



Effective Policies for Increasing Participation in School Breakfast Programs

SUMMARY

The following issue brief addresses policy changes that states and districts can enact to increase School Breakfast Program (SBP) participation. Policy change is an important tool for achieving sustainable, widespread change and school breakfast policy is an area ripe for advocacy. Through state legislation or district policy, states and localities have taken steps to increase participation in school breakfast, including:

- Requiring schools to offer breakfast.
- Requiring innovative breakfast models.
- Eliminating the reduced-price category.
- Providing universally-free breakfast.
- Providing an additional per-meal reimbursement.
- Providing funding for start-up/expansion costs related to changing breakfast models.

This brief also describes common obstacles to these policy changes, such as lack of support from key decision makers, and strategies to overcome these obstacles. Finally, the brief provides details on successful school breakfast policies enacted in New Mexico and the District of Columbia. NM and DC passed legislation requiring innovative breakfast models in schools with significant numbers of low-income students and both places have seen a largely positive and successful response to these policy changes. NM and DC now have the two highest school breakfast participation rates in the country.

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IMPORTANCE OF POLICY

Policy change is a powerful tool to effect social change. The passage of one piece of legislation can achieve widespread, lasting results that can surpass individual efforts in communities across the country. Enacting new policies can also help institutionalize these changes so that they become permanent practice.

School nutrition policy, and school breakfast policy, in particular, is an area ripe for policy advocacy. Successful efforts in schools, school districts and states across the country demonstrate that enacting school breakfast policy can result in relatively quick, meaningful changes to ensure that all children start the day with a healthy meal that prepares them for learning. For example, legislation passed in 2010 required schools in Washington, D.C. with significant numbers of low-income children to implement innovative breakfast models designed to boost participation in school breakfast. As a result, in one year, D.C. soared to first place from 20th in national rankings on school breakfast participation.¹

SCHOOL BREAKFAST BASICS

Research finds breakfast is important for academics, behavior and health. Despite these benefits, for a variety of reasons, many families have difficulty providing breakfast for their children every morning. Limited budgets, tight schedules and hectic mornings can mean that children skip breakfast or the breakfast they consume is not a balanced, healthy meal.

The federal School Breakfast Program (SBP) can help, but currently only about half of low-income children who eat a school lunch also eat school breakfast. This means that on any given day more than 10 million low-income children may be going without a balanced school breakfast. Traditionally, most schools serve breakfast in the cafeteria before the start of the school day. Unfortunately, too many families find it difficult to get their children to school that early in the morning or many students may simply not have an appetite for breakfast that early. These traditional models for serving school breakfast often suffer from poor participation and, as a result, can be a financial liability for the school budget.

However, innovative school breakfast delivery options, such as Breakfast in the Classroom or Grab N' Go breakfast, make school breakfast part of the school day and result in much higher rates of participation. These programs can help combat childhood hunger, improve academic performance and nutrition and bring in much needed federal funds.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR INCREASING ACCESS TO SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Federal rules establish the basic structure of program requirements, but state and local policies are free to build on this structure to improve the program. Through legislation, agency or district policy, states and localities have taken the steps described below to increase access to school breakfast.

Requiring schools to offer breakfast.

Because there is no current federal requirement that schools offer breakfast, approximately half of states have established a requirement that all schools offer breakfast, or that schools with a certain percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals offer breakfast. This type of requirement ensures that low-income, potentially food insecure, children at least have the option of eating breakfast at school.

¹ "School Breakfast Scorecard, School Year 2010-11". Food Research and Action Center. January 2012. http://frac.org/pdf/school_breakfast_scorecard_2010-2011.pdf.

Requiring innovative breakfast models, such as Breakfast in the Classroom or Grab N' Go.

