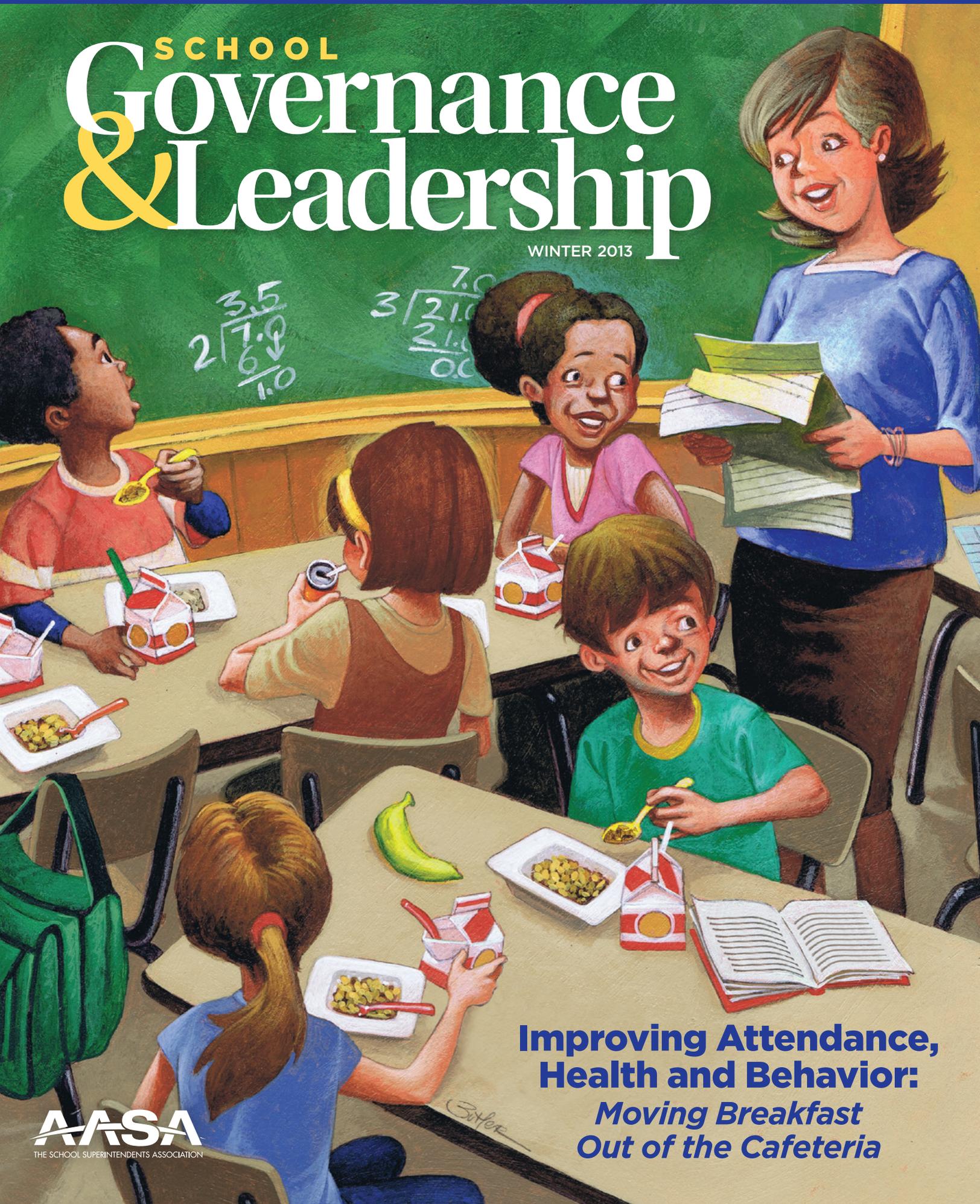


SCHOOL Governance & Leadership

WINTER 2013



**Improving Attendance,
Health and Behavior:
Moving Breakfast
Out of the Cafeteria**



Breakfast to Start the School Day

BY DANIEL DOMENECH



At the American Association of School Administrators, my staff and I are committed to supporting school system leaders like you in improving the lives of the students you serve. As school leaders, you know that many children suffer from hunger — you see it in your community, and in every school

building. You hear it from teachers, some of whom provide snacks for children who would otherwise be grumpy or distracted because they did not eat breakfast in the morning.

This issue of *School Governance & Leadership* is filled with resources and leadership lessons to help superintendents understand their role in alternative school breakfast programs and break down any barriers to implementation. With good planning and an effective team, serving breakfast outside of the school cafeteria can run smoothly from the start and provide nourishment to children who would otherwise go hungry. I hope this publication will motivate you to take on such efforts to ensure your students are ready to learn as the school day begins.

DANIEL DOMENECH is executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

SCHOOL Governance & Leadership

WINTER 2013 VOL. 8 NO. 1

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School Governance & Leadership
(ISSN 1099-6379) is an occasional
publication of AASA, 1615 Duke
Street, Alexandria, VA 22314;
Telephone: 703-875-0700

Postmaster: Send address changes to
AASA Membership, 1615 Duke Street,
Alexandria, VA 22314

Acknowledgments

This issue of *School Governance & Leadership* would not have been possible without the encouragement of AASA's executive director, Dan Domenech, who was instrumental in AASA receiving support for the AASA's Superintendent Leadership to Enhance and Expand the School Breakfast Program in Urban Districts Initiative from the Walmart Foundation. Kelly Beckwith, AASA project director, and Sapna Batheja, AASA project manager, lead AASA's school breakfast efforts and were critical to the positive outcomes the school districts experienced and to the development of this report. AASA is also grateful to the superintendents and their food service personnel who partnered with us to enhance school breakfast: Joseph Bond and Nancy Padrone of Brentwood Union Free School District; Sharon Contreras and Annette Marchbanks of Syracuse City School District; Mary Ronan and Jessica Shelly of Cincinnati Public Schools; and Richard Miller and Rodney Taylor of Riverside Unified School District.

