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# INTRODUCTION

## THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

The School Breakfast Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in schools and institutions, serving breakfasts in 1,475 Maryland schools for the 2007-2008 school year. Many different types of schools serve breakfast, elementary through high school, rural and urban. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free breakfasts to children each school day. The program was established to ensure that all children have access to a healthy breakfast at school in order to promote learning readiness and healthy eating behaviors.

The School Breakfast Program operates very similarly to the National School Lunch Program. Both programs allow children to qualify for free or reduced price meals, based on their family's income.

## BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY BREAKFAST

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day – educationally and nutritionally. A key piece of boosting children's well-being and improving schools is to ensure that each child can start the day right with a healthy breakfast at school.

- **Breakfast helps children learn.** Numerous studies show that breakfast improves learning and attendance, and reduces behavior problems and tardiness. Children who eat breakfast at school – closer to test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.

- **Breakfast promotes good health.**

Eating breakfast at school results in fewer visits to the school nurse, improves children's diets, reduces absenteeism, and helps build healthy eating habits. Additionally, children who start the day with a good breakfast are less likely to be obese.

The benefits of breakfast are significant, but too many children in Maryland miss out on a healthy start to their day. During the 2007-2008 school year, only 44 eligible low-income children across the state participated in school breakfast for every 100 who participated in school lunch. Because eating breakfast is essential to students' ability to learn, stay healthy, and behave in school, it is vital to assess how effectively schools, school districts, counties, and the state as a whole are doing in reaching their students with school breakfast.

With less than half of Maryland's eligible children participating in the School Breakfast Program and more children becoming eligible as families are harshly affected during this economic recession, it is imperative to reduce barriers to participation and prioritize the expansion of breakfast participation in our schools.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed for stakeholders who aspire for more of their students to start the day with a healthy breakfast by implementing flexible serving models.

This toolkit will help determine the type of delivery service best suited for your school and demonstrate how the delivery service can be implemented. This toolkit also showcases innovative breakfast delivery models from around Baltimore as well as Maryland. It features profiles of various programs' operations and accomplishments, the barriers that have been faced, and the tactics used to overcome these challenges.

## GETTING STARTED

Whether you are a school principal or a food service director, there is something in this toolkit to help you enlist support from key decision makers and begin planning your school breakfast program expansion.

Included are the following tools:

- Descriptions, ideas, and examples of various delivery service options.
- Information and problem solving ideas for stakeholders at every level.
- Resources and tools to communicate breakfast to various stakeholders.

*What we find particularly exciting is that this [school breakfast] is a relatively simple intervention that can significantly improve children's academic performance and psychological well-being.*

J. Michael Murphy, EdD, School Breakfast Program researcher, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School