Even for schools that do offer breakfast, most suffer from low rates of participation. To address this problem, some school districts, including Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles, have instituted innovative policies designed to increase participation by making breakfast part of the school day through models such as Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab N' Go or Second Chance Breakfast.² Similarly, states, such as New Mexico and Washington, D.C., have passed legislation requiring certain schools to implement universal breakfast as part of the school day. The New Mexico and Washington, D.C. legislation are described in detail below. These alternative breakfast models have proven to be the most effective way for schools to increase participation in their breakfast programs.

***Breakfast in the Classroom** - Students eat breakfast in the classroom at the beginning of the school day or during morning break time.*

***Breakfast After First Period** - This model is also called a nutrition break or second chance breakfast. Students eat breakfast during a break in the morning.*

***Grab 'N Go** - With this model, breakfast is brought to the student, making it easier for them to participate. Strategically positioned carts often act as mobile serving areas.*

Eliminating the reduced-price category.

Eliminating the reduced-price category and providing universally-free breakfast are other strategies to boost participation in breakfast, and often pair well with the breakfast models described above. Students from families earning between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for reduced-price school meals, which means they must pay up to 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch. While these co-payments can be a financial barrier for some families, they also pose administrative challenges for schools because they must keep track of which students qualify for reduced-price meals, collect these co-payments and ensure delinquent accounts are repaid. School districts across the country report that students have a hard time affording co-payments for school meals; participation is lower for students who qualify for reduced-price meals when compared to those who qualify for free meals; and participation drops off toward the end of the month when family budgets may be particularly tight. For these reasons, a number of states, such as Washington and Vermont, have enacted policies to eliminate the reduced-price category. According to a 2006 survey of school food services from the School Nutrition Association, nineteen percent of respondents reported eliminating the reduced-price category at some point for SBP and found that participation rose 44 percent on average.³

Providing universally-free breakfast.

A related policy is to establish universal school breakfast, which means that breakfast is available at no cost to all students. This includes eliminating the reduced-price category, but it also means that students from families earning more than 185 percent of the poverty level would no longer have to pay for their meal. Universal breakfast helps schools by eliminating the paperwork and labor related to tracking income and meal payments and also helps reduce the stigma associated with school meals. Universal breakfast works best at schools with high rates of free and reduced-price eligible students. Provision 2, a meal claiming option provided by USDA to help schools with serving universally-free meals, is worth pursuing in many school districts.⁴ Universal breakfast is often used in conjunction with a new breakfast delivery model, such as Breakfast in the Classroom. Universal breakfast alone does not necessarily translate to large participation increases, but it is a great step forward to achieving other successes.

² For more information on how these breakfast models work, visit Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices, <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/>.

³ For more information on eliminating reduced-price, refer to this link from the School Nutrition Association, <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=12586>.

⁴ For more information on Provision 2, refer to this USDA link, http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/prov-1-2-3/provision1_2_3.htm.

Providing an additional per-meal reimbursement for breakfast.

States can also provide funding to incentivize schools to increase participation or to improve the quality and appeal of the breakfasts served. More than a dozen states, including Nebraska and Iowa, have appropriated an extra per-meal reimbursement as an incentive for schools to serve breakfast. California passed legislation creating a successful pilot program that provided schools with an extra reimbursement for an additional serving of fruits or vegetables with breakfast. This pilot program not only had nutrition benefits but also contributed to a small participation increase in participating schools.⁵

Providing funding for start-up/expansion costs related to changing breakfast models.

Starting a new school breakfast program or expanding an existing one to serve more children can carry one-time costs, such as purchasing equipment to serve breakfast or deliver meals to the classroom. Some states, including Connecticut, Colorado, California, and others, have made funds available to schools for these purposes. These funds can be restricted to schools that are implementing an innovative breakfast model, such as Breakfast in the Classroom, or for schools with a high proportion of students that qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTING POLICIES

Targeting policies to high need schools.

