



CHILD NUTRITION FACT SHEET

Food Research & Action Center 1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 540 Washington, DC 20009

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL BREAKFAST EXPANSION

The strong consensus that every child benefits by starting the day with a healthy meal has led states to seek effective strategies for maximizing participation in the School Breakfast Program. Three strategies that have been particularly effective include:

- **Universal Breakfast** – Offering free breakfast to all students is one of the most effective ways to expand school breakfast.
- **Direct Certification** – This federal option, which makes students automatically eligible for free school meals if their families participate in the Food Stamp Program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, has been so successful that it will become a requirement for all school districts participating in the School Lunch or Breakfast programs by the end of the 2007-2008 school year.
- **State Funding and Regulation** – Thirty-seven state legislatures have enacted regulations or appropriated state funds for the School Breakfast Program.

Universal Breakfast

Universal school breakfast programs are those that provide breakfast to all children in a school – or district – regardless of family income, without charge. This approach is gaining popularity because it reduces administrative burdens, draws no lines between students based on income, reduces stigma and attracts more low-income children, and rapidly increases overall participation so that every child can do better in school.

Approximately 40 states have schools, and often large school districts, with universal breakfast programs. New York City, Cleveland (Ohio), and Kansas City (Missouri) are among the cities that have (or have announced the implementation of) universal breakfast in every school. Other cities, such as Portland (Oregon), offer breakfast at no charge to all students in at least half of their schools.

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DC: New Member of the Universal Breakfast Club

The District of Columbia Public Schools implemented a Universal School Breakfast Program in October 2005. The school district made the change in an effort to increase participation. It hopes to remove the stigma among students that the program was only for the poor and to expand the positive effects on academic performance to more students. Within just four weeks of the universal breakfast program's implementation, more than 2,500 new students were participating.

As part of its annual survey of the School Breakfast Program in October, 2005, FRAC asked state child nutrition officials to identify the three most effective strategies for increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program. Of the 40 states (including the District of Columbia) that responded to FRAC's survey, 72 percent listed universal free breakfast and 62 percent listed breakfast in the classroom (another form of universal breakfast) as the most effective strategies for increasing participation. Forty-six percent responded that "grab 'n go" breakfast, often a variant of universal breakfast in the classroom, was one of the three most effective strategies.

Provision 2

One way schools can offer universal breakfast is to implement a program option called Provision 2. This provision allows schools to provide breakfasts (and lunches) for several years at no charge to all students, and still receive federal school meals funding. Under Provision 2, the results of the school meal application process for one year – the proportions of students in free, reduced price and paid categories – are then used as the baseline for calculating a school's reimbursements for meals served for the following three or four years. The school can use this approach for breakfast, or lunch, or both, but schools have found the most dramatic positive effects in breakfast.

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By providing breakfast to children at no charge regardless of family income, schools can save money through eliminating the laborious tasks of collecting, handling and verifying applications for discounted meals as well as daily collection of payments from students. This and the resulting increase in participation in school breakfast, often pays for the cost of providing without charge any reduced-price or paid breakfasts. If schools demonstrate to USDA that local economic conditions have not substantially changed at the end of the 3- or 4-year cycle of the provision, they may continue universal breakfasts for another cycle without collecting applications from families again.

Idaho: Increasing Participation through Provision 2

Idaho achieved an impressive 17 percent state-wide increase in the number of low-income children in its School Breakfast Program from 2004 to 2005. Their State Department of Education attributes the increase to their success in supporting the increased implementation of Provision 2. Sixty-three of Idaho's 114 public K-12 schools are now using in Provision 2, representing at least one school in 55 percent of the state's K-12 districts. The total federal reimbursement for school breakfast in the state increased by 33 percent.

By both eliminating forms that parents complete and inviting all students to eat for free, schools can remove several barriers to participation. Targeting the entire student body for breakfast decreases the stigma of school breakfast being for “poor kids” only.

In addition, offering breakfast to all students at no charge allows breakfast to be served in the classroom, an innovation that is winning over even reluctant educators once they see the educational and behavioral benefits. Classroom breakfasts also eliminate problems with bus schedules. Teachers find classroom breakfasts do not interfere with class schedules. In fact, educators report that students are more alert and ready to learn after in-the-classroom breakfasts. Support staff finds this way of serving breakfast easier than preparing the cafeteria early in the morning and cleaning it twice in one day, a concern often raised about school breakfast before classroom service is tried.