Together, these superintendents and food service personnel worked to create incredible and sustainable change in their districts. We also want to thank the mentor organizations who worked directly with the districts, including Action for Healthy Kids and the Children's Defense Fund.

And, importantly, AASA is pleased to acknowledge the Walmart Foundation for supporting this AASA initiative to alleviate hunger through the implementation of alternative school breakfast strategies that help keep students in school and learning.

SHARON ADAMS-TAYLOR
Associate Executive Director

This issue of *School Governance & Leadership* was produced with support from the Walmart Foundation. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Walmart Foundation.



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An In-Depth Look at Breakfast Benefits

This may be a typical weekday morning in many households in your community: wake up, brush teeth, shower, get dressed, grab books and rush out the door to catch the bus to school. But there's something missing — something so vital that it would yield many positive results for students in the form of academic success, decreased behavioral issues and decreased tardiness. This crucial factor is breakfast. Students living in poverty are at an increased risk for hunger, but schools have a unique opportunity to meet this need and reverse hunger before it negatively affects student achievement during the rest of the school day.

Most superintendents who lead districts with high rates of free and reduced-price meals see the value in school breakfast. In August 2012, AASA sent a survey about school breakfast to its members. Among respondents, superintendents of districts that have free and reduced-price meal rates of 50% or higher believe that serving breakfast leads to students being more attentive in class, decreases student behavioral issues and helps low-income families (AASA, 2012).

Why Breakfast Matters

There are many benefits to children of eating a healthy breakfast, and researchers continue to point to the link between good nutrition and education. That is, eating breakfast correlates with improved outcomes for students, including:

- ▶ **SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.** Eating a healthy breakfast consistently improves the academic performance of undernourished students and various cognitive functions in the short term among students (Taras, 2005; Bellisle, 2004).
- ▶ **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.** Evidence suggests that breakfast consumption may

improve school attendance (Rampersaud et al., 2005) and reduce tardiness (Kennedy and Davis, 1998).

- ▶ **ATTENTION.** Children who eat school breakfast are more likely to experience improvements of attentiveness (Murphy et al., 1998).
- ▶ **DIET QUALITY.** Children who eat school breakfast are more likely to meet the dietary standard for specific nutrients in food (Kleinman et al., 2002).

There are many benefits to children of eating a healthy breakfast, and researchers continue to point to the link between good nutrition and education.

- ▶ **DISCIPLINE.** Suspensions from school decreased in 40 Maryland schools after the implementation of universal free school breakfast (Murphy, Pagano, and Bishop 2001).

- ▶ **HEALTH AND WEIGHT.** The national School Breakfast Program has been shown to build better eating habits among children, particularly reducing the percentage of calories consumed from fat (Bhattacharya, Currie and Haidler, 2004). Girls from food-insecure families who eat school breakfast are less likely to be overweight than those who do not eat school breakfast (Jones et al., 2003), and research clearly shows the link between eating a healthy breakfast and maintaining a healthy weight; skipping breakfast altogether is linked with a

higher risk of obesity.

Participating in school breakfast and lunch programs also helps to reduce hunger in low-income families (Bartfeld et al., 2009).

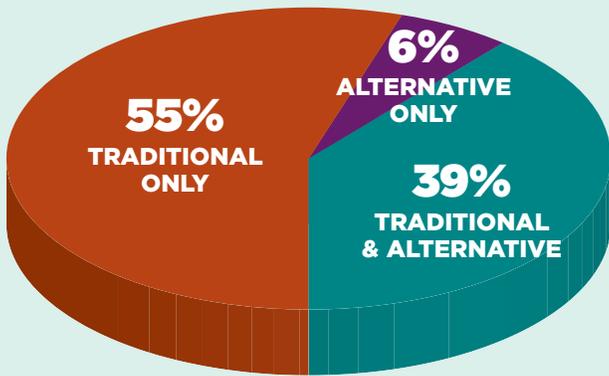
While students who eat school breakfast significantly decrease self-reported hunger compared to students who do not participate in school breakfast (Murphy et al., 2000), skipping breakfast has become more commonplace among children. Even though a majority of schools in the United States offer the School Breakfast Program, fewer than one-quarter of all children participate, and of those children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, participation is less than half. There are a variety of reasons for this lack of participation:

- ▶ Lack of time in the morning due to busy schedules
- ▶ Bus and carpool schedules that do not get students to school in time to consume breakfast
- ▶ Not feeling hungry first thing in the morning
- ▶ Peer pressure to socialize or play instead of eat school breakfast
- ▶ Social stigma that school breakfast is only for low-income students

Child Hunger Cannot Be Ignored

Child hunger affects future job readiness. Children who experience hunger are not as well-prepared physically, mentally, emotionally or socially to perform effectively when it's time to enter the adult workforce (Cook and Jeng, 2009).

Students need to eat breakfast to be alert, focused and ready to take on the day, and therefore should be encouraged to participate in their school breakfast program. ■



AASA Member Districts and Breakfast Model Types

In the 2012 AASA School Breakfast Survey, we asked how breakfast was served in your districts. The responses are charted above.

N = 938 AASA MEMBERS

School Breakfast Definitions

When we talk about “alternative school breakfast,” what do we mean? “Traditional breakfast” is consumed in the cafeteria, either at the same time for all students or in shifts. Use this as a primer for the other ways breakfast can be served at school.

