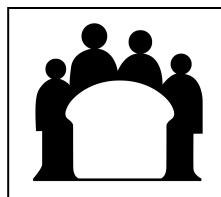


SCHOOL BREAKFAST IN AMERICA'S BIG CITIES: School Year 2006-2007



FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER

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About FRAC

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.

For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's Weekly News Digest, visit www.frac.org. For information about the School Breakfast Program, go to www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/sbp.html

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School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2006-2007

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Summary of Key Findings

This report examines the performance of school breakfast programs in 19 large urban school districts in the 2006-2007 school year, with the goal of monitoring their progress in increasing school breakfast participation among low-income students. This is a follow-up study to the first report [School Breakfast in America's Big Cities](#), published by FRAC in August 2007, which included an analysis of 23 large urban school districts.

FRAC gathered information for this report through a survey sent to each of the 23 districts from the prior study. Four of them did not respond to the survey despite multiple efforts to contact them. Our findings here have not changed substantially from the first report. While a majority of the 19 districts performed above the national average in reaching low-income students with breakfast, almost half failed to reach a majority of their low-income students with the important morning nourishment they need to succeed in school.

Key Findings:

- **Three out of the 19 districts – Newark (NJ), Minneapolis and Boston - served at least two-thirds as many low-income students at breakfast as they served at lunch.** If all 19 districts had reached at least 70 low-income children with breakfast for every 100 receiving lunch in the 2006-2007 school year, over half a million more children would have been eating a healthy school breakfast every day. Districts overall would have collected an additional \$123 million in federal child nutrition funding.
- **Nine of the 19 districts surveyed increased the percentage of low-income students eating breakfast each day.** Most notably, Minneapolis Public Schools increased the proportion of low income students eating breakfast each day from 59.7 eating breakfast for every 100 eating lunch, to 69.5:100, almost 10 points. Two of the districts did not change, and eight served breakfast daily to a smaller percentage of low-income students than in the previous school year. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools recorded the biggest drop in percentage served, with its ratio of low-income students in breakfast to lunch dropping by six points.
- **The districts with breakfast in the classroom have the highest participation rates.** The three top performing districts feature programs in which students receive breakfast at no charge and eat in the classroom at the beginning of the school day. In Newark, New Jersey, which has the highest participation rate, all K – 8 schools serve breakfast in the classroom. In Minneapolis most schools offer an in-classroom option, and in Boston about a third of the schools offer breakfast in the classroom.
- **Two of the largest districts in the U.S. – the Chicago Public Schools and the New York City Department of Education - began pilot classroom breakfast programs during the 2007 – 2008 school year in order to increase breakfast participation rates.**
- **The key strategy that urban school districts across the nation should adopt to expand breakfast participation among low-income students remains the provision of universal classroom breakfast, especially in schools with high percentages of low-income students.**

Introduction

The nation's federal nutrition programs, including school breakfast, are indispensable to the economic security, health and well-being of low-income people. School nutrition programs exemplify good public policy because they not only reduce hunger, but also have a range of positive outcomes that advance other key national priorities. They support child development, improve health, increase school achievement and positive student behavior, reduce obesity, boost family incomes, stimulate local economic growth, and improve the quality of child care and afterschool programs.

Because the school nutrition programs are entitlements, they also are particularly responsive during times of economic downturn, like the one the nation is in now. They grow when the economy is weak and more people need benefits. School breakfast is a prime example of the potential of the nutrition programs to boost nutrition, health, learning and economic security in both the short and long term. A full review of the positive effects of school breakfast can be found at:

www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/SBP_outreach.htm

FRAC has analyzed school breakfast participation at the state level for many years. This is the second year that we have looked specifically at school breakfast participation in large, urban school districts. The greater concentration of low-income families in many such districts makes them an ideal environment to offer effective school breakfast programs, reaching larger numbers of children with better nutrition. With large numbers of low-income students, these districts are in a unique position to benefit from economies of scale and community partnerships to increase breakfast participation. And the concentration of poverty in many cities means that these districts have a very important mission to insure that children have access to adequate nutrition in order to learn, grow, and thrive.

Many children do not eat a nutritious breakfast at home. Millions of families in the United States cannot afford to feed their children healthy breakfasts every day. More than 36.2 million people lived in households struggling against hunger in 2007, compared to 35.5 million in 2006 and 33.2 million in 2000. The number of people in the worst-off category - the hungriest Americans - has risen 40 percent since 2000, from 8.5 million to 11.9 million.

Many children from low- and moderate income families are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, but each day thousands of students who eat school lunch do not eat breakfast at school. Nationally, for every 100 low-income children who ate free and reduced-price lunch, 45.3 low-income children ate free and reduced-price breakfast in school year 2006-2007. Many of the children who do not eat breakfast start the educational day not ready to learn and unable to concentrate.

While the struggle to get breakfast to children particularly affects low-income households, many families, regardless of income, find that early morning school bus schedules, long commutes to jobs, and nontraditional work hours make it difficult to prepare or sit down for a nutritious family breakfast. Some children, especially teenagers, have no appetite for breakfast very early in the morning when they wake up. Other children may have to wait for long periods of time between an early breakfast at home and a late lunch at school, making breakfast at school an important option.

