

Shine With School Breakfast: An Overview of the School Breakfast Program in NYS 2008-2009



A daily breakfast is essential to the health, well-being, and academic achievement of growing children.

The Nutrition Consortium of NYS
14 Computer Drive East
Albany, New York 12205
(518) 436-8757
www.nutritionconsortium.org

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) ensures that children and teenagers throughout NYS have access to good nutrition at school to prepare them for a day of learning.

A significant amount of research proves the benefits of breakfast consumption. Specifically, eating school breakfast provides students with physical, academic, and social advantages. This includes reduced hunger, improved nutritional intake, increased academic scores, reduced school disciplinary referrals, and reduced school absenteeism rates. When individual students succeed, the entire school environment thrives.

When a school operates the SBP, any student may eat school breakfast. However, breakfast can be free or at a reduced-price for low-income children who qualify. School breakfast particularly benefits these low-income children, who are often vulnerable and in need of good nutrition.

June 2010

Unfortunately in NYS, less than 1 in 5 of all students enrolled in school participate in the SBP. This is due to access barriers such as stigma, conflicting bus schedules, pressure to get to class on time, lack of SBP awareness, and many schools throughout NYS do not even operate the SBP.

To overcome these barriers and increase SBP participation, schools should operate the SBP and serve breakfast in creative ways other than the traditional cafeteria manner. These 'alternative service methods' may include:

- Incorporating breakfast in the classroom at the beginning of the school day so that all children can eat;
- Pre-assembling breakfast and serving it in high traffic areas such as school lobbies and hallways to make breakfast more visible;
- Extending meal service time into first or second period so older students who arrive later or have study hall can still eat; and/or
- Offering breakfast free for all students to eliminate stigma that only low-income students eat school breakfast.

Many schools throughout NYS have already successfully adopted alternative service methods. In fact, they possess two to three times higher SBP participation rates than schools that service breakfast in the traditional cafeteria manner.



Key Findings about the SBP in NYS School Year 2008-2009

School Breakfast Participation Remains Low: School breakfast is available to all students enrolled in schools that operate the SBP. However, during the 2008-2009 school year, less than 1 in 5 (18%) of all enrolled students ate school breakfast.

High Demand for Free & Reduced-Price Meals: The SBP can be particularly beneficial to students from low-income households. In order to receive free or reduced-price meals (both school breakfast and school lunch), students must submit either an application or 'direct certification letter' (for those students receiving certain types of public benefits). In the 2008-2009 school year, over half (53%) of all students in schools qualified for free and reduced-price school meals by submitting qualifying paperwork in NYS.

A Majority of Breakfasts are Eaten by Low-Income Students: Schools help provide good nutrition to low-income students who might not otherwise be eating at home. A majority of breakfasts served with the SBP are eaten by low-income students. During the 2008-2009 school year, 80% of all breakfasts served were eaten by students approved to eat free or reduced-price school meals.

The School Breakfast Program is Not Reaching Enough Low-Income Students: Even though a student qualifies to eat free or reduced-price school meals, it does not guarantee that the student will actually participate in the SBP. Less than 1 in 3 (27%) of students qualified to eat free or reduced-price school meals in 2008-2009 actually ate school breakfast.

Participation in the School Breakfast Program is Significantly Lower Than in the National School Lunch Program: School lunch participation remains high amongst low-income students. More often than not, students who eat a free or reduced-price lunch could also benefit from a free or reduced-price breakfast. However, in NYS many low-income students are missing out on school breakfast. During the 2008-2009 school year, for every 100 school lunches served to low-income students, only 37 school breakfasts were served to low-income students.

NYS is Missing Out on Millions of Federal Dollars: For each school breakfast served, schools receive a per-meal reimbursement, primarily from the federal government to pay for meal-related costs. Since serving more breakfasts means more reimbursement, it is financially advantageous for NYS to increase participation in the SBP. If 60% of the low-income students eating lunch with the National School Lunch Program also ate breakfast at school with the SBP, NYS could receive \$55 million additional federal reimbursement dollars annually.

Data based on information provided by NYSED



Recommendations for the SBP in NYS

Federal Recommendations:

- Provide start-up grants to support universal classroom breakfast initiatives.
- Increase per-meal reimbursements to support higher meal quality and incorporate more fresh fruits and whole grains.
- Eliminate the reduced-price meal category and make school meals free for students living in households up to 185% of poverty.
- Provide funding to support program administration at the federal, state, and local levels.

NYS Recommendations:

- Simplify the method of 'direct certification' to ensure that all students receiving food stamps and/or TANF are automatically qualified to receive free school meals.
- Increase state-funded per-meal breakfast reimbursements rates.
- Recognize and reward schools that use alternative service methods to ensure breakfast is part of the school day.
- Increase the numbers of schools operating the SBP throughout NYS.
- Promote school breakfast within the school community to increase awareness of its existence.

For more information about the SBP,
please contact
Rachel Hye Youn Rupright at
rachel.rupright@nutritionconsortium.org