

## **Bridging the Gap:**

Reaching Underserved Students  
with Breakfast After the Bell

**2020 NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BREAKFAST REPORT**



**HUNGER SOLUTIONS**  
**NEW YORK** UNITING POLICIES AND  
PROGRAMS TO END HUNGER





Courtesy Owego-Apalachin Central School District

## Hunger affects one in six children in New York State.<sup>1</sup>

A robust body of research supports what educators and school officials see every day: hunger has a profoundly negative impact on children's physical, emotional and mental development.

The federally funded School Breakfast Program helps schools ensure no child starts the school day hungry.<sup>2</sup> A nutritious school breakfast boosts students' ability to learn effectively<sup>3</sup>; supports positive social, emotional, and behavioral development<sup>4</sup>; and improves students' health and general well-being.<sup>5</sup>

This report contains the results of an analysis of New York State school breakfast participation in public schools during the 2018-2019 school year. On average, one in four students ate free or reduced-price breakfast during that year. While that is an increase from the previous year, the program continues to be underutilized. The data also revealed two areas of greatest unmet need: middle and high (secondary) schools and 15 high-need school districts.

New school breakfast legislation has been enacted to help increase breakfast access in high-need districts, but its benefits are, for the most part, yet to be seen.

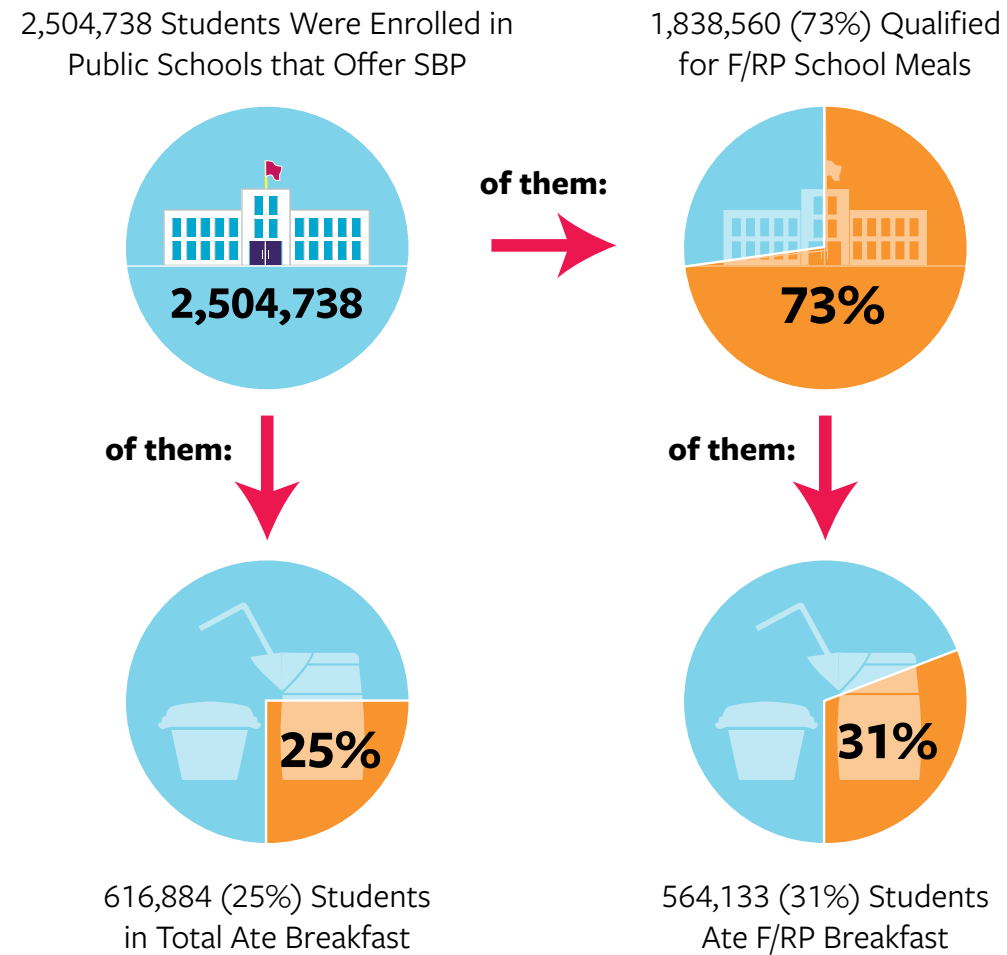
Included in this report are strategies to more effectively reach underserved student populations, which in turn will help schools to claim millions of dollars in federal funding lost due to low school breakfast participation.