School breakfast improves children's diets. In addition, school breakfast can help to build lifelong healthy eating habits. Breakfasts served as part of the federal School Breakfast Program must provide one-fourth or more of the key nutrients children need every day, and contain no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and less than ten percent of calories from saturated fat.

Research has shown that children who eat school breakfast are less likely to be obese. Obesity rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents over the past 20 years. These alarming figures translate into increased risks of premature death and an overall lower quality of life.

From every perspective – nutrition, health, education, productivity, restoring economic growth – cities should be doing much more to get children to breakfast and breakfast to children, and pull down federal dollars to do so. This report describes the gaps in many cities' current efforts, and the strategies they should be using to reach more children.

FRAC and USDA Partner to Expand Breakfast Participation in Large Districts

In 2008, FRAC and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service embarked on a joint initiative to expand school breakfast participation. The two organizations have worked together with state and local partners to provide focused outreach and technical assistance in ten large school districts across the country. For each of the identified school districts, even a small improvement in the percent of free and reduced price eligible children who participate in the School Breakfast Program would result in a significant increase in the number of children that start their school day with a nutritious school breakfast. Districts participating in the initiative are Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Fresno, Hartford, Houston, New York, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Washington DC.

Both FRAC and USDA also have revised their breakfast outreach resources as another element of this initiative. View the revised tool kits at:

www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/SBP_outreach.htm
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/expansion/default.htm

The Survey

In early 2008 FRAC sent a survey regarding school breakfast participation and practices to 23 large urban school districts that had participated in our 2007 Urban School Breakfast survey. FRAC selected the districts based on size and geographic representation, seeking to look at the largest school districts in a substantial number of states.

School food service staff in 19 districts responded between January and July 2008 with data on the 2006-2007 school year, as well as answers to questions about current school breakfast practices. Four districts failed to respond despite multiple efforts to contact them.

The major goals of the survey were to:

- Determine the extent to which these districts reach low-income children with the School Breakfast Program, and assess trends;
- Consider the additional number of low-income students that would be served if the districts achieved a higher participation rate, and determine the federal dollars lost to the districts as a result of not providing these meals;
- Monitor progress and examine the effectiveness of school districts' efforts to increase school breakfast participation through the provision of "universal breakfast" (breakfast at no charge to all students), and the implementation of programs where breakfast is eaten in the classroom at the beginning of the school day; and
- Collect information on promising practices in the districts which might serve as national models for increasing school breakfast participation by low-income students.

This report describes what we learned and the implications of this analysis for future school breakfast expansion efforts.

Findings

District Characteristics

1. Enrollment

Districts that participated in this study ranged in size from 36,000 to more than 1 million students during School Year 2006-2007. **Table 1** lists the participating districts, from the smallest to the largest enrollment, as reported by the districts. Eight of the 19 districts had a student enrollment of more than 100,000, with New York City and Los Angeles being by far the largest. Six of the 19 districts had a student enrollment of fewer than 60,000. Only 4 districts had greater student enrollment in 2006-2007 than in the previous school year. Five districts had essentially the same enrollment level in the two years, while the remaining 10 districts all posted losses in enrollment.

Table 1: School Districts Participating in FRAC Survey by Total Student Enrollment

School District Name	Total Enrollment	Change in Enrollment from SY 05-06 to SY 06-07
Minneapolis School District, MN	36,000	decrease
Oklahoma City, OK	38,748	decrease
Newark Public Schools, NJ	40,636	decrease
Seattle Public Schools, WA	44,305	no change
Omaha Public Schools, NE	47,044	increase
Wichita Public Schools, KS	47,240	increase
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	54,461	no change
Columbus Public Schools, OH	57,000	no change
Boston Public Schools, MA	57,034	decrease
Denver Public Schools, CO	73,344	no change
Baltimore City Schools, MD	81,284	decrease
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	131,977	increase
School District of Philadelphia, PA	186,500	decrease
Houston Independent School District, TX	200,285	decrease
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	296,000	no change
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	342,072	decrease
Chicago Public Schools, IL	405,278	decrease
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	707,626	increase
New York City Department of Education, NY	1,057,250	decrease

2. Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals

Schools take applications from students' families to determine if the students are eligible for federally-funded free or reduced-price meals. Although districts vary in the effectiveness of their efforts to get low-income families to complete applications, the extent of such eligibility is considered a key measure of need in a community and is often used as a proxy for determining the extent of need for financial support to a school system. On the federal level, for example, Title 1 of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act uses eligibility rates for free and reduced-price meals as a part of the formula for determination of additional funds for schools serving high-risk communities. Many states use rates of eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals as a part of their formulas for determining each school district's level of state funding.

The districts responding to this survey reported the percent of their student enrollment eligible for free and reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program for school year 2006-2007. These figures provide a snapshot of the relative level of poverty and nutritional need. **Table 2** shows their reported percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, as well as a total combined percentage of both free and reduced-price eligible students. The percentages varied from a low of 40.7 percent combined free and reduced-price eligible in Las Vegas, Nevada, to a high of 86.9 percent in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Meals: How it Works

Any school can participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. School boards must apply to their administering state agency – usually the education agency – in order to institute a program, which is administered nationally through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. All students in participating schools may take part in the school meals programs.

