



Assessing Your School Breakfast Potential

Participation in the School Breakfast Program is important – primarily as a way to help meet the nutritional needs of students, but also to help schools receive maximum reimbursement and run a successful program. This section will help you build a School Breakfast Program pilot or expansion team, identify strengths and barriers to increasing participation, create an action plan to address program improvements, and incorporate marketing strategies to make school breakfast healthier and more appealing to students.

Step 1: Create a School Breakfast Expansion Team

Important changes generally occur when one person sees the need for change and is willing to take action. Most likely, you will find other individuals who are interested in expanding the School Breakfast Program to help more children get the nutrition they need during the school day. A good first step is to discuss your ideas about expansion of the School Breakfast Program with an existing health-focused team such as a school health committee or the district's local wellness committee.

If you aren't already part of a school health or wellness team, ask to take part in an upcoming meeting to share your ideas. If your State has a Nutrition Network to link local health departments, school districts, food banks, and non-profit agencies together to coordinate nutrition initiatives, have you considered whether or not these relationships could produce additional members for your team? Approach teachers, school counselors and nurses, administrators, parents, students, and community members and leaders and ask them to get involved. If necessary, create a sub-committee of interested people to take on school breakfast expansion as their main focus.

Step 2a: Assess your Breakfast Potential [*For new programs*]

If your school currently does not have a School Breakfast Program, you will need to make an assessment of your school's potential to support morning meal service. How many students would be expected to participate? What capacity do you have for various service delivery methods?

- **Current Lunch Participation Rates:** What is current participation? Compare your participation rates in the National School Lunch Program with total enrollment for each school. You may want to use data from your October claim for reimbursement to calculate your participation rates. How many students qualify for free or reduced price (F/RP) meal benefits? For traditional breakfast service, a good baseline for minimum expected participation is either $\frac{1}{4}$ of your total enrollment, or $\frac{1}{3}$ of your F/RP students. However, participation will in most cases be much, much higher if using an alternative service delivery method. Work with your State agency to get information on

participation rates at similar schools located throughout your State, and use this as a point of comparison.

- **Student Demographics:** Are there specific populations that are under-served? Which specific populations already have high participation rates at lunch?
- **Possible Barriers:** Try to identify barriers that might prevent students from participating in a breakfast program, were you to implement one. How might these barriers prevent your breakfast program's participation level from reaching its full potential?
- **Strengths:** What strengths does your school or district have that the school breakfast team can utilize? What aspects of your current school food service operation work well? What individuals and groups are interested in promoting healthier school nutrition environments?
- **Team Members:** Are there key stakeholders missing from the wellness committee or breakfast exploration team? This toolkit addresses this in depth in the **Identifying Key Stakeholders** section.
- **Overall Goals:** Building a sustainable breakfast program is one strategy to help improve the overall health and academic performance of students. Are there other measurable goals, such as improved behavior or fewer visits to the school nurse, that you are able to focus on?
- **Operating Costs:** School districts face many challenges in serving healthy meals within tight financial constraints. Make sure that you prepare some baseline projections for the costs and revenues associated with operating your School Breakfast Program, using various combinations of service delivery methods and assumptions regarding participation rates. Think about ways to maximize the cost-effectiveness of the program.
- **Potential Funding/Resources:** When school breakfast participation levels fall short of expectations, the school or district may need to support the program with funding sources other than Federal reimbursement or cash payments. Some organizations offer funding to help schools expand their breakfast programs. Take a look at www.grants.gov or <http://www.fns.usda.gov/> for possible Federal funding sources. Use the information collected in your initial assessment and outline your action plan/budget to submit as part of a grant application. Identify potential partners with the **Getting Started with School Breakfast** module.

Step 2b: Assess Your Current Breakfast Program [For existing programs to be expanded]

Once you have a group dedicated to expanding school breakfast participation, you will want to examine how well the School Breakfast Program is working in your district or school. Before you move forward with an action plan, conduct a needs assessment by considering these factors:

- **Current Breakfast Participation Rates:** What is your current participation level? Compare your participation rates for breakfast and lunch with total enrollment for each school. You may want to use data from your October claim for reimbursement to calculate your participation rates.
- **Student Demographics:** Are there specific populations that are under-served? Which populations have high participation rates?
- **Possible Barriers:** Determine what barriers might exist that currently keep students from participating in the breakfast program. What are some of the reasons breakfast participation does not reach its potential?
- **Strengths:** What strengths does your school or district have that the school breakfast team can utilize? What aspects of your current breakfast program work well? What individuals and groups are interested in promoting healthier school nutrition environments?
- **Team Members:** Are there key stakeholders missing from the wellness committee or breakfast expansion team? This toolkit addresses this in depth in the **Identifying Key Stakeholders** section.
- **Overall Goals:** Expanding breakfast participation is one strategy to help improve the overall health and academic performance of students. Are there other goals, such as improved behavior or visits to the school nurse, that you are able to measure?
- **Operating Costs:** School districts face many challenges in serving healthy meals within tight financial constraints. The next bullet provides some resources to help you calculate the cost of operating your School Breakfast Program, and maximize the cost-effectiveness of the program.
- **Potential Funding/Resources:** When school breakfast participation levels fall short of expectations, the school or district may need to support the program with funding sources other than Federal reimbursement or cash payments. Some organizations offer funding to help schools expand their breakfast programs. Take a look at www.grants.gov for possible funding sources. Use the information collected in your initial assessment and outline your action plan/budget to submit as part of a grant application. Identify potential partners with the **Getting Started with School Breakfast** module.
 - For example, the National Dairy Council and its affiliates regularly award grants to help schools that need funds to expand their programs.

Step 3: Develop an Action Plan/Implementation Strategy

Review the school's strengths and weaknesses and select areas for improvement. Use results from your needs assessment to create necessary changes in food, timing or method of service.

- Decide which areas to tackle first, and which to do later.
- Outline specific activities and realistic timeframes to achieve the desired improvements. Borrow ideas from other districts that have increased breakfast participation.
- Assign responsibilities to specific team members.
- Determine what materials and resources are needed to complete the activities.
- Gain support from key stakeholders
- Set timelines for reviewing successes and resolving problems, and include a method for evaluating progress.

Step 4: Put Your Plan Into Action

Get your implementation activities under way. Enlist help from team members and other stakeholders to promote and market the School Breakfast Program. Meet regularly to keep momentum going toward completing each objective. Monitor progress and adjust your timelines as necessary.

Step 5: Evaluate Your Plan

Review your progress—recognize your successes and resolve problems that arise. Your team may need to revise the plan as you go along to make sure you accomplish your goals.

Step 6: Share Your Success Story

Let other people in the community (including the media) know about your activities. Invite them to participate as often as possible. This will help you win support for your goals, gain recognition for your school, and encourage others to join the team. In the **Marketing Your Program** module, you'll find resources such as public service announcements (PSAs), sample articles, and media releases to help you generate interest in your program.