Breakfast in the Classroom: Breakfast delivered to and consumed in the classroom before school starts. Most often served in elementary and middle school classrooms.

Grab’n’Go Breakfast: Breakfast packaged in bags with all components of the meal available at sites throughout school for pick up on the go. Most often served in middle and high schools.

Second Chance Breakfast (also known as Breakfast After First Period and Breakfast After the Bell): A type of Grab’n’Go breakfast served later than usual breakfast times. Most often served in middle and high schools.

Source: USDA, 2012.

Vending Machines

A Convenient and Flexible School Breakfast Option

In Cincinnati Public Schools and Syracuse City School District, high school students are able to obtain a fully reimbursable breakfast from a customized vending machine. In both districts, breakfast is free to all students regardless of family income. Students enter a unique identifier number, choose a breakfast, and have a healthy meal before, during or even after first period. Under federal law, breakfast cannot be served up to one hour before lunch, which is when the machines are turned off in Cincinnati. By making breakfast available for a little longer, schools give students who might not have been hungry before school started an opportunity to eat later.

“I’m surprised the vending machines have worked so well,” said Jeff Brokamp, principal of Cincinnati’s Walnut Hills High School. “But these things have been a godsend and make a huge impact on participation. Secondary schools have generally been known to have lower participation rates for school meals, making alternative breakfast programs a tough sell. However, they have underscored the importance of breakfast to all ... not just those who come from lower-income homes.” One teacher remarked, “By making breakfast available to all, the demographics of kids eating have changed.” ■



ILLUSTRATION © BY RALPH BUTLER

District Overview

AASA's Superintendent Leadership to Enhance and Expand the School Breakfast Program initiative provided technical assistance and grant funding to four urban school districts to design and implement alternative school breakfast programs. ("Alternative" means that breakfast is served in places other than the cafeteria.) AASA member superintendents Joseph Bond (Brentwood, N.Y., Union Free School District), Sharon Contreras (Syracuse, N.Y., City School District), Richard Miller (Riverside, Calif., Unified School District) and Mary Ronan (Cincinnati, Ohio, Public Schools) understood that this is an issue of equity and excellence and were willing to lead their districts — including school board members, food service directors, teachers, principals and custodians — through change in order to help prepare students to learn first thing in the morning. You will hear more of their stories throughout this publication.

This table provides an overview of the four urban districts discussed throughout this publication. Refer back to it as needed for a reminder of each district's characteristics.

| | Brentwood Union Free School District | Cincinnati Public Schools | Riverside Unified School District | Syracuse City School District |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Superintendent | Joseph Bond | Mary Ronan | Richard Miller | Sharon Contreras |
| School Breakfast Team Lead | Nancy Padrone, coordinator of school food service | Jessica Shelly, food services director | Rodney Taylor, nutrition services director | Annette Marchbanks, assistant director of food service |
| Number of Schools in Project | 17 | 14 | 36 | 32 |
| Enrollment of Schools in Project | 16,576 | 12,753 | 41,567 | 19,997 |
| School Breakfast Model Type | ES: Breakfast in the Classroom MS & HS: Grab'n'Go | HS: Grab'n'Go via vending machines and breakfast kiosks | ES: Grab'n'Go via breakfast kiosks and Breakfast in the Classroom | ES: Breakfast in the Classroom MS & HS: Grab'n'Go via vending machines |
| Is Universal Free Breakfast Offered? | Yes (changed during grant year) | Yes (changed to Provision 2 during grant year) | Yes (partial) | Yes (Provision 2) |
| Percentage Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (2011-12 School Year) | 72% | 74% | 69% | 83% |
| Avg Daily Participation, Oct. 2011 | 17% | 23% | 23% | 40% |
| Avg Daily Participation, Oct. 2012 | 42% | 32% | 25% | 54% |
| ES = Elementary School; MS = Middle School; HS = High School | | | | |

Effective School Breakfast Programs

Examples and advice from four urban school districts with successful school breakfast programs

The various models of and best practices for increasing school breakfast participation have been well-defined, however, it is vital to determine a strategy for implementing a successful and seamless program. Through its Superintendent Leadership to Enhance and Expand the School Breakfast Program in Urban Districts initiative, AASA established a successful formula for full implementation of an alternative school breakfast program. Each of the elements helped the districts create a more successful program that was supported by teachers, students, principals, custodians and the community.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCHOOL BREAKFAST TEAM

Each of the four districts created an interdisciplinary School Breakfast Team (SBT) to implement its program. Team members included the superintendent and food service director, a communications representative, principals, students, parents, custodians, and local community experts. The rationale for the School Breakfast Team is that it allows key stakeholders to share peer to peer. Two districts formed SBTs in each school, as well, which helped with troubleshooting issues and getting buy-in at the school-building level.

When **THE SYRACUSE SCHOOL BREAKFAST TEAM** first came together in October 2011, members knew they had the full support of Superintendent Sharon Contreras, who had written a letter to all school system staff before changing to an alternative school breakfast program. But the team had no idea what key stakeholders might think of changing how breakfast was served, so it sought to assess the attitudes of principals, teachers and parents about breakfast and school food service in general. Team members created a series of surveys, which were sent out via staff and parent Listservs and hosted on the district website; they even added an IT person as a temporary member of the team. The feedback obtained from the surveys helped the SBT create a packet for each principal providing all of the information the principal would need to talk to staff about the coming changes.

The School Breakfast Team lead, Annette Marchbanks, then followed up with each principal individually to talk over the specifics of each building's needs, staff concerns and other logistics. "Communication and preparation are critical to the success of this program. Although we are one district, each school had its own set of concerns that needed to be identified and addressed prior to the implementation of the program. Oftentimes, one principal's idea solved another principal's problem," Marchbanks said.

