is available at <http://www.childrenshungeralliance.org/NEWS/0412/0412-casestudies.html>.

Focusing on School Breakfast

The **California** Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), a statewide public policy advocacy organization, has released a guide for parents, students and community partners entitled *Local Wellness Policies: An Opportunity to Improve School Breakfast*. This guide explains the rationale for school breakfast and offers policy proposals to increase the quality of and access to school breakfast. In California, more than 1,200 schools do not offer the School Breakfast Program; only 40 percent of children who eat lunch also eat breakfast, and only 16 percent of children overall eat school breakfast. Policy recommendations include expanding the School Breakfast program to all California schools, scheduling breakfast at an appropriate time or serving it in the classroom so that all children have access, and eliminating stigma by offering breakfast free to all students. The guide can be found at <http://www.cfpa.net/obesity/BreakfastComponent.WP.pdf>.

Additional information about "Breakfast in the Classroom" can be found at <http://www.breakfastfirst.org/Bfastinclass.htm>.

Resources

- Federal Program Overview: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/>
- State Agency Contacts: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>
- USDA *School Breakfast Toolkit*: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/toolkit/Default.htm>

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Definitions of commonly used hunger and nutrition terms can be found in NCSL's Hunger and Nutrition Partnership *Glossary of Hunger and Nutrition Terms* at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/Glossary.htm>.