Depending on the state or school district, policies may need to be adapted in order to target those children most in need or at risk of food insecurity. Many school breakfast policies create thresholds based on the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals or academic performance as measured by test scores. For example, schools with 50 percent or more students who participate in free or reduced-price meals will be affected by the policy change, while schools that do not meet this level are unaffected by the policy. Alternatively, a state or school district can design the policy to impact only schools that meet the federal definition of “severe need,”⁶ a federal category based on the percentage of low-income students in a school. Severe need schools qualify for a higher level of federal reimbursement. Given the importance of breakfast for learning and academic achievement, another targeting strategy is to focus on low-performing schools, based on annual standardized test scores.

Allowing schools to opt out of policies that would cause undue burdens.

Another adaptation to consider is allowing schools a yearly opt-out or waiver if the school can demonstrate why it cannot comply with the requirement. For example, Kansas requires school breakfast in all public schools unless the Board of Education allows for a waiver. However, the state does not allow waivers for schools where 35 percent or more of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The Kansas State Department of Education appoints a committee to evaluate the waiver applications, determine the validity of the reason(s) for which a waiver is requested, and recommend to the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) whether to grant or deny the waiver request. The KSBE evaluates the committee's recommendations and makes the final decision to approve or deny the request.⁷

These waivers can also be structured such that the public has an opportunity to review and comment before it is approved by an independent body, such as a school board or state board of education. In

⁵ For more information on this pilot, refer to the evaluation conducted by the UC Berkeley Center for Weight and Health available at <http://cwh.berkeley.edu/resource/evaluation-california-fresh-start-program-report>.

⁶ A severe need school is one where 40 percent of the lunches served were free or reduced-price during the second previous school year.

⁷ More information on Kansas school breakfast is available at http://www.kn-eat.org/SNP/SNP_Menu/SNP_Home.htm.

addition to a waiver, establishing a staggered or phased-in roll out can help allay concerns that school administrators might have with implementing new policies.

Providing funding to help schools implement new policies.

Funding is another area for policy development. While the federal government, through the USDA, provides schools with the funding to operate SBP, schools that change their delivery model may need to purchase certain items, such as point-of-sale machines for Grab N' Go breakfast or carts and insulated bags for Breakfast in the Classroom. Many schools have made these changes without additional funding, but specifically tying policy changes to funding can help ease passage of the legislation.

A number of states already have funding specifically devoted to school breakfast, either as a per-breakfast reimbursement or as grants available to help implement a school breakfast program. For example, Nebraska state law provides an extra 5 cents per breakfast served at public schools that also serve lunch. New Hampshire state law provides an extra 3 cents per breakfast for schools that have complied with federal wellness policy requirements. In the State of Washington, state law allows for funding for breakfast start-up or expansion grants, when appropriated.

While the current budget climate in many states makes new funding a challenge, some states might be able to re-appropriate existing funds to achieve new policy goals related to school breakfast.

“Since 1998, Maryland has appropriated funds to support the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program. Schools with at least 40 percent of their students eligible for free or reduced-price meals can apply for MMFA funding to implement a universal classroom breakfast program. State funding enables schools to cover the lost revenue associated with serving free meals to students who qualify for reduced-price or paid meals. An evaluation from Harvard University found that the MMFA program has a positive impact on Maryland School Performance Program scores and grades. Research also found a decrease in tardiness and suspensions and improvements in academic performance.”

DISTRICT LEVEL POLICY CHANGE

Advocating for state policy change is not the only strategy to consider. Several school districts across the country have also adopted school breakfast policies. In 2010, the Houston Independent School District Board of Education mandated the [First Class Breakfast Program](#)⁸ to provide students with a Breakfast in the Classroom in all elementary and middle schools. In 2011, Chicago Public Schools also adopted a district-wide Breakfast in the Classroom requirement. In 2012, the Los Angeles Unified School District announced the “Food for Thought” initiative to expand Breakfast in the Classroom to 675 schools serving over 500,000 students. These initiatives at some of the largest school districts in the country demonstrate that widespread changes can also occur at the local level. For case studies on the district policies in Chicago and Houston, visit bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast.