When changing how breakfast is served, whether districtwide or in a subset of schools, it is advisable to find mentors or experts who have done this type of work before or can offer expertise. **THE BRENTWOOD SCHOOL BREAKFAST TEAM** strategically added several members from outside the district, including a staff member of the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council, who was instrumental in assisting with the planning

When changing how breakfast is served, whether districtwide or in a subset of schools, it is advisable to find mentors or experts who have done this type of work before or can offer expertise.



PHOTO COURTESY SHARE OUR STRENGTHS' NO KID HUNGRY CAMPAIGN

and development of the breakfast program. They also included a staff person with the state antihunger agency, who assisted with statistics and information needed to access critical information; a former food service director and consultant-volunteer with the New York State Action for Healthy Kids, who provided an outside perspective; and finally, a staff person of the Children’s Defense Fund, who assisted on a survey project once the program was under way. “Each of these members of our team was instrumental in their own way to get the program going and continuing. I could not have done this project without these outside experts,” said Nancy Padrone, coordinator of school food service at BUFSD.

OUTREACH

Outreach to important key stakeholders is a vital part of implementing alternative school breakfast. When there is any kind of a change in the school meal system, it is important to educate individuals on why

this change is so important and how it benefits them. Each of the districts profiled here reached out to various groups, including school staff and parents.

► **BRENTWOOD UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT** regularly conducted outreach to stakeholders. Prior to rolling out the program in the first school, Brentwood hosted a districtwide meeting that included representatives from every school building and two outside experts who were present to assist in answering questions. The audience comprised administrators, teachers, principals and operational staff, including food service and custodial employees. Coordinator of School Food Service Nancy Padrone explained the upcoming changes to the breakfast program and answered questions from the audience. The meeting was tense, but the superintendent, food service coordinator and outside experts allowed stakeholders to voice their concerns. “I screamed the loudest at the initial meet-

ing,” said one custodian. “But now, as other schools in the district are coming on board, custodians at other schools figure if I am not complaining, it can’t be so bad.”

As the program was getting ready to roll out in each school, Brentwood distributed a one-page instructional sheet that outlined how the program would work for teachers. Said one teacher in BUFSD, “It just feels like we’ve been doing it forever. It’s no big deal now.”

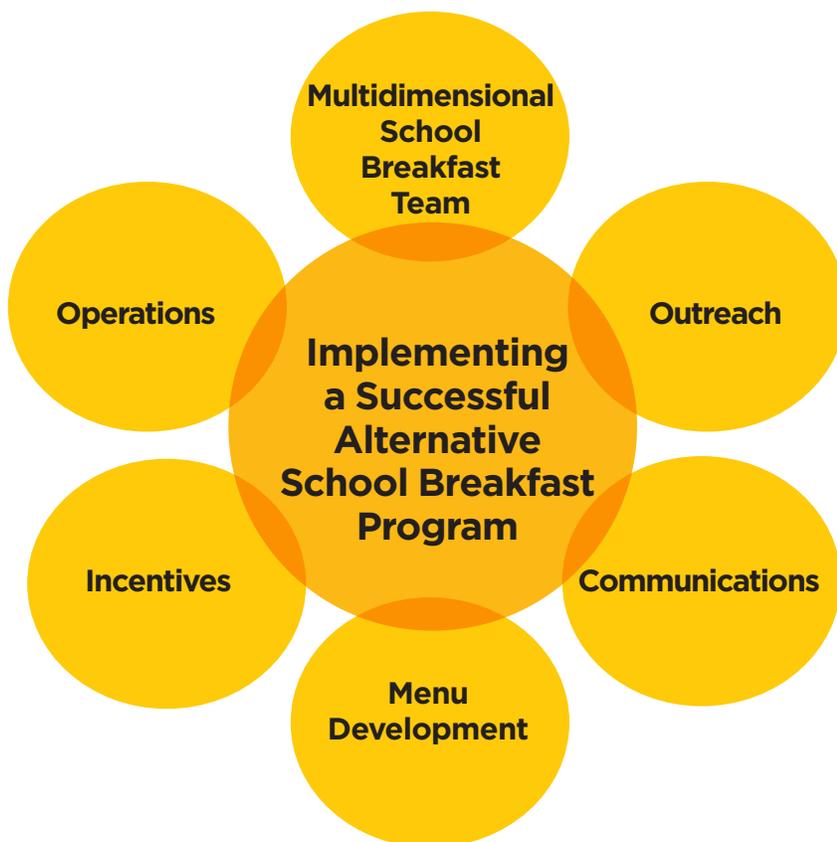
► SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

focused on outreach to school staff by conducting in-person meetings with every school principal prior to rollout of the alternative school breakfast program. At the meeting, a SBT team member distributed an instructional packet on the program that outlined changes school staff could expect. One principal stated that because she spent adequate time prepping her staff for the change, by the time the program rolled out there was no resistance. “Communication with staff, parents and the unions regarding the importance of the program as well as emphasis on the impact a healthy breakfast has on a student’s academic performance are keys for success,” said Superintendent Sharon Contreras.

COMMUNICATIONS

In many communities, media attention about changes to the school breakfast program helps parents and the larger community understand the district’s commitment to its students. Especially in higher-poverty districts, programs like school breakfast are seen as an investment in children’s health and academic success. Including a member of the district’s communications department on the School Breakfast Team is essential, as this department promotes the work of the SBT to the larger community. In addition, communications professionals help with outreach by creating brochures, banners and letters informing all involved of the school breakfast changes.

► **RIVERSIDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT’S** communications team was





ABOVE: Elementary school students in Syracuse City School District have breakfast in the classroom before classes begin.

