



Developing a Marketing Strategy

After analyzing your district's or school's needs, gaining key stakeholder support, and putting your breakfast establishment or expansion plan into action, it's time to promote your program! This is where marketing comes into play.

Marketing is more than just announcing "breakfast is served." An effective marketing strategy promotes school breakfast as a tasty, healthy, convenient, and "smart" choice, and targets the right audience with each message. This section will help you boost participation rates by raising awareness of the program's availability as a positive opportunity for students at school.

For additional tips and resources on marketing and promoting your meal program, check out the research-based strategies from Cornell University's Smarter Lunchrooms Movement: <http://smarterlunchrooms.org>.

STEP 1: Define your Objective

You will be most successful in achieving your goal if you tailor your activities to your specific needs. In the **Assessing School Breakfast Potential** document in this toolkit, you were given information on defining those needs. Are parents unaware of the program? Are children not enticed? Do community members and key stakeholders know about the benefits of breakfast and importance of children starting their day with a healthy meal? Determining the answers to these questions will in turn assist you as you shape your marketing campaign. Refer to the table on the following page for guidance on how to address some of the most common challenges faced by school food service directors when attempting to establish or expand a School Breakfast Program.

If you find that...	...try to...	...by...
<p>People don't know about the breakfast program</p>	<p>Increase awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending home informational flyers • Hosting a parents breakfast • Serving breakfast at lunch • Posting menus online • Posting promotional materials in the cafeteria, in classrooms, and in hallways at school
<p>People don't look favorably on the current breakfast program</p>	<p>Improve perception of the breakfast program or change the foods you offer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting input on what your customers want and applying it • Coming up with a new gimmick for your program • Having a contest where students get to plan the ultimate breakfast menu
<p>People don't think the current program is healthy</p>	<p>Improve nutritional quality of meals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing current recipes and menus to ensure they meet the nutrition standards • Adding more fruits and vegetables to your meals • Advertising more prominently the most "healthy" menu choices each day
<p>You want to increase sales</p>	<p>Increase student and teacher participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting menu choices • Holding a taste test event to give potential participants a sample of foods offered • Offering alternative breakfast delivery methods (Grab 'N' Go, classroom breakfast, etc.)

One of the most important ways to increase participation in breakfast is to consider using an alternative service method such as breakfast in the classroom, grab n' go, or breakfast after first period. These methods are discussed in the **There's More Than One Way to Serve Breakfast** document of this toolkit. The guidance provided in the **Involving Key Stakeholders** document will help you show key stakeholders the importance of breakfast and convince them to make necessary changes. This section will help you sell your program, no matter how you have it set up, once it is established.

STEP 2: Target Your Audience

Different audiences may be concerned with different aspects of school breakfast:

- **Students**
- **Parents and Guardians**
- **Teachers**
- **Administrators**
- **Communities**

When targeting your audience, you may wish to consider:

- **Specific Ages and Grade Levels**
- **Cultural Identity**
- **Language**

STUDENTS

What's Important to Students:

- **Food That Tastes Good.** Find out what types of foods your students like to eat, and try to tailor your menu planning to their preferences.
- **Having Fun.** Make sure activities that promote school breakfast are age appropriate and varied. Examples might include contests, tasting events, and farm to school programming.
- **Being Healthy.** Your students (especially teenagers) are interested in the benefits of eating healthy foods. Show them that participating in school breakfast is a delicious way to help them energize their day and maintain a balanced diet!

Marketing Methods:

- Teacher encouragement
- School posters

- Assemblies
- Peer nutrition educators or a student food council
- Contests
- Advertisements on school computer screensavers and during school announcements
- Surveys about food preferences
- Articles in school newsletters
- Farm to school events
- Hosting taste tests

PARENTS and GUARDIANS

What's Important to Parents and Guardians:

- **Convenience.** Mornings can be hectic and fast paced. School breakfast takes one thing off the morning “to do” list, and helps parents and children to decompress their routine.
- **Value.** Breakfast at school is inexpensive yet provides students with tremendous benefits. Furthermore, many families that already participate in the National School Lunch Program are eligible for free or reduced price breakfast.
- **Nutrition.** Parents can be sure their child is eating a healthy breakfast. The updated school breakfast standards require daily offerings of fruit, whole grains, low-fat and fat free milk, plus limitations on saturated fat, *trans* fat, sodium, and calories.
- **Positive Academic Performance.** Research shows that students who eat a healthy breakfast are more attentive, have better memory recall, and perform better on standardized tests than those who do not eat a healthy breakfast.

Marketing Methods:

- Flyers
- Articles in the school newsletter
- Automated messages on school phone lines (attendance line, “on hold” messages)
- Presentations at PTA meetings

- Parent teacher conferences
- Public service announcements (PSAs)

TEACHERS

What's Important to Teachers:

- **Strong Academics.** Students who eat a healthy breakfast have been linked to better academic achievement than students who do not eat a healthy breakfast.
- **Healthy Students.** School breakfasts provide daily offerings of fruit, whole grains, low-fat and fat free milk, and limitations on saturated fat, *trans fat*, sodium, and calories, helping to guarantee that participating students start their day strong.
- **Instruction time.** School breakfast does not have to interrupt the school day. Breakfast in the classroom can be an opportunity for nutrition education or a short, scheduled “nutrition break.”
- **Student Behavior.** Eating breakfast is linked to better student behavior, increased attentiveness, and fewer absences.