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL BREAKFAST POLICY

Before pursuing a policy change, it is important to consider how it would impact potential stakeholders and develop a strategy for engaging these groups and working through their concerns upfront. School breakfast policies can potentially affect teachers, school administrators, janitors, school food service staff, students, parents and other groups. Strong objections from any of these groups can block the progress of the policy and can generate unfavorable media coverage.

Meeting with and engaging groups that may have concerns can help smooth the passage of the policy. Associations representing teachers, principals, school administrators or other school staff might voice

⁸ For more information on Houston Independent School District’s First Class Breakfast Program, visit <http://bit.ly/Niswsl>.

opposition to any proposed legislative changes. Nationally, many of these groups support school breakfast expansion efforts. Common concerns include cost, scheduling, loss of instructional time, waste management and training. Often these concerns can arise simply from confusion or misunderstanding of how innovative breakfast programs operate.

Visiting a successful breakfast program that may already exist in your state or community is a great strategy to demonstrate the benefits of a strong breakfast program using an alternative delivery model. If one does not exist, many resources, such as videos and toolkits, are available on the [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/) (<http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/>). These resources describe how many of the common obstacles are easily overcome. A few of these are described below, as well as examples for overcoming them.

Common Obstacles	Example for Overcoming
Teachers or principals are concerned that Breakfast in the Classroom will interfere with instructional time.	The state education agency or legislature can issue a memo or proclamation declaring that Breakfast in the Classroom and instructional time are compatible and emphasizing how breakfast can help learning objectives. California, Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania have used this tactic.
Sanitation staff and teachers worry that waste will increase and classrooms will become messy.	Many schools have successfully addressed these concerns by delivering cleaning supplies, such as paper towels and wet napkins, placemats, and trash bags, along with meals to classrooms. With planning, meals can be designed to limit the possibility of messes, such as avoiding syrups or pre-slicing fruits.
Teachers won't support these changes.	With so many other responsibilities, teachers may believe that implementing these changes adds to their schedule. But, with advanced planning and involving teachers early, it is possible to gain their support. Teachers groups, such as the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, support strategies such as Breakfast in the Classroom. In a national survey of K-8 public school teachers, six out of 10 teachers reported that they have students who regularly come to school hungry and the most commonly cited solution from teachers was for schools to provide breakfast. A well-fed student is often more attentive, better behaved and ready-to-learn than a hungry one. For more information on school breakfast and support from teachers, visit http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/nea-hin-school-breakfast-toolkit for a toolkit created by the NEA and Share Our Strength.
Principals or school officials won't support these changes.	Not all principals understand the importance of school breakfast on learning nor the benefits of expanding school breakfast participation. Fellow principals and administrators from schools that have these programs are often the best spokespeople. A supportive video of a principal's positive experience with school breakfast is available at http://bit.ly/QBc1at . A champion in your state that has a successful Breakfast in the Classroom or Grab N' Go breakfast program can invite others to observe their program in action or speak to their peers at meetings or conferences. Visit http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/guidestoolkits for more tools from Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices.
School food service director won't support these changes.	A school food service director who runs a model program is a great spokesperson to help support the proposed policy change. They understand the unique challenges their colleagues face and can be strong advocates to persuade reluctant colleagues. Also, it is important to learn what support a school food service department needs to make the policy work, such as grants, technical assistance, or buy-in from administrators or teachers.

<p>Changes will cost too much money.</p>	<p>While some of these changes may require small upfront costs, they often result in more financially sound school breakfast operations. Traditional school breakfast programs often suffer from poor participation and resulting low revenues. If participation increases, the school brings in more federal reimbursements and the program can become profitable. In addition, small, strategic grants to support start up or expansion can help spur action. These resources exist both publicly and privately.</p>
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If these strategies still do not satisfy opposition voices, strategic compromise is another option. Such compromises might include adapting the initial policy goal by allowing for an opt-out or waiver, a phased or staggered implementation, or a narrower range of affected schools.