Household income determines whether students receive free meals, reduced-price meals, or "paid" meals (for which students pay most of the cost). The federal government provides these funds to a school (through the state) based on how many breakfasts and lunches it provides to students in each category. In the 2006-2007 school year schools received \$1.31 for each free breakfast, \$1.01 for each reduced-price breakfast, and \$0.24 for each paid breakfast served. Schools received an additional \$0.25 for each free and reduced-price breakfast served if at least 40 percent of the lunches served during the second preceding school year were free or reduced price. (These are called "severe need" schools.)

Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line receive school meals for free. Children from families with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty line receive school meals at a reduced price – no more than 30 cents for breakfast. All other participating students, officially designated as receiving "paid" meals, pay most of the cost for their breakfast, often approximately \$1.00. As discussed later, however, some schools offer meals – or at least breakfasts – free to all students.

3. Participation by Schools Within the Districts

Nationwide, in the 2006-2007 school year, 84.8 percent of schools that served lunch also served breakfast. But the districts participating in this survey serve school breakfast in the vast majority of their schools. Fifteen of the 19 districts reported that they served breakfast in every school in the district. Three of the other four provided breakfast in the vast majority of schools: Chicago, Clark County and Boston provided breakfast in 98 percent of school buildings. Denver did so in 84 percent of buildings during school year 2006-2007.

Table 2: Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price School Meals

School District	Percent of Students Eligible for Free Meals	Percent of Students Eligible for Reduced-Price Meals	Combined Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	32.5	8.2	40.7
Seattle Public Schools, WA	32.7	8.5	41.2
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	38.3	7.2	45.5
Omaha Public Schools, NE	47.8	10.1	57.9
Denver Public Schools, CO	52.6	6.8	59.4
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	51.1	11.6	62.7
Wichita Public Schools, KS	54.2	10.8	65.0
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	61.7	5.0	66.7
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	61.3	8.8	70.1
Minneapolis School District, MN	63.3	7.4	70.7
Baltimore City Public Schools, MD	63.9	8.9	72.8
Newark Public Schools, NJ	63.5	9.7	73.2
School District of Philadelphia, PA	66.6	7.2	73.8
New York City Department of Education, NY	64.1	10.2	74.3
Columbus Public Schools, OH	68.0	7.0	75.0
Boston Public Schools, MA	68.3	8.3	76.6
Houston Independent School District, TX	72.7	10.3	83.0
Chicago Public Schools, IL	75.4	8.0	83.4
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK	79.4	7.5	86.9

4. Participation by Students

For this report, FRAC calculated the number of students eating breakfast (average daily participation, or ADP) in each city by dividing the number of breakfasts served over the course of the school year by the number of serving days, as reported in the survey by each district. **Table 3** shows the number of participants for each district, arranged by lowest to highest number of participants each day. The chart also shows whether the number of reported participants increased or decreased from the prior year. Eight districts had fewer daily participants (low-income students) than the previous year, while the rest posted increases. While these numbers reflect in part changes in overall enrollment in many of the districts, it is notable that even some districts with falling overall enrollment were able to significantly increase their numbers of breakfast participants, as did Houston and Minneapolis.

The survey also asked whether districts had developed new policy or programmatic initiatives to expand breakfast during the spring or fall of 2007. Three districts reported implementing new breakfast service models during this time period – Chicago, New York City and Philadelphia. Chicago and New York reported implementing in-classroom breakfast, while Philadelphia implemented both in-classroom breakfast and grab and go models. (See page ___ for an explanation of different breakfast service models.) These districts expect to see the positive effects of these programs beginning in their 2007-2008 participation numbers.

Table 3: School Breakfast Average Daily Participation (ADP)

School District	ADP for Low Income Students (Free and Reduced-Price) in SY 06-07	Change in ADP for Low Income Students from SY 05-06 to SY 06-07*	Change in Total Student Enrollment from SY 05-06 to SY 06-07
Seattle Public Schools, WA	5,961	+3.5%	no change
Wichita Public Schools, KS	7,607	+9.4%	increase
Denver Public Schools, CO	10,383	+1.0%	no change
Minneapolis School District, MN	11,787	+7.9%	decrease
Omaha Public Schools, NE	11,383	+2.8%	increase
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	10,724	-9.8%	no change
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK	12,399	-8.2%	decrease
Baltimore City Public Schools, MD	15,376	-7.2%	decrease
Columbus Public Schools, OH	17,190	-5.6%	no change
Newark Public Schools, NJ	19,664	+1.2%	decrease
Boston Public Schools, MA	20,353	+2.4%	decrease
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	22,502	-2.6%	increase
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	32,596	+7.6%	no change
School District of Philadelphia, PA	43,784	+1.4%	decrease
Houston Independent School District, TX	53,900	+20.4%	decrease
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	73,197	-7.4%	decrease
Chicago Public Schools, IL	77,410	-4.3%	decrease
New York City Department of Education, NY	157,652	+2.0%	decrease
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	176,533	-5.7%	increase

*Negative numbers in bold

Effectiveness in Reaching Low-Income Students with School Breakfast

Because there is very broad participation in the lunch program by low-income students in districts around the country, it is a fair measurement of how many students should and could be benefiting from school breakfast each day. FRAC therefore uses free and reduced-price participation in the school lunch program by low-income students as a benchmark against which to measure low-income student participation in school breakfast. Nationally, for every 100 low-income children who ate free and reduced-price lunch, 45.3 low-income children ate free and reduced-price breakfast in school year 2006-2007. In the best performing States, the ratio is above 60:100.