RIGHT: An informational brochure for Syracuse City School District's school breakfast program.



very successful in getting local media coverage of breakfast kickoff events at schools throughout the district. They hosted “pajama parties,” where students and staff came to school in their PJs on the first day breakfast was served outside of the cafeteria. “Our pajama-party kickoff program was a huge success,” noted Nutrition Services Director Rodney Taylor. “Students, teachers and principals enjoyed coming to school in their pajamas to celebrate the kickoff of our new initiative. Our goal was to make breakfast fun and exciting, and I think we accomplished that!” In addition, the events provided parents with take-home materials to help them better understand the program and what was being offered to their children.

► **IN SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT,** Communications Coordinator Michael Henesey tirelessly reached out to local media to promote the program throughout the city. Numerous articles were published in the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, and NewsChannel 9 WSYR aired segments one day on its morning, afternoon and evening newscasts. Further-

more, the district worked with Syracuse University volunteers to create a brochure about the benefits of eating a healthy breakfast, which was sent home in every student’s report card.

Finding volunteers or students to help with outreach can stretch small budgets. “The local media and the volunteers from Syracuse University played an important role in helping us publicize and promote the alternative school breakfast program. With their help, we were able to provide our parents with accurate and timely information about the program and the benefits it has for their children both nutritionally and academically,” said Henesey.

► **CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS** had a unique partnership with the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. In its childhood obesity clinic, the hospital posted an electronic banner that encour-

aged CPS students to participate in their school breakfast program.

OPERATIONS

Implementing alternative school breakfast is a large — but doable — task for any school district. Not only do food choices need to be considered, but it is imperative to work with the district operations and maintenance departments on equipment and logistics.

► **CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS** uses vending machines in all of its secondary schools as part of the Grab’n’Go model, and the location of these machines was an important consideration. The SBT first analyzed the schools’ campuses to determine where most students gather in the mornings. Then the team worked with the district operations department to find

locations with electrical outlets or to have outlets installed. Students in Cincinnati have embraced the vending machines, and overall breakfast participation has increased over 100%. One student said that if another district were interested in installing vending machines, that district should come to his school to see how the machines work: “They should mirror ours. It’s almost perfect in a way.”

► **BRENTWOOD UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT** budgeted for walk-in coolers to create additional food storage, which helps expand the menu options in its program. However, the time between submitting the purchase order and obtaining the actual equipment was longer than expected. The district also ran into unforeseeable installation issues that required working very closely with the director of operations. Installing the walk-ins necessitated going through the roof of the school, and because the roof had a warranty on it, the district had to consult with a number of companies before finding one that would be able to work around the warranty. The installation of walk-in units was scheduled for the summer months, since it included electrical shutdown



ABOVE: A custodian in Brentwood Union Free School District created an extended cart to help move more cooler bags to more classrooms.

RIGHT: Students in Brentwood help transport the cooler bags into the classroom.



and inventory would be low. Many existing reach-in units were relocated or disposed of due to inefficient operation and age, and the 12 new walk-ins were completed and operational for the start of school in September 2012.

In addition to installing walk-in coolers, Brentwood worked with the custodial staff at each school to transport portable cooler bags that hold breakfast items to classrooms. At one school, an innovative custodian created an extended cart to help move more bags to more classrooms. The district has since created similar carts for other schools.

INCENTIVES

Part of the success of a school breakfast program is making breakfast routine. As the districts were getting started, they developed incentives — promotions and

LEFT: Vending machines in Cincinnati Public Schools have been a great success, increasing breakfast participation by over 100%.

BELOW: Banners like this one from Cincinnati Public Schools are part of the outreach program to increase awareness of school breakfast programs.



giveaways — to encourage breakfast consumption and create excitement and a buzz about the meal so that the breakfast meal would become a habit.

► **IN CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS,** the School Breakfast Team offered five-tiered cash prizes (\$500-\$3,000) to the schools that increased their average daily participation the most over a certain period of time. “We were able to destigmatize school breakfast by making it a competition between our schools to achieve the highest breakfast-participation increase,” said Jessica Shelly, food services director of CPS. This scheme was developed through discussions with students who sat on the School Breakfast Team and school principals. The School Breakfast Team offered the award once a month for three months with the goal of making breakfast a normal part of students’ school day. The cash incentives went to the individual school and paid for things such as tickets to prom, a senior trip to a local amusement park and increased physical-activity opportunities at a roller rink.

► **RIVERSIDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT’S** School Breakfast Team knew from the outset that their initiative would be called Start Your Day R.I.G.H.T. (Riverside Is Getting Healthy Together) and immediately created a logo. “Our emphasis as a partner in the breakfast program has been to make this part a community



A flyer for one of Riverside Unified School District's successful pajama-party breakfasts includes the Start Your Day R.I.G.H.T logo created by the School Breakfast Team.

effort to not only encourage children to eat a good breakfast every day, but also to make it part of an overall healthy living plan," said Gloria Cowder, director of program development at RUSD. "This effort marries very well with a citywide effort in Riverside to help our city become fit and healthy. In fact, the Riverside Mayor's Office liked our logo and message so much, they requested to use them to market a larger citywide effort. This campaign is now reaching nearly 400,000 residents in the city as our entire community focuses on the importance of healthy eating and exercise."

The district also gives stickers to elementary students for every day they participate in the program, and the children love being rewarded for eating a healthy breakfast at school. In addition, the district added pencils to some of their Grab'n'Go bags and called them "lucky bags" to further encourage participation.