Many objections center on cost. The current fiscal situation of most state and local budgets make asking for more funding challenging. However, some states already provide funds for school meals. States could modify this funding stream to benefit school breakfast programs, such as providing funds for coolers, storage, or other one-time start-up costs associated with operating a breakfast program. Private funding is also sometimes available from foundations, corporations or other philanthropic entities.

Engaging media can also generate support for the policy change. Working with a few key journalists to coordinate a walk-through of a Breakfast in the Classroom program often produces positive, rich stories with great visuals of children eating breakfast. Policymakers respond favorably to these types of site visits, often becoming strong advocates for expanding them. Tips for working with the media and planning site visits are available on the [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/guidestoolkits), (<http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/guidestoolkits>).

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BREAKFAST LEGISLATION

While states have passed a variety of legislation to promote school breakfast, only a few have passed comprehensive legislation that requires the innovative breakfast programs that make breakfast part of the school day and have consistently worked to increase participation. Two examples are provided below.

New Mexico SB 144

In April 2011, Republican Governor Susana Martinez signed Senate Bill 144, to increase participation in school breakfast by mandating that high poverty elementary schools serve breakfast after-the-bell. New Mexico Appleseed, a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization, authored this legislation to both ensure that existing state dollars allocated for breakfast were leveraged to feed the most children and that any school that wanted to serve breakfast during instructional time had specific authority to do so.

Going into effect in the 2011-12 school year, the Bill:

- Requires that all elementary schools provide after-the-bell breakfast if 85 percent or more of enrolled students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals the prior year.
- Allows for a waiver from this requirement if a school can demonstrate financial hardship (though no waivers have been either requested or given.)
- Uses \$1.9 million in elementary school breakfast funds to reimburse the schools for lost revenue from serving a free meal to students eligible for a full-price or reduced-price breakfast.
- Includes language to allow breakfast to occur during the school day if instruction is occurring.

The bill was sponsored by State Senator Cynthia Nava, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, and was passed with wide bipartisan support in the Legislature.

Thorough research and background preparation prior to introduction of the bill was vital to their legislative success. New Mexico Appleseed conducted extensive research to demonstrate the educational and financial benefits every legislator would bring to his/her district if the bill passed. A thorough

understanding of the financial implications of state and federal dollars brought in under the law, the number of children who would be fed and the increased nutrition requirements from the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was crucial to achieving bipartisan support. New Mexico Appleseed understood all the relevant breakfast regulations and potential financial impact. They estimated the number of additional children schools would serve and the resulting increase in federal reimbursement dollars that they would draw down, assuming schools achieved a 90 percent participation rate.

Legislative Background

According to estimates from New Mexico Appleseed, the \$1.92 million in state elementary school breakfast funds issued through the funding formula set forth in the mandate, would bring in \$15.5 million federal dollars and serve 54,000 children from high poverty elementary schools. Recognizing that the fiscal consequences of such a requirement are often the biggest obstacle, the bill reallocated existing state funding for breakfast such that schools impacted by the legislation would receive funds to help implement after-the-bell breakfast.

The legislation had the support of the local school nutrition association, national advocacy organizations, and bipartisan support from former educators and superintendents in the legislature. The bill received beneficial media attention, including a positive editorial from a major state newspaper.

Implementation of New Mexico SB 144

Proper implementation is necessary to ensure the bill meets its potential. Framed as a means to improve academic outcomes, reception to the new breakfast requirement has been overwhelmingly positive. A [recent study](#)⁹ from NM Appleseed demonstrated that 82 percent of school officials (either principals or teachers) had a positive response to breakfast after-the-bell. There have been no reports of schools seeking a waiver from this requirement. State school breakfast funds help compensate schools for the costs associated with serving breakfasts for free to those who qualify for reduced-price or paid meals.

