

Strategies in Tough Economic Times: Expanding School Meal Access and Participation

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Ensuring Access

- Effective direct certification system
- Systems for categorically eligible children
- Frequent outreach
- School meals application campaign

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Effective Direct Certification Systems

- Data matches are conducted at the state level with easy access by local school districts.
- Data matches are updated monthly and school districts regularly check for newly eligible students.
- Families are notified of their enrollment for free school meals and don't need to return a letter or other paperwork to the school.

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Systems for Categorically Eligible Children

- Homeless, runaway and migrant children are "categorically eligible" for free school meals,.
- In order for them to be certified, the school district's Migrant Education Coordinator or the Homeless Education Coordinator must confirm their status with the school nutrition program.
- Frequent and regularly scheduled communication between Food Service and these administrative areas within the district is crucial.

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Frequent Outreach

- Make sure families know that they can apply throughout the school year
- Schools should routinely send information to families:
 - flyers in children's backpacks,
 - public service announcements
 - automated phone messages to all enrolled families
 - information about school meals at all parent events such as back-to-school nights, PTO meetings and parent/teacher conferences
 - Special outreach for non-English speaking groups, including translation of all outreach materials and applications into the various languages spoken in the community

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School Meals Application Campaign

- Advocates and School Food Service
 - Revise the school meal application
 - Distribute school meals applications as part of the enrollment package
 - Provide the application in all languages that are spoken by a significant number of families
 - Provide assistance with filling out applications
 - Offer incentives for families and schools

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Increasing Participation

- ❑ Time breakfast and lunch periods to ensure maximum participation
- ❑ Make sure that every school offers breakfast
- ❑ Let students know that school breakfast is for everyone
- ❑ Start a “universal” program
- ❑ Implement point of sale systems

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Timing of Meals

- ❑ School administrators that consult with food service staff, students and families about meal schedules are often able to meet the students’ needs while still reaching all academic and administrative goals and requirements.

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Offer Breakfast at Every School

- ❑ School administrators who understand the importance to academic success of ensuring that children are well nourished find ways to overcome barriers

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Reduce Stigma

- ❑ Universal Breakfast
- ❑ Classroom Breakfast
- ❑ Point of Sale systems

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Partnerships

- ❑ Achieving maximum accessibility to and participation in school meals requires the work of multiple partners within schools and communities
 - DC Hunger Solutions
 - Children’s Alliance

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Discussion

- ❑ Getting the word out...
- ❑ Summer Food Programs
- ❑ Getting good data...comparing “eligible” to “certified”
- ❑ Connection to mandates

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