MENU DEVELOPMENT

With any change in school food service, one of the first things to consider is how the menu is affected. A majority of school districts use a tried-and-true rotating cycle menu for school meals. However, with an alternative breakfast program,

determining the right cycle menu can be more of a challenge due to the limited options. It can take a long time to determine the right balance of food offerings for a cycle menu that meets USDA requirements, is healthy and appetizing, and is easy to prepare and serve in the alternative breakfast model. Schools that offer traditional breakfast in the cafeteria usually have the flexibility to offer hot and cold breakfast items. When the serving model is changed, some districts may choose to solely offer cold items for ease and because of food safety concerns. There are a number of different strategies that schools can use to help avoid menu fatigue.

► **BRENTWOOD UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT** initiated its program with a five-day cycle menu in all schools, eventually expanding to a 10-day cycle. To maintain enthusiasm and avoid menu fatigue, Brentwood constantly innovates to keep its menu fresh and exciting for students. The district works with vendors to find new items like the Ultimate Breakfast Round, a whole-grain, high-protein and -fiber bar that is popular with students. Brentwood also wanted to offer more individually packaged, pre-cut fresh-fruit options to provide ease for students. "By discussing our program with the other school districts participating in this project, we were able to assist one another

To maintain enthusiasm and avoid menu fatigue, Brentwood constantly innovates to keep its menu fresh and exciting for students.

with common issues and resolve these quickly without much trial and error. The expertise of the Syracuse staff assisted us to include some items not considered when our menu was first planned, such as raisins, wet wipes, clean-up items and some supplies, too," according to Nancy Padrone.

► **SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT** tries out potential new food options with students to get feedback before placing them on the menu. In one school, a resistant teacher's classroom was made into a "taste-testing classroom" — the resistant teacher's students were the first to sample new breakfast items. "You give students a sense of empowerment when you ask them to assist you in menu-item choices. It also gives the food service department an indication of student acceptability. All the nutritious food in the world does absolutely no good if it is not consumed," Annette Marchbanks said. ■

Nutrition Education

It is especially important to inform students of why their food service model is changing. Therefore, nutrition education is key.



► **SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT** made extensive efforts to increase awareness of and education about nutritious foods, purchasing nutrition education books and a MyPlate display for all of the district's libraries. In addition, the district hosts "farmers markets" in school cafeterias to showcase fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy breakfast and lifestyle. At the markets, students can try fresh fruits on breakfast items like cereal and oatmeal.

► **CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS** created a DVD called "Healthy In ... Healthy Out" featuring star student athletes and teachers speaking about the benefits of starting the day with a healthy and nutritious meal. This DVD was played during all high school health classes. In addition, Cincinnati created a new, interactive component for its food and nutrition services website to educate people about nutrition.

Myths and Facts About Breakfast in the Classroom

There are many misconceptions about barriers to serving Breakfast in the Classroom. With a little thought, communication and planning, however, superintendents can address these myths and proceed with successful implementation. Get the facts below.

MYTH: Breakfast in the Classroom leads to a loss of instruction time.

FACT: Typically, a well-planned program increases instruction time. During breakfast time, some teachers read to their students, have silent reading or incorporate a short lesson with a breakfast theme. Provide teachers with as much information about the process as possible before starting, so that distribution and cleanup of meals is fast and easy.

“We used to do morning announcements at 9:20. Now we do them at 8:50.”

— A VICE PRINCIPAL,
SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO: Engage resistant faculty and staff to effectively implement the program so there is no loss of instruction time. Work with principals to assist teachers who indicate lost instruction time because of Breakfast in the Classroom.

Provide opportunities for teachers from different schools to talk to each other about how breakfast is being served in their school, or for teachers to visit successful schools to see the program in action. Provide a similar venue for principals.

MYTH: When schools serve Breakfast in the Classroom, students eat two breakfasts — one at home and one at school.

FACT: While all students are offered a breakfast meal, students are not forced to take one.

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO: Make it known throughout the district that eating breakfast at school is not required. Students should only take a breakfast if they really want one.

MYTH: Unions do not support Breakfast in the Classroom.

FACT: While many unions have questions about the role of their members in Breakfast in the Classroom, the examples set in many large, suburban and rural school districts are evidence that unions are not an impediment to serving alternative breakfast in schools. In the AASA School Breakfast Survey, superintendents who had implemented alternative school breakfast indicated higher levels of union support for the program (72%) than what super-

“Before the program started, I said there would be five spills a day. That first month, I don’t think there were five spills total.”

— A CUSTODIAN, BRENTWOOD UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

intendents who do not offer alternative breakfast anticipated regarding union support (39%) (AASA, 2012).

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO: Be the main point of contact to union representatives. The food service director can answer many questions, but your leadership is crucial here.

MYTH: If you serve breakfast in the classroom, children with food allergies will have a reaction.

FACT: Food service professionals are accustomed to taking precautions for students with food allergies. When moving breakfast out of the cafeteria, they must communicate with teachers about students’ needs. Many schools use allergy cards on the totes in which food is delivered to the classroom for the teacher’s information.

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO: Be aware of the procedures in place for students with food allergies. Provide training for teachers regarding an allergic child’s needs and what to do in an emergency. Send a letter home to parents, signed by someone in the district (the superintendent,

food service director, principal, teacher, school nurse), about how the school will take precautions for their child.

MYTH: Serving breakfast in places outside the cafeteria will lead to pesky critters throughout the school due to increased waste and crumbs in the classroom or hallways.

FACT: Alternative school breakfast does not typically lead to pest problems in a school. Easy solutions can be implemented before the program begins, including placing large trash bags in the hallways and providing classrooms with sanitizing wipes for desks.

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO: Set the expectation that students and staff will take care to limit spills and crumbs on school property and grounds. Work closely with the director of maintenance and the custodians at the schools around their new responsibilities. Ensure that there is an Integrated Pest Management system in place that includes the new breakfast program.