However, even with this largely positive response, challenges arose, but none are unique to New Mexico's legislation. Rather, these challenges are similar to those that arise across the nation when implementing innovative school breakfast models, particularly Breakfast in the Classroom. Some cited issues related to support from teachers and principals for the changes, a need for training on implementing innovative school breakfast models, and funds for the equipment that is sometimes needed to implement new school breakfast models. While the bill might not specifically address these issues, the state department of education and private groups, such as New Mexico Appleseed and DairyMax provide support, technical assistance and financial resources for implementation of these requirements.

School breakfast participation has soared in New Mexico since the passage of the bill. With an increase of 13 percent in free and reduced-price school breakfast participation, NM is now ranked first in the country in school breakfast participation.¹⁰

Washington, D.C. – Bill 18-564 – Healthy Schools Act

In May 2010, the D.C. Council passed the [Healthy Schools Act](#)¹¹, a bill that contained numerous provisions related to child health, nutrition, and school wellness, including stronger nutrition standards for school meals, increased physical activity requirements, standards for sustainable and local food procurement, and greater access to school meal programs.

⁹ To read the NM Appleseed study on school breakfast, "Full Stomachs = Full Minds", visit <http://bit.ly/Nomdy8>.

¹⁰ "School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2011-2012". Food Research and Action Center, http://frac.org/pdf/Scorecard_SY2011-2012.pdf.

¹¹ For more information on the Healthy Schools Act, visit <http://dchealthyschools.org/>.

Specific to breakfast, the Act required that all public schools and public charter schools offer free breakfast to all students. Elementary schools where more than 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals must serve Breakfast in the Classroom while middle and high schools who meet this threshold must offer any innovative breakfast service model, such as Breakfast in the Classroom or Grab N' Go. The Act also removes the reduced-price co-payment.

The Healthy Schools Act provides about \$4 million in annual funding to public and public charter schools to implement this landmark legislation. For meals that meet the heightened nutrition standards, the Act provides an additional \$0.10 for each breakfast, an additional \$0.10 for each lunch, and \$0.05 for serving local food as a meal component at breakfast or lunch. The Act also provides schools with funding for the elimination of the reduced-price co-payment for families whose household income placed them in that category. In the 2010-11 school year, the Act provided \$7 per student to public and public charter schools for costs associated with the requirement of starting up an innovative school breakfast model.

Legislative Background

Unanimously passed by the D.C. Council, the bill was signed in May 2010 and went into effect August 2010. It was introduced by then Council Chair Vincent Gray, and Councilmember Mary Cheh, who was then chair of the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment, the committee to which the bill was referred.

Advocacy organizations in D.C. played an instrumental role in getting the bill passed, including leading efforts by D.C. Hunger Solutions. D.C. Hunger Solutions had successfully been working with individual schools to increase breakfast participation, but also wanted to pursue a policy approach with the goal of creating district-wide change. Partnering with Councilmember Cheh, who championed this school wellness legislation, D.C. Hunger Solutions ensured the Act's inclusion of the key anti-hunger provisions, including free school breakfast, requirements for Breakfast in the Classroom and alternative new service models, the elimination of the reduced-price co-pay for lunch, and enhanced nutrition standards into this bill, called the Healthy Schools Act. This Act was one of the few bills passed during the session with local funding, which came from a new local soda tax.

Implementation of the Healthy Schools Act

The impact of the Healthy Schools Act was swift. According to annual breakfast participation rankings published by the Food Research and Action Center,¹² D.C.'s rank skyrocketed from 20th place to 1st place in the year after implementation, serving 32 percent more low-income children than the previous year.

D.C. Hunger Solutions published a report¹³ that analyzed implementation of breakfast in the classroom at D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) during the 2010-11 school year. The Act affected 66 of 85 elementary schools in DCPS. In the 57 DCPS schools that complied with the provisions, participation rose to an average of 71 percent, which was a 24 percentage point increase over the previous year, and brought in \$1.38 million additional in federal funds. This translates to over 4000 more kids eating school breakfast in 2010-11 than the previous year. In the 37 schools that implemented full Breakfast in the Classroom, participation rose to an average of 79 percent, up from 50 percent in the previous year.