A challenging, yet achievable goal for large urban districts would be to serve breakfast to at least 70 out of 100 low-income students who eat school lunch. Their large student populations allow them to benefit from economies of scale, the shorter distances from home to school in most city schools should ease higher participation rates, and the concentration of free and reduced-price eligible students translates into large federal reimbursements for the meals served. Further, these districts have the ability to put effective administrative systems into place to implement breakfast service models that make participation in breakfast more convenient, such as breakfast in the classroom, and result in more students taking advantage of this critical meal. Most importantly, the large concentrations of poor children in these urban areas present districts with the imperative to insure that children have access to adequate nutrition in order to learn, grow, and thrive.

Three of the urban districts in this study served breakfast to two-thirds or more of their low-income students that received lunch each day. The rest of these urban districts served less than 57 percent of the low-income students that ate school lunch, with three of them serving less than one in three low-income students.

Six of these districts served fewer breakfasts to low-income students than the national average. Of the lowest performing six districts, only one (Clark County) met the state average for breakfast participation, with the rest trailing the average for school districts in their state.

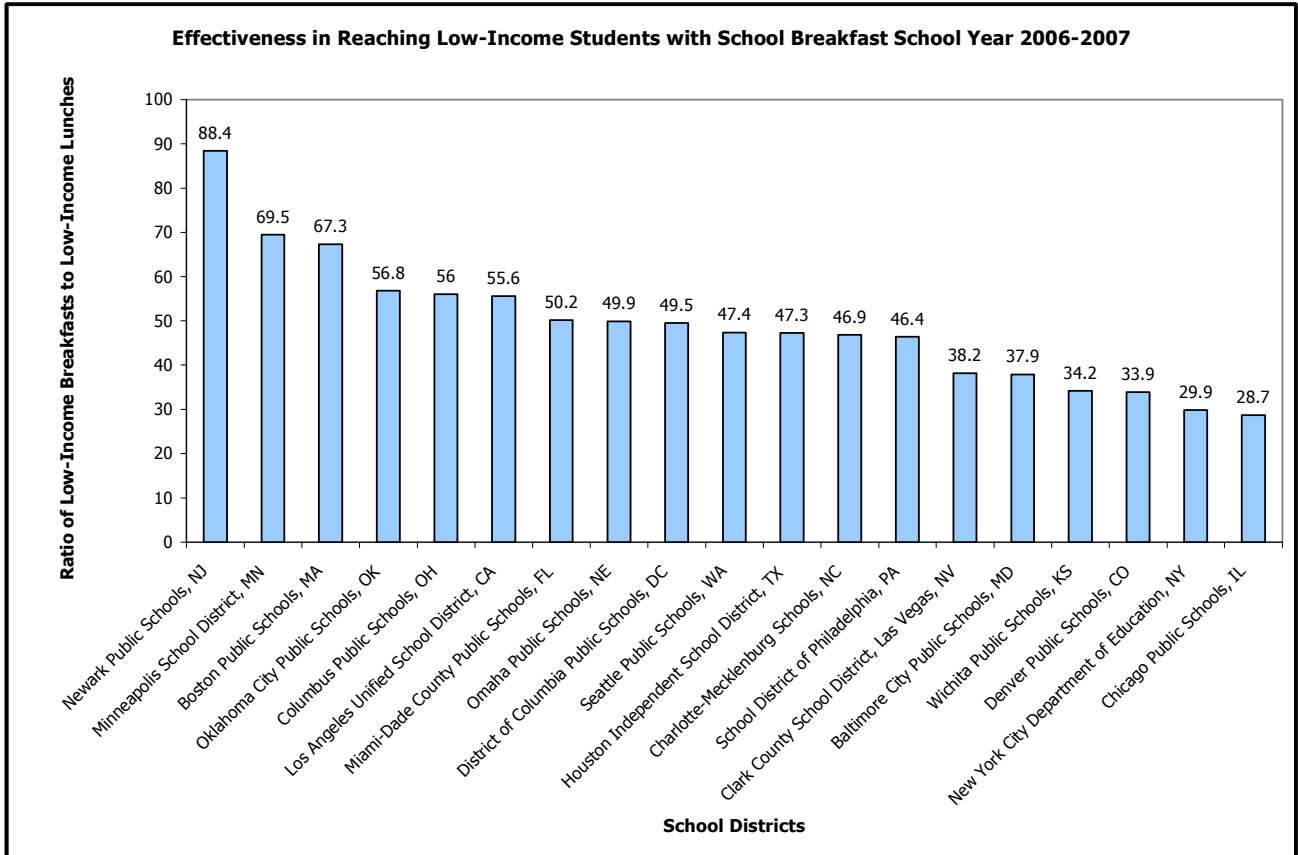


Table 4, on the next page, ranks the districts in the report based on their ratio of low-income students eating school breakfast compared to lunch. Most districts experienced small or no variation in this ratio between the two school years. Nine districts increased the percentage of low-income eating school breakfast, while eight decreased and two remained unchanged. The largest increase in the ratio was achieved by Minneapolis, which increased low-income student participation in breakfast even as their overall enrollment decreased. Some districts, such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg, saw a small decrease in daily participation of low-income students in breakfast, but a larger drop in their ratio of breakfast to lunch participation.