## 2018-2019 NYS School Breakfast Participation Snapshot

Statewide, participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) remains low among children who qualify to eat breakfast for free or at a reduced rate (F/RP).

**During the 2018-2019 school year:**



Although school breakfast remains historically underutilized, it is important to note an additional 27,838 students ate school breakfast in the 2018-2019 school year compared to the previous school year.

### Barriers to Breakfast Access

While all high-poverty schools operate a breakfast program, many serve breakfast in the cafeteria when most children have not yet arrived at school for the day.

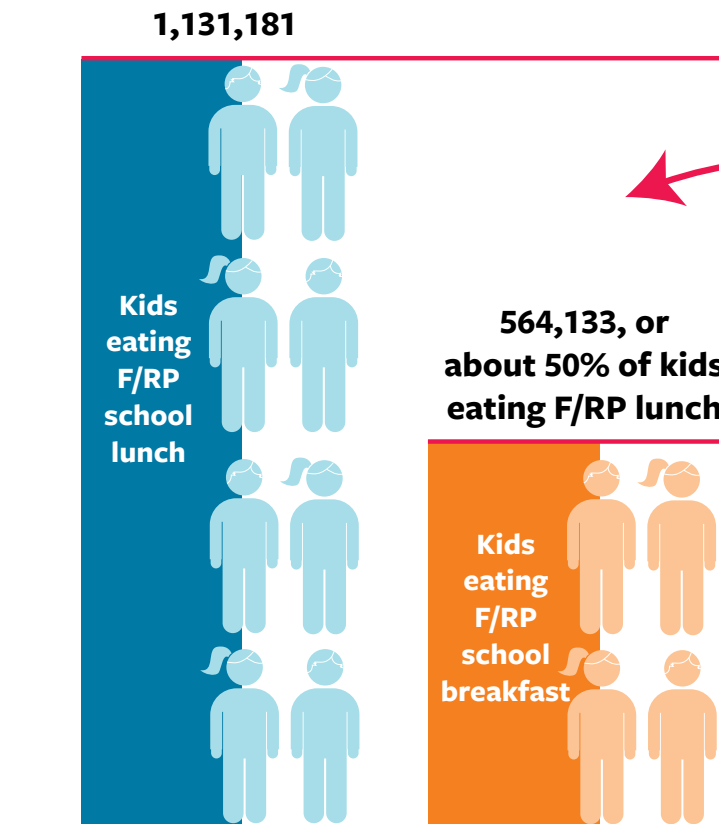
That traditional breakfast model misses too many children who qualify to eat at school for free or at a reduced price.

A number of issues prevent students from arriving at school before the first bell rings,<sup>6</sup> when traditional breakfast service ends. They include:

## The School Breakfast Gap

The School Breakfast Gap refers to the disparity between breakfast and lunch participation among students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. The gap is measured by comparing the number of children who eat free and reduced-price school breakfast with the number who eat free and reduced-price school lunch.

The national benchmark for strong participation in the School Breakfast Program is to reach 70% of free and reduced-price lunch participants with free and reduced-price breakfast. In the 2018-19 school year, only 50% ate breakfast across the state. New York is consistently among the lowest performing states in the country. In the 2018-19 school year, New York ranked 36th in a national analysis by the Food Research and Action Center in school breakfast participation.<sup>7</sup>



**This is the School Breakfast Gap.**

Low participation in school breakfast translates not only to a lost opportunity to address hunger, but to lost funding. In the 2018-19 school year, NYS public schools missed out on \$67 million in federal reimbursements that could be used to improve school meal program service models, equipment, and meal quality.

Hunger Solutions New York's analysis revealed that of the 687 public school food authorities (school districts/charter schools that offer school breakfast) included in this analysis, 96 met the goal of reaching 70% of lunch participants with breakfast, while 591 did not. This translates to only 14% of school food authorities reaching the benchmark for strong participation.

- Time constraints
- Transportation difficulties
- Early school start times
- The stigma that school breakfast is only for "poor kids"
- Difficulty affording the reduced-price copayment

## Areas of Greatest Unmet Need

Our analysis of 2018-2019 school breakfast participation revealed two areas of greatest unmet need: 15 high-need school districts with underperforming breakfast programs, and secondary school students, who, overall, participate in school breakfast at a much lower rate than elementary school students.

### High-Need School Districts with the Largest School Breakfast Gap

During the 2018-2019 school year, 15 high-need school districts made up nearly three-quarters of New York State’s School Breakfast Gap. If those districts met the goal of feeding 70% of their lunch participants breakfast, New York State would daily feed 163,726 more students free and reduced-price breakfast and draw down an additional \$48.3 million dollars in federal reimbursements annually.