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Cincinnati Public Schools

School Breakfast: An Issue of Leadership

Superintendent support and enthusiasm can make or break a new alternative school breakfast program. In the AASA School Breakfast Survey, members who have an alternative school breakfast program stated that school administrators were most supportive group of implementing the program (AASA, 2012). In interviews with AASA, the four superintendents who participated in the Superintendent Leadership to Enhance and Expand the School Breakfast Program in Urban Districts initiative talked about the role of leadership in making the breakfast program a success in their districts.

AASA: Why did you see a need for an alternative school breakfast program in your district?

MARY RONAN: Our secondary schools had an average breakfast participation rate of only 16%, while our elementary schools had an average breakfast participation rate of over 58% — an astounding difference. To date, a great deal of attention is given to improving breakfast participation at the elementary school level. The rationale is that the earlier that good eating habits can be established, the greater the likelihood that students will continue the habits as they progress in school. Nonetheless, secondary students also require good nutrition to make learning effective. CPS saw a tremendous opportunity to create a replicable program to respond to the challenges of increasing and sustaining breakfast participation rates for this hard-to-reach group.

Some of the challenges include tackling the peer pressure and social stigma of “school breakfast”; creating a breakfast service strategy that does not take away from a student’s instructional time or social time; and minimizing the geographical distance students must go to get breakfast each morning. Through working cooperatively with our community part-

ners, establishing strong buy-in from school staff and the consistent application of the best practices for breakfast service we will use, our district almost doubled our average daily breakfast participation from 16% to 30% in our 14 secondary and K-12 schools over the past 12 months.

AASA: What advice would you give other superintendents who want to start an alternative school breakfast program in their district?

JOSEPH BOND: The best advice is to first rally your building administration, explain the parameters of the plan, listen to their concerns and address those with statistics.

As we were planning the kickoff meeting to inform our staff of the alternative breakfast program, the grant and its benefits, and present the overall plan, I received push-back from several union groups, which required discussion of the real issues that would be addressed with instituting a new breakfast program. The bottom line was, our students were arriving to school hungry.

We have an obligation to evaluate such issues and now had a solution with the help of this grant and the fact that expanding the breakfast program would address this issue and be self-sustaining long after the grant. Some of the concerns presented by the union groups were loss of instructional time for teachers and cleaning issues for custodial staff. By making the leaders of these groups realize we were addressing a very severe need for our students, neither group could rally for “not feeding a hungry child.”

As the superintendent, it was my obligation to make the naysayers become supporters of this program and see that no instructional time would be lost or sanitary issues created — we would be feeding children to help in the educational process — that’s what it is all about. It is important to have the teachers, food service and custodial staff on the same playing field with the same goal: “It’s for the kids.”

SHARON CONTRERAS: The superintendent must set the expectations for the program and serve as a leader. In addition, communication and planning are critical to the process. Potential problems can be identified before the program is implemented and solutions can be found, ensuring efficient and effective delivery. It is critical that you listen carefully to the concerns of all key stakeholders: parents, teachers and staff.

AASA: What are some strategies for sustaining an alternative school breakfast program?

RICHARD MILLER: As with many new programs, a new breakfast initiative can be exciting at first, then may become less popular after the newness wears off. What we have learned is the importance of engaging our teachers, parents and students from the very beginning. We also have worked hard to use data to show us where we need to improve. If participation numbers drop at any of our sites, we work on new ways to provide incentives and reminders at those sites to reinvigorate the program. We are always looking for new and imaginative ways to keep students and staff motivated. ■

Advice From Stakeholders

AASA held focus groups with key stakeholders in each district that participated in the initiative. They offered advice to other districts considering implementation of an alternative school breakfast program.

TEACHERS

- ▶ I was surprised by this, but there are now better relationships between teachers and students. When you dine together, a better bond between staff and students is developed. **(SYRACUSE)**
- ▶ Don't panic. **(RIVERSIDE)**

STUDENTS

- ▶ Make sure the vending machines are in a good location. [Put vending machines] where students congregate and can eat [breakfast] and hang out. **(CINCINNATI)**
- ▶ If somebody keeps bothering you [in the cafeteria], he's not going to do it in the class because he doesn't want to get in trouble. **(SYRACUSE)**

A PRINCIPAL

- ▶ The school has to own it. Everyone has to sit together, plan and organize it. When it's a collaborative process, everyone owns it. **(SYRACUSE)**

FOOD SERVICE STAFF

- ▶ Pound the pavement first; get out there and push it beforehand; get with each school administration and come

with the facts about how this has worked with other districts.

(CINCINNATI)

- ▶ Give it time. Everybody work together. It's not for our benefit, it's for the children. It sounds like a lot. It is. It's a lot of work for everybody. But it works itself out. Everybody working together, it makes it successful. **(BRENTWOOD)**

PARENTS

- ▶ Have a community forum and invite teachers, staff, community members, parents, students, etc., so all of their questions are answered up front so you get that buy-in. **(SYRACUSE)**
- ▶ The ability to send your kids to school and know they will serve breakfast in the classroom is a relief. It's one less thing I have to stress about. **(RIVERSIDE)**

A CUSTODIAN

- ▶ If you're going to talk about Breakfast in the Classroom, the DVD version won't work. You need the face time with all the stakeholders, to have a person from each group talking about how it will impact your school. **(BRENTWOOD)**

Funding and Sustaining an Alternative School Breakfast Program

How can you make an alternative school breakfast program work in your district? It is undeniable that such an initiative has associated costs, including additional labor and equipment, but a successful program with increased participation can offset these costs to enhance the breakfast program. As discovered in the AASA School Breakfast Survey, districts that served alternative

breakfast only or in conjunction with traditional breakfast were significantly more likely to have self-sustaining food service budgets (AASA, 2012) — and while it's not clear exactly why this is, it is likely due to increased breakfast participation, which results in increased federal reimbursements. Here are some recommendations for funding and sustaining an alternative school breakfast program:

▶ **Implement universal free breakfast.** It is known that social stigma can prevent hungry students from participating in school breakfast (Ribar and Haldeman, 2011). Therefore, schools that have a high percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals and low breakfast participation may benefit from implementing universal free breakfast to attract more students to participate in the

school breakfast program. In addition, schools can investigate if applying for Provision 2 status or Community Eligibility would make financial sense for their programs. For more information on these options, go to www.fns.usda.gov.