Table 4: Comparison of School Year 2005 – 2006 and 2006-2007 Effectiveness in Reaching Low-Income Students with School Breakfast

School District	F & RP Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP SY2005-2006	Rank	F & RP Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP SY2006-2007	Rank
Newark Public Schools, NJ	93.7	1	88.4	1
Minneapolis School District, MN	59.7	3	69.5	2
Boston Public Schools, MA	63.6	2	67.3	3
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK	57.2	4	56.8	4
Columbus Public Schools, OH	56.2	5	56.0	5
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	55.5	6	55.6	6
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	52.2	9	50.2	7
Omaha Public Schools, NE	52.3	8	49.9	8
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	47.2	11	49.5	9
Seattle Public Schools, WA	45.3	12	47.4	10
Houston Independent School District, TX	45.4	10	47.3	11
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	53.1	7	46.9	12
School District of Philadelphia, PA	43.8	13	46.4	13
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	37.4	15	38.2	14
Baltimore City Public Schools, MD	39.0	14	37.9	15
Wichita Public Schools, KS	35.6	16	34.2	16
Denver Public Schools, CO	33.9	17	33.9	17
New York City Department of Education, NY	29.1	18	29.9	18
Chicago Public Schools, IL	28.7	19	28.7	19

KEY
Increase = 9 Districts
Decrease = 8 Districts
No Change = 2 Districts

Reaching 70 out of 100: The Nutritional and Financial Benefits

For each day a low-income child was not being served breakfast in 2006-2007, the school lost \$1.31 in federal nutrition funding for every child who would have received a free breakfast, and \$1.01 for every child who would have received a reduced-price breakfast. If those children attended a “severe need” school – one of the thousands of schools in which at least 40 percent of lunches served were free or reduced-price – an additional \$0.24 in federal funds per meal was forfeited. Those uneaten meals not only represent potential harm to children’s health and development; they also add up to tens of millions of dollars in federal child nutrition funding going unclaimed by districts every year.

While many of the districts were making efforts to expand their breakfast participation, most fell short of their full potential to serve low-income children. If each district in this survey had provided at least 70 low-income children with breakfast through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) for every 100 low-

income children that received lunch through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the 2006-2007 school year, an additional 533,543 students would have eaten a healthy school breakfast every day, and districts would have received an additional \$123.5 million in child nutrition funding. **Table 5** provides these data for each district in the report, arrayed from the highest to the lowest participation ratio. Most of the lost revenue and unserved low-income students are clustered in the largest districts, with nearly a third in New York City alone. The New York City district would have collected over \$50 million in additional federal funds, and served an additional 211,988 low-income students, if it met the 70:100 ratio.

Table 5: School Districts' Additional Funding and Participation if 70 Low-Income Students Were Served School Breakfast (SBP) Per 100 Served School Lunch (NSLP)

School District	Ratio of Low-Income SBP to 100 Low-Income NSLP	Additional Low-Income Students Served if 70 SBP per 100 NSLP	Additional Annual Funding if 70 Low-Income Students Served SBP per 100 NSLP
Newark Public Schools, NJ	88.4	*NA	*NA
Minneapolis School District, MN	69.5	84	\$18,397
Boston Public Schools, MA	67.3	810	\$188,833
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK	56.8	2,625	\$593,105
Columbus Public Schools, OH	56.0	4,315	\$949,461
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	55.6	45,619	\$10,531,198
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	50.2	28,972	\$6,678,385
Omaha Public Schools, NE	49.9	4,717	\$998,446
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	49.5	4,430	\$1,030,307
Seattle Public Schools, WA	47.4	2,851	\$632,647
Houston Independent School District, TX	47.3	25,866	\$5,791,534
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	46.9	11,048	\$2,546,461
School District of Philadelphia, PA	46.4	22,245	\$5,142,024
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	38.2	27,151	\$6,223,592
Baltimore City Public Schools, MD	37.9	13,005	\$2,928,263
Wichita Public Schools, KS	34.2	7,941	\$1,738,142
Denver Public Schools, CO	33.9	11,051	\$2,493,317
New York City Department of Education, NY	29.9	211,988	\$50,435,123
Chicago Public Schools, IL	28.7	108,825	\$24,611,288
TOTAL		533,543	\$123,530,523

* Already exceeds 70 free and reduced-price school breakfasts per 100 free and reduced-price school lunches

Providing Universal Breakfast and Breakfast in the Classroom

This section provides information about, and examines the effectiveness of, urban school districts' efforts to increase breakfast participation through the provision of breakfast at no charge (sometimes called "universal"), and the implementation of programs where breakfast is consumed in the classroom at the beginning of the school day.