School Food Authority	BAB required in some/all schools*	CEP in some/all schools**	# of Additional Students Eating F/RP Breakfast to Reach 70% of Lunch	Additional Annual Funding If 70% Students Eating F/RP Lunch Also Ate F/RP SBP
NYC Public Schools	Yes	Yes	143,011	\$42,238,289
Yonkers City SD	Yes	Yes	4,089	\$1,207,644
Uniondale UFSD	Yes	Yes	1,902	\$561,860
Success Academy Charter	No	Yes	1,895	\$559,806
Utica City SD	Yes	Yes	1,810	\$534,521
New Rochelle City SD	Yes	No	1,354	\$396,290
Albany City SD	Yes	No	1,340	\$395,869
Hempstead UFSD	Yes	No	1,261	\$372,566
Elmira City SD	Yes	No	1,200	\$354,320
White Plains City SD	No	No	1,016	\$296,938
Valley Stream Central HS District	No	No	1,004	\$290,355
Port Chester-Rye UFSD	Yes	No	999	\$290,048
Niagara Falls City SD	Yes	Yes	975	\$288,107
Middle Country CSD	No	No	943	\$274,681
Kingston City SD	Yes	Yes	925	\$272,679
			<b>163,726</b>	<b>\$48,333,972</b>

\*BAB: Breakfast After the Bell  
For a full list of schools required to implement Breakfast After the Bell, visit: <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/common/cn/files/bablist.pdf>

\*\*CEP: Community Eligibility Provision

## Secondary Schools

An analysis of participation in free and reduced-price breakfast by type of school revealed secondary school students participate at much lower rates than younger students.

### % F/RP Participation in SBP

Elementary schools: **41%**

Middle schools: **19%**

High schools: **17%**

Secondary school students skip school breakfast for many reasons, including:

- Lack of appetite first thing in the morning
- Hectic morning schedules
- Late buses and other transportation difficulties
- Desire to maximize sleep
- Prioritizing socialization over breakfast
- Perception among students that school breakfast is for “poor kids.”  
The severity of this stigma becomes more pronounced as children mature.

Courtesy Newburgh Enlarged City School District





### Breakfast After the Bell Law:

- Enacted in the 2018-2019 school year, with 1,357 schools under the requirement.
- Schools with 70% or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price school breakfast are required to implement Breakfast After the Bell.
- Each school year, New York State Education Department identifies schools based upon data submitted through the basic educational data system (BEDS) for the prior school year.
- Schools can choose which Breakfast After the Bell model best suits their needs.
- Breakfast in the Classroom counts as instructional time.

For more information, visit:  
[cn.nysed.gov/breakfast-program](http://cn.nysed.gov/breakfast-program)

### Increased State Reimbursement for Reduced-Price Meals:

- Beginning July 1, 2019, students approved for reduced-price meals must receive breakfast, lunch and snack at no charge.
- New York State funding will provide an additional \$0.25 in state reimbursement for each reimbursable breakfast and lunch served, and an additional \$0.15 for each reimbursable snack served to a reduced-price eligible student, to cover the cost previously paid by the student.

For more information, visit:  
[cn.nysed.gov/content/increase-state-reimbursement-reduced-price-meals](http://cn.nysed.gov/content/increase-state-reimbursement-reduced-price-meals)

### New York Takes Legislative Action

New York State has taken two recent steps to address low school breakfast participation among low-income students:

- A law enacted during the 2018-2019 school year requires high-poverty schools to offer Breakfast After the Bell.
- The 2019 executive budget provided \$2.3 million to eliminate students' reduced-price copayment for both breakfast and lunch.

The Breakfast After the Bell legislation requires high-poverty public schools to provide breakfast after the start of the instructional day.<sup>8</sup> This policy empowers schools to move breakfast service out of the cafeteria, which can drastically improve participation at all grade levels. During the law's first year, the nearly 1,400 schools impacted by it saw an increase of nearly 8,000 additional students eating school breakfast.

Effective in the 2019-2020 school year, students who once qualified to pay \$0.25 for school breakfast now receive the meal at no cost. The state's investment ensured 400,000 students would have access to a no-cost breakfast. Elimination of the student's co-pay removes a significant participation barrier for many working-class, low-income families and is a step toward an expansion of universal breakfast—where all students eat breakfast for free.

Both school breakfast policies are quite new. We expect to see further growth in breakfast participation as a result of them in the coming years, especially in schools impacted by the Breakfast After the Bell requirement.

### Strategies to Improve Breakfast Access at All Schools

Whether your district is one of the 15 with the largest School Breakfast Gap, or one with