

ASSESSING THE NEED IN YOUR SCHOOL

Prior to expanding your school's breakfast program, it is important to assess the demographics, need, and interest at your school. Some questions to ask about your school:

DOES YOUR SCHOOL CURRENTLY HAVE THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM?

If your school does not currently have the program and are interested in finding out more information about reimbursements, program regulations, and more, please go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/breakfast> for more details. In Maryland, schools with at least 15% of their students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must serve breakfast.

DOES YOUR SCHOOL QUALIFY FOR MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT?

Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) is a state-funded breakfast program administered through the Maryland State Department of Education. First started in 1998 in several Maryland elementary schools, MMFA allows schools to offer breakfast for free to all students in the classroom regardless of their family income. MMFA in-classroom breakfast increases breakfast participation.

Schools with more than 40 percent free and reduced price meal enrollment can apply for limited state MMFA funding. The state seeks applications from all schools that are eligible. Factors taken into consideration include geographic diversity and varying rates of free and reduced price school enrollment. The state provides funding to the schools for the meal costs or proportion of meal costs that are not reimbursed by the federal government. For the 2007-2008 school year, 196 schools across Maryland were funded to participate in the MMFA program. Across the state, more than 630 schools were eligible for MMFA for the 2007-2008 school year, but state funding does not cover all of these schools. For the 2008-2009 school year, the program was funded at \$3.1 million dollars – enough funding to cover just one-third of eligible schools. This funding may be reduced for the upcoming school year due to budget cuts.

Maryland Meals for Achievement was legislated after private foundations studied the impact of serving universal breakfast in the classroom at the beginning of the school day. Participation jumped dramatically from about 18% before the pilot began to 85% within two months of serving breakfast in the classroom. The initiative sought to reduce the stigma children may feel about participating in a program that's seen as only "for poor kids" by serving breakfast to all students, and it sought to make it easier to serve breakfast to students who may have been unable to participate in the cafeteria before the school day began by serving breakfast in the classroom. An evaluation by researchers from Harvard University found that MMFA schools reported a decrease in tardiness and suspensions and an increase in Maryland School Performance Program (MSPAP) scores and grades.

If your school does not currently have the program and is interested in finding out more information about reimbursements, program regulations, and more, please go to http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/meals_achieve.htm.

WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

Who composes the population you are serving? Are there specific populations that are underserved? Does your school include grades K-6 or K-8 or K-12? Middle school and high school students are less likely to eat breakfast at school. The *Going Further* section of this toolkit includes some ideas to strategically target your outreach to older students.

WHAT IS CURRENT PARTICIPATION?

Compare your participation rates for breakfast and lunch with total enrollment for each school.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM?

Determine what barriers might exist that keep students from participating in the breakfast program. What are some of the reasons breakfast participation does not reach its potential? For example, do busses arrive right at the start of the school day and limit the time students can obtain breakfast?

WHAT ASPECTS OF YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM WORK WELL?

What strengths does your school or district have that can be utilized? For example, does your school use parent volunteers to assist with breakfast in the morning? Would they be willing to assist with an alternative delivery method?

WHO NEEDS MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHY BREAKFAST IS IMPORTANT?

Breakfast is beneficial for students, but do all of your stakeholders know? By eating a healthy meal before school, students are better prepared for learning. Parents are assured knowing they have another option for providing a nutritious breakfast for their children. Principals and teachers see improved attendance and tardiness, as well as improved academic performance, in students. Students who have eaten a school breakfast have higher assessment scores. Determine who needs more information and provide studies to educate them on why expanding breakfast is imperative. The *Stakeholders* section of this toolkit outlines those who would be instrumental in assisting with school breakfast expansion and their potential concerns.

ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL

USDA has several great resources on expanding breakfast including goal sheets and cost calculation sheets to evaluate breakfast at your school. Please go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/CND/Breakfast/expansion/assessingpotential.htm> for more information.