"Universal" Breakfast

Programs that offer meals at no charge to all students, regardless of income, are called "universal." Universal breakfast results in the expansion of student participation because it reduces stigma, eliminates fee barriers for many low-income children, and broadens participation in ways that make many students more willing to go to the cafeteria rather than hang around outside the school building. The traditional means-tested school breakfast served in the cafeteria before school (in which the meal is free or the child pays, depending on family income) creates a sense among the children that the program is just "for poor kids." (This is less true for lunch, at least through middle school, because typically all children go into lunch.) Universal breakfast reduces the stigma, making school breakfast more attractive to children who need it, and providing all children the opportunity to start the school day ready to learn.

Serving breakfast free to everyone can be done in the cafeteria, but adopting universal breakfast also helps schools implement programs such as breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day, or offering "grab and go" carts in the hallways. When breakfast is served at the beginning of the school day, it is much easier for students to take advantage of the meal, and it has been proven to boost participation.

Of the 19 large urban school districts surveyed in this report, only four do not provide free breakfast to all students, regardless of income, at many or all of their schools. Three districts (Baltimore City Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, and Houston Independent School District) that had limited universal programs offered at only some schools during school year 2005-2006, implemented a universal program district-wide during the 2006-2007 school year.

Provision 2

Of the 15 districts that do have a widespread universal breakfast program, seven use "Provision 2" of the National School Lunch Act as a funding mechanism, and eight do not. Provision 2 enables schools to provide meals (breakfast and lunch, or either one) at no charge to all of their students while reducing paperwork and administrative costs. Under Provision 2, all students receive free meals, regardless of income, and schools collect applications for free and reduced-price meals only once every four years. The reimbursement rate for meals for all four years is based on the percentage of meals in the school as a whole that are served in each category (free, reduced and paid) during the "base year." Provision 2 schools pay the difference between the cost of serving meals at no charge to all students and the federal reimbursement for the meals. The increased participation, resulting in increased federal reimbursement, and the significant administrative savings (e.g., fewer applications to process) associated with Provision 2 help offset all or much of the cost differential.

The Philadelphia Story

Since 1990, Philadelphia has operated a USDA-approved pilot program allowing it to serve universal free school meals in two-thirds of its schools without the use of paper applications from families. Instead of the usual process, the school district uses statistically reliable household sampling to determine the free, reduced-price and paid percentages at each school building. This survey research model was proven to be at least as accurate as the cumbersome paper application process. And importantly, the district has found that schools with this program have higher participation rates than schools that collect fees for meals. This model deserves to be expanded to more large school districts with concentrations of low-income families eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Districts that utilize Provision 2 for both breakfast and lunch programs realize larger administrative savings than those that use it just for breakfast. If a district uses Provision 2 for breakfast only, it must continue to collect applications from students for lunch purposes, and verify those applications, each year. For districts that only want to provide breakfast at no charge, and continue to collect fees from higher income students for lunch, it may not help to use Provision 2.

In these circumstances, offering breakfast free to all students and using meal applications to determine breakfast reimbursement produces roughly the same results for students – free breakfast. But the accounting and paperwork procedures differ for the food service staff, compared to Provision 2. They continue to count meals served by category when they submit their claims for reimbursement. Even in these districts, the rise in participation created by universal breakfast, and resulting increases in federal reimbursement, help achieve economies of scale for food and labor that can decrease the overall cost per meal and offset the lack of reimbursement for the full-price or “paid” category.

Serving Breakfast after the School Day Begins

Fifteen of the districts in this study served breakfast after the school day begins in at least some of their schools during the school year 2006-2007. These methods include breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go” breakfast service from carts or kiosks set up in school hallways or cafeterias, and breakfast after first period for middle and high school students. Serving breakfast after the school day begins dramatically increases participation by making it convenient and accessible to all. Many families find that early morning schedules make it difficult to fit in breakfast - either at home or before school starts in the cafeteria – due to long commutes and nontraditional work hours. Also, it eliminates the problem caused by tight school bus schedules, when students don’t always arrive at school in time for breakfast before the first bell rings.

Alternative Service Methods

Breakfast in the Classroom – Students eat breakfast in their classroom, either at the beginning of the school day or early during the day. Often breakfast is brought to classrooms from the cafeteria by students in containers, or served from carts in the hallways by food service staff.

“Grab and Go” – All the components of school breakfast are conveniently packaged so students can easily grab a reimbursable meal quickly, either from the cafeteria line or from carts elsewhere on school grounds. Depending on the school’s rules, students can eat in the cafeteria, the classroom or elsewhere on school grounds

Breakfast after First Period, or “Second Chance Breakfast” – Usually implemented in middle and high schools, students are allowed time after their first period to obtain breakfast, either in the cafeteria or from carts in the hallway, to then eat in the classroom or cafeteria. Computerized systems insure that children receive only one breakfast each day.