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South Carolina: Breakfast in the Classroom Works

The South Carolina Office of School Food Service and Nutrition reports that 37 percent of their school districts now offer breakfast in the classroom in at least one school. The state reported to FRAC that when universal free breakfasts are served in the classroom, almost all students eat breakfast, and that it is particularly effective in middle and high schools, where a higher percentage of students skip breakfast and often eat nothing until lunch. They have produced a 13-minute video targeted to food service directors and superintendents, *It All Starts with Breakfast*, which they credit with helping to increase the number of schools offering breakfast in the classroom.

Direct Certification

Direct certification greatly simplifies the application process for both families and school officials, by eliminating the need for certain families to complete a paper application. Over the years, state officials have attributed the participation of millions of children in school food programs to direct certification.

Direct certification allows students from families receiving food stamps or TANF to be deemed eligible (or certified) for free school meals without filling out a separate application for the school. To determine who is eligible, state or school officials cross-reference their student files (taking precautions to ensure students' privacy) with participant files at food stamp and/or TANF offices. The school or state agency then notifies the food stamp- and/or TANF-eligible families that their children are eligible for free meals. In some states, a parent must sign the letter and return it to the school in order for the child to participate.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires mandatory direct certification of children whose families receive food stamps beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, and extending to all schools in the 2007-2008 school year. While this is being phased in, states and school districts that are not yet required to use direct certification of food stamp families still have the option of using it for food stamp and/or TANF families.

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State Breakfast Requirements

To guarantee that the School Breakfast Program is widely available, at least in schools with significant concentrations of low-income students, 27 states have laws mandating that certain schools participate in the program. Generally, requirements are linked to a school's percentage of low-income students, defined by the proportion of students who apply and are eligible for free and reduced price meals, or by the proportion of students receiving free or reduced price lunches.

The percentage required before the school must offer a breakfast program varies widely. For example, West Virginia requires all schools to participate, while in Washington State all schools with over 40 percent of lunches served at free or reduced price must offer breakfast. Kentucky and Utah do not require schools to have a breakfast program, but do require schools without one to report the reasons why. Kentucky also requires school districts to arrange bus schedules so that all buses arrive in sufficient time for schools to serve breakfast prior to the instructional day.

New Jersey: An Effective Mandate

Passed in 2003, New Jersey law now requires all public schools in which 20 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced price meals under the federal School Lunch Program to establish a School Breakfast Program. Beginning in the 2004-2005 school year, the new law applied to elementary schools, with middle and high schools coming under the new requirements starting in the 2005-2006 school year. The result of the first year of implementation was an impressive 39.1 percent state-wide increase in the number of low-income children in the breakfast program, the largest percentage increase in the nation by far. Also, the state experienced a 9.5 increase in its breakfast-to-lunch ratio of student participation (from 26.0 to 35.5), also the largest in the nation. The state should make even more gains in the 2005-2006 school year as the mandate is implemented in secondary schools.

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State Funding for Breakfast

To assist schools in providing breakfast to students, 22 states provided state funds for one purpose or another related to school breakfast: as additional per meal reimbursements (to supplement the federal per meal reimbursement); as start-up and/or expansion funds to finance costs related to the start of new programs or expansion of participation in existing programs; as payment for the costs of outreach; as incentive grants; or to pay for supervision costs. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, provide additional funding in reimbursements for lunch if breakfast is served.

Virginia: \$\$ Incentive for Increased Student Participation

As part of Governor Mark R. Warner's Healthy Virginians Initiative, the state appropriated \$1,172,020 beginning with FY 2006 to establish an incentive program to increase student participation in the School Breakfast Program. The funds are available to any school division as a reimbursement for breakfasts served in excess of the baseline established in 2003-2004. Schools are eligible to receive up to 20 cents per meal for this new participation. Funds will be distributed to schools during FY 2006 based on the increase in their breakfast participation from the 2003 - 2004 school year to the 2004- 2005 school year, when participation increased by 11 percent statewide.