▶ **Leverage the increased reimbursements.** School districts that implement alternative school breakfast witness



benefits to their local community. The increased number of students eating breakfast means more federal dollars to the school's food service department. These funds can only be utilized for the costs associated with the school meals program. This money can then be spent on extra labor hours for existing staff or hiring additional staff to

assist with the program — adding jobs in the community.

► **Seek out funding opportunities.** Stay abreast of available grant opportunities from organizations including Fuel Up to Play 60 and Action for Healthy Kids (see Resources). Funds may be available for either individual schools or an

entire district; a phased rollout with just one or two interested schools in a district is a great way to ensure success. All of the districts highlighted in this publication used this phased approach, and they found that it was a great way to work out any kinks in the program before taking on additional schools. ■

How to Get Students Excited About Breakfast: Tips From an Industry Expert

► **Maintain variety in menus to provide “new news” to children.** Keep menus fresh and exciting by using the marketing techniques of quick-service chains — try tactics like “limited time offers,” which help keep consumers interested in the food offerings.

► **Work with your vendors.** Suppliers have resources and means to develop new and cost-effective menu items. Hold them accountable for helping you come up with new menu items and controlling costs. Use them as “consultants” to bring you new ideas; they will respond.

► **Talk to your neighbors.** Find out what neighboring school districts are doing with their breakfast menus. Consult their menus to find new items you might be able to use. If they use the same vendor, see if the vendor will give a discounted price for batch orders for two districts.

► **Follow fast-food trends.** Draft off the major marketing programs of quick-service restaurants that are developing trendy new menu items, e.g., snack wraps and iconic sauces — these can be “borrowed” to develop menu items. Kids will find these foods “cool” because they see advertising and marketing for them.

► **Label calories and key nutrients.** Menu labeling with calories will soon be required in the marketplace for chains with more than 20 units. Children will see calo-

ries on menu boards, and you can help them interpret this information by doing some education along with breakfast. A few words like “this meal has 350 calories and you need about 1800 calories each day” will go a long way to teaching students about caloric balance for good health.

► **Consider increasing frequency of distribution.** If storage space is a constraint and it's not possible to add more, consider working with your dis-

tributor to increase frequency of distribution. There may be increased costs, but it is likely less expensive than buying new equipment, and deals can be made with distributors who are motivated to add more business. You'll be buying more, so make your distributors have some skin in the game. ■

— CATHERINE ADAMS HUTT, PH.D., RD, LD,
AND AASA SCHOOL BREAKFAST
ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

An elementary school student in Syracuse City School District enjoys a healthy breakfast in the classroom.



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Resources

DISTRICTS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE AASA INITIATIVE

Brentwood Union Free School District: www.brentwood.k12.ny.us and www.brentwood.k12.ny.us/HTMLpages/food%20services/FOODSERVICESPAGE.html

Cincinnati Public Schools: www.cps-k12.org and www.cps-k12.org/menu/menu.htm

Riverside Unified School District: www.rusdlink.org and www.rusdlink.org/domain/69

Syracuse City School District: www.scsd.us and www.scsd.us/departments/operations/food-service

FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER

Breakfast for Learning: www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf

How to Expand Participation in School Breakfast: www.frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/cnr06_breakfast.pdf

School Breakfast: Making it Work in Large School Districts: School Year 2011-2012: http://frac.org/pdf/urban_school_breakfast_sy2011-2012.pdf

School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2011-2012: http://frac.org/pdf/Scorecard_SY2011-2012.pdf

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION HEALTH INFORMATION NETWORK

Breakfast in the Classroom Toolkit: www.neahin.org/educator-resources/breakfast-in-the-classroom.html

Start School with Breakfast: A Guide to Increasing School Breakfast Participation: www.neahin.org/educator-resources/start-school-with-breakfast.html

SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION

Growing School Breakfast Participation: www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=15726

National School Breakfast Week: www.schoolnutrition.org/nsbw

SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Hunger in Our Schools: Teachers Report 2012: www.strength.org/teachers

School Breakfast Toolkit: www.strength.org/school_breakfast/school_breakfast_toolkit

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Discover School Breakfast Toolkit: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/toolkit

Expanding Your School Breakfast Program: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion

School Breakfast Program: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast

OTHER

Action for Healthy Kids: www.actionforhealthykids.org

Breakfast First/California Food Policy Advocates: <http://breakfastfirst.org>

Breakfast in the Classroom: www.breakfastintheclassroom.org

Children's Defense Fund: www.childrensdefense.org

Children's Hunger Alliance (Ohio): www.childrenshungeralliance.org

Fuel Up to Play 60: www.fueluptoplay60.com

Got Breakfast?: www.gotbreakfast.org

Hunger Solutions New York: <http://hungersolutionsny.org/index.php/info/child-nutrition-center/school-breakfast-program>

Wisconsin School Breakfast Program: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/wischoolbreakfast>