Table 6 summarizes survey results from the cities we surveyed on universal (free for all) and in-classroom programs. Sixteen of the 19 school districts have at least some schools that are serving breakfast after the school day begins, usually providing it during the first ten minutes of class time. The two districts where most students eat breakfast in the classroom, as a regular part of their school day, reach the largest percentage of low-income students.

Several of the districts that were not serving breakfast after the beginning of the school day during the 2005-2006 school year started pilot programs during school year 2006-2007. For instance, Oklahoma City Public Schools implemented breakfast in the classroom in four schools, and a “grab and go” service model in one school during the 2006-2007 school year. The Wichita public school system has implemented breakfast in the classroom at one school. Chicago Public Schools started a breakfast in the classroom program in one elementary school in the fall of 2007. And New York City also started to pilot breakfast in the classroom in several buildings in the fall of 2007, with expansion up to 30 buildings over the course of the school year.

In the 2008-2009 school year, classroom breakfast programs continue to grow in school districts, with Baltimore City and Washington, DC both beginning new classroom breakfast programs, while Chicago and New York City continue to expand their programs. The next section provides more detailed case studies of current expansions in classroom breakfast programs occurring during this school year in New York City and Chicago.

Table 6: Universal Breakfast and Breakfast in the Classroom

School Districts	Universal Breakfast	Provision 2	Breakfast In the Classroom	Ratio of low-income students eating breakfast compared to lunch
Newark Public Schools, NJ	All	Yes	Most	88.4
Minneapolis School District, MN	All	No	Most	69.5
Boston Public Schools, MA	Partial	Yes	Some	67.3
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK	None	No	Some	56.8
Columbus Public Schools, OH	All	No	Some	56.0
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA	Partial	Yes	Some	55.6
Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL	All	Yes	None	50.2
Omaha Public Schools, NE	All	Yes	None	49.9
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	All	No	None	49.5
Seattle Public Schools, WA	All	No	Some	47.4
Houston Independent School District, TX	All	No	Some	47.3
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	Partial	No	Some	46.9
School District of Philadelphia, PA	Partial	No	Some	46.4
Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV	None	No	Some	38.2
Baltimore City Public Schools, MD	All	No	Some	37.9
Wichita Public Schools, KS	None	No	Some	34.2
Denver Public Schools, CO	All	Yes	Some	33.9
New York City Department of Education, NY	All	Yes	Some	29.9
Chicago Public Schools, IL	None	No	Some	28.7

Case Studies: New York City and Chicago Pilot Breakfast in the Classroom

New York City: Mayoral Leadership

New York City took significant steps in 2008 to implement classroom breakfast programs, hoping to improve breakfast participation. Despite offering breakfast at no charge to all students, the city has lagged behind most other large districts in the nation. The school district's food services department (SchoolFood), school employee unions, advocates and government officials worked together to start a classroom breakfast pilot program during the 2007-2008 school year. The New York City Department of Public Health has assisted with implementation of classroom breakfast in a group of schools in Harlem, where it is working on an obesity prevention initiative. In early 2008, several members of these groups, along with some anti-hunger advocates, conducted site visits to Newark Public Schools to get ideas from their successful classroom breakfast program.

In January 2008, a classroom breakfast program began in New York City's Public School 68. Starting first with kindergarten through 2nd grade, the program was incorporated into the entire elementary school within two weeks. Breakfast participation increased dramatically, with 98 percent of the children eating breakfast each morning in their classrooms.

As the school year progressed, an additional 20 schools started classroom breakfast pilots in at least some of their classrooms. SchoolFood created the position of Breakfast Coordinator to provide leadership to the new program, as well as technical assistance to school-level personnel as they implement the new service model. As of December 2008, more than 6000 students in 48 schools in New York City were eating breakfast in their classrooms each day.

In late October 2008 Mayor Bloomberg announced that the Department of Education would expand the In-Class Breakfast Pilot Program to 300 schools with student populations with high poverty rates. This goal is part of a group of 18 initiatives to help New Yorkers manage the increasing challenges brought on by the economic downturn. The initiatives are designed to create jobs, support the City's workforce, small businesses and homeowners, and provide targeted relief to the City's most vulnerable populations. New York is the only city to specifically target school breakfast expansion as part of its response to the current recession.

Each school's principal must approve of the change in service model – something that principals sometimes are reluctant to do out of concerns about possible loss of instruction time, increased janitorial expenses, or disruption in teachers' schedules. It is hoped that the Mayor's leadership will mean that more principals will sign on to the program and the district will be able to realize its goals for the program. If they do, participation in the district will increase dramatically by the end of the 2008-2009 school year.

Chicago Public Schools: Universal Breakfast in the Classroom

In the fall of 2007, Chicago Public Schools started its first pilot classroom breakfast program at McAuliffe Elementary school. One year later, the district has plans to expand the pilot, now called "Universal Breakfast in the Classroom," to 100 schools during the 2008-2009 school year. To implement the new program, the district has hired a Special Programs Director who has a culinary and marketing background, as well as recent experience implementing universal breakfast in the classroom at five Chicago charter schools.