The principal lessons learned were that:

- Schools achieve the best results when they offer breakfast after the school day starts.

¹² "School Breakfast Scorecard, 2010-11", Food Research and Action Center, http://frac.org/pdf/school_breakfast_scorecard_2010-2011.pdf

¹³ "Breakfast in the Classroom in D.C. Public Schools: 2010-2011 Successes and Recommendations", D.C. Hunger Solutions, http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/dc_classroom_breakfast_2010-2011report.pdf

- The most effective models have buy in from the principal.

According to a survey by D.C. Hunger Solutions at DCPS elementary schools, 77 percent of respondents, including principals, teachers, or other staff, enjoyed having Breakfast in the Classroom at school.

The report found that the major challenges at DCPS elementary schools include the following:

- Waivers by DCPS in year one of the Act allowed schools to not implement Breakfast in the Classroom, even though the law does not actually allow for waivers.
- A lack of required principal and/or coordinator training on Breakfast in the Classroom.
- Poor communication to/training for teachers.
- Need for more training for food service staff.
- Need to spread awareness of Breakfast in the Classroom successes.

The report recommended addressing challenges by disallowing waivers, increasing training opportunities and producing quarterly reviews of Breakfast in the Classroom programs and celebrating successes.

Lessons Learned from Policy Successes

New Mexico and Washington, D.C. both successfully passed meaningful school breakfast legislation that required Breakfast in the Classroom or other alternative breakfast models in schools with significant numbers of low-income children. While the specifics were different between the two bills, the lessons learned are similar.

Both had a strong local organization leading the advocacy effort. These organizations had the necessary expertise in school breakfast policy and local relationships to successfully advocate for their bills. Both bills created thresholds for requiring innovative breakfast models based on the percentage of low-income students. Both also included funding to help schools comply with the new requirements.

As breakfast advocates have learned across the country, as well as with the policy changes in New Mexico and D.C., it is important to include all relevant stakeholders, such as teachers, principals, school food service staff and others in the planning process as early as possible. The more that these groups are involved and included, the more likely it is that they will support the policy change.

Perhaps the most important lesson learned is that policy works! The District of Columbia's participation in school breakfast ballooned just one year after the passage of the Healthy Schools Act. New Mexico and DC are now ranked first and second, respectively, in terms of the proportion of free and reduced-school lunch participants who also eat school breakfast.¹⁴

Next Steps and Planning

If you are interested in pursuing school breakfast policy change, start by considering the following initial factors as they apply to your state or school district:

- Is school breakfast currently required to be served?
- What are current breakfast participation rates?
- What is the estimated impact of proposed policy on cost to schools, increase in number of children served, and increase in federal reimbursement dollars?
- Does your state or school district appropriate funds for school nutrition that can be used for this policy change?

¹⁴ "School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2011-2012". Food Research and Action Center, http://frac.org/pdf/Scorecard_SY2011-2012.pdf.



- What are the levels of free and reduced-price eligible children in schools? What thresholds could be established and how many schools would they affect?
- What relevant associations (such as PTA, teachers' unions, school administrators groups, etc.) should you engage?

When looking for a policy maker to support your bill, consider a legislator that is on a relevant committee, such as education or health, to which the bill may be referred. Prior to moving forward with the legislation, it is important to line up supporters, such as principals, school board members, teachers, and school nurses. Be sure to prepare data and talking points to respond to common questions about the impact of these changes, the costs associated and what the outcomes will be. Additional resources, examples, templates and more can be found at BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org/School-Breakfast. Data about state school breakfast participation can be found on this interactive map at BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org/School-Breakfast#.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to New Mexico Appleseed, New Mexico Public Education Department, and DC Hunger Solutions for their time and assistance on this policy brief.