Marketing Methods:

- Leadership and support from school administration
- Research on the academic and behavioral benefits of breakfast
- A “trial run” of breakfast in the classroom
- Provide information about breakfast in the classroom and other alternative serving methods
- Success stories from teachers at other schools
- Invite teacher participation on school breakfast decisions

ADMINISTRATORS

What's Important to Administrators:

- **School Performance.** School breakfast can help improve academic performance for those students who otherwise would not eat a healthy morning meal.
- **Behavior.** Students are more attentive and better behaved when they have eaten breakfast in the morning.
- **Healthy Students.** School breakfasts provide daily offerings of fruit, whole grains, low-fat and fat free milk, and limitations on saturated fat, *trans* fat, sodium, and calories, helping to guarantee that participating students start their day strong.
- **Cost effective strategies.** Administrators need to know that school breakfast programs can be cost effective, and may generate additional revenue for the nonprofit food service account.

Marketing Methods:

- PowerPoint presentations (sample included in this toolkit)
- Letters (samples included in this toolkit)
- Other administrators' letters of support/success stories
- Invitations to school breakfast events
- Research detailing the academic benefits of a healthy breakfast
- A well thought-out breakfast expansion plan
- Cost calculations (use calculators included in the toolkit)

COMMUNITIES

What's Important to the Community:

- **Academic performance.** Local residents want strong schools in their communities. A highly accessible breakfast program can help to increase the integrity of a school's academics, while providing a valuable and convenient service to students and parents/guardians.
- **Healthy Students.** Healthy children help to make a healthy community. Eating a healthy breakfast is an important part of a balanced diet.

- **Help During Difficult Economic Times.** Families whose children are eligible for free or reduced price lunches are also eligible for free or reduced price breakfast. The School Breakfast Program can help families that are working hard to make ends meet provide a balanced, nutritious meal at a low or no cost.

Marketing Methods:

- PSAs
- Local news/media coverage
- Community outreach events
- Inviting local politicians to share a school breakfast meal with students
- Inviting local celebrities to participate in a school breakfast.

*For more information on identifying key stakeholders and addressing their concerns, visit the **Identifying Key Stakeholders** module.*

Other things to consider when targeting your audience:

- **Specific Ages and Grade Levels**
 - Marketing to a nine-year-old and marketing to a teenager require very different approaches to messaging. Analyze what your school's students are interested in and try to use it to your advantage. Be aware of their daily concerns, and what is most important from their perspective. Is there a television character that they like? Do teenagers have concerns about nutrition and health, and are they aware of all the benefits offered by breakfast? Do students avoid breakfast because they think it is “un-cool?”
- **Cultural Identity**
 - If you are targeting a diverse group of students, you might consider foods from a variety of cultural influences for breakfast. In the United States, we typically associate waffles, pancakes, cereal and certain kind of fruits with breakfast. Consider researching breakfast recipes that hail from the cultural/ethnic backgrounds that are present in your student body. Better yet, ask students to share favorite breakfast menu ideas from their families' recipe books and

incorporate them into the breakfast rotation, if feasible. Serving something new at breakfast can make your program more attractive!

- **Language**
 - Many students may come from homes where English is not the primary language. Promoting your program in a variety of languages will help you to reach the widest audience.

STEP 3: Create Your Image

There are several factors to consider when developing a breakfast image. Not only do you have to define your own product and service, you have to look at it in the context of your competition and find ways to emphasize the advantages of School Breakfast.

What are you offering?

- Nutritious food for students in the form of well-balanced meals.
- A convenient alternative for parents in the morning.
- A low-cost meal that has a positive impact on children's learning experience.

What is your competition?

- Fast food restaurants, vending machines, student store, convenience stores, a la carte items

Compare your Prices and Promotion Methods

- How does your competition (sources of breakfast other than student homes) market their products?
- What promotion methods of theirs are most effective, and what are yours?
- How do your prices compare?
- How do you differ from them?
- How do you distribute your meals?
- What methods have you used before?

- What has been effective?
- What other possible methods?
- How much money do you have? What can you do with your current resources?
- How are you testing your marketing tools?
- How are you measuring results?
- What can you start doing NOW?

Then, sell your product with:

SIGNS - Create signage that fits the type of service you are providing. Keep the message and design simple to ensure readability. Design and print out simple signs for meal descriptions or for the cafeteria.

MENUS - Menus offer vital information regarding types of meals served and enhance the image of the school meal programs. Students are not the only people who see the menus; parents, teachers, principals and community members also see them. Describe how your school meals meet the nutrition standards and Dietary Guidelines recommendations. Include nutrition education messages. Collaborate with teachers to promote themes that align with classroom lessons, such as “Breads from Around the World” or “Harvest of the Month,” etc.

MAKE MENU CHOICES MORE APPEALING - Imagine yourself in a restaurant. You scan the menu for your appetizer and entrée for the meal. As you look at the words, your decision is solely based upon the words on the piece of paper. So use words that are enticing or exciting, because if they sound good to you, they will probably sound good to the next person. Try using some of these words when describing your meals. Remember to deliver what you promise. For some ideas on appealing food descriptions, consider

ENVIRONMENT - The environment where students eat is important. Sometimes cafeterias are used for food service, gym class, sports practice, assemblies and meetings. Create an area that is neutral for those activities and design ways that it could be more relaxing and entertaining to eat there. Play background music or decorate the walls so that it looks more appealing and fun. Review some of your “nuts and bolts” business practices, like structure of the serving lines, how food is arranged and presented to students, and the location of the registers and trash bins. Solicit ideas of how you can create an environment where students will enjoy eating. Improve customer service by maintaining a positive attitude when serving food. Train food service staff on customer service and problem solving. More information on these strategies is available in the **Serving a Healthy Breakfast** document in the **Implementing Your Program** module.