Nutrition Support Services staff will market the program to principals, teachers and administrators at meetings and other district-wide events. They have created a video presentation, "Universal Breakfast

Rocks,” which they have begun showing as part of these efforts. Their plans include assembling a program implementation team that will work with each school as it initiates the program, in order to tailor the program to each school building’s needs. They also will provide training to school staff in advance of implementation of the new program. They are targeting schools with high levels of low-income students (80 percent or higher free and reduced-price eligible) and focusing on grades K-8 because of simpler implementation and quicker student acceptance. They will work on implementation in high schools in the following school year.

There are two basic models being offered to schools for the Universal Breakfast in the Classroom program, “Grab & Go to the Classroom” and “Breakfast Served in the Classroom.” With the grab and go model, pre-packed breakfasts are distributed at strategic locations (near a main entrance, stairway or hall), and students bring them to their first period classroom. The food services staff collects the trash, leftovers, coolers and rosters from the classrooms. This model is ideal for large buildings and large student populations. In the breakfast served in the classroom model, food services staff assemble coolers with all breakfast items (four hot/cold menu components, spork kits, placemats and sanitary wipes), and deliver them to each classroom before students arrive in the morning. Students and/or teachers distribute the meal at the beginning of the first period. Food services staff collect trash, leftovers, coolers and rosters from the classrooms. This model is ideal for smaller buildings and those with elevators.

The district hopes to replicate the success that it achieved at McAuliffe Elementary, where participation increased by 250 percent and test scores improved by over nine percent after the program was implemented. McAuliffe’s teachers report fewer discipline problems and increased student alertness, and there is a lower incidence of tardiness and absenteeism since the program was initiated. Many principals and groups visit McAuliffe to witness the operation and benefits firsthand. Some of the most vocal opponents of the program before implementation are now its biggest champions.

As of late 2008, eleven additional schools had implemented the Universal Breakfast in the Classroom programs and are seeing similar participation results; thirteen schools using a different universal breakfast model, where breakfast is not eaten in the classroom, have not experienced a significant impact on participation. The district reports that more than 30 schools are interested in beginning the in-classroom program, and it will continue its outreach and marketing efforts through the rest of the 2008-2009 school year.

Conclusion

Large urban school districts should make increased availability and participation in school breakfast one of their highest priorities, in order to reduce hunger and support the health and educational potential of their students, particularly low-income students. It not only reduces hunger, but it has a range of other positive outcomes – it supports child development, improves health, boosts school achievement and student behavior, and reduces obesity.

School breakfast also is a prime example of the potential of the nutrition programs to mitigate the serious negative effects of an economic recession. Because it is an entitlement, the program can be particularly responsive during times of economic downturn: the program can grow when the economy is weak and more children need help. But with less than half of eligible low-income children taking advantage of the breakfast program now, and as substantial numbers of new children become eligible when families lose jobs or have their incomes cut during this recession, it is essential to accelerate the expansion of school breakfast participation.

As demonstrated by many of the districts in this report, universal breakfast is an effective strategy for increasing student participation, and also for enabling the implementation of breakfast in the classroom, which has an even larger impact on participation. The key strategy that more school districts across the nation should adopt to expand breakfast participation among low-income students remains the provision of universal classroom breakfast in schools with high percentages of low-income students.

All of the districts in this report have schools with high concentrations of poverty where they can immediately implement breakfast in the classroom to reach many more children. The increased participation and resulting federal reimbursements, coupled with the reduced administrative efforts spent on recovering unpaid fees, helps districts break even. As demonstrated in this report, more and more schools are providing breakfast in the classroom at no charge to all students, and as more of these schools experience its positive outcomes – higher attendance, lower absenteeism, reduced behavior problems, fewer visits to the school nurse and higher student achievement — the practice will continue to spread.

Key Recommendations for School Districts to Expand School Breakfast Participation

- Offer a breakfast program in all schools.
- Offer universal breakfast (free for all students) in the classroom, especially in schools with high percentages of free and reduced-price students.
- Implement automated payment systems so that students receiving free or reduced-price meals are not overtly identified.
- Improve nutrition quality by increasing the availability and consumption of fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and serving lower fat dairy products. Large school districts should take full advantage of their significant buying power in order to improve the nutritional profiles of the processed foods and USDA commodities they order.
- Improve the direct certification and application processes.
- Promote school breakfast to make sure that students and their families know that it's for everyone.

Methodology

The data in this report were collected directly from the school districts' food and nutrition department personnel through an email survey, with follow-up interviews by phone, and in some cases on-site visits.

Student Participation

Student participation data are based on daily averages of the number of breakfasts and lunches served during the school year, using the number of serving days provided by each district.

The Cost of Low Participation Rates

The cost estimate is based on a calculation of the average daily number of children receiving free or reduced-price breakfasts for every 100 children receiving free or reduced-price lunches during the same school year. FRAC calculated the number of additional children who would be reached if each district reached a ratio of 70 to 100. FRAC then multiplied this unserved population by the reimbursement rate for 169 school days of breakfast. (While some districts served breakfast for more or fewer days during the 2006-2007 school year, 169 was the national average.) FRAC assumed each district's mix of free and reduced-price students would apply to any new participants, and conservatively assumed that no additional student's meal would be reimbursed at the higher rate that "severe need" schools receive.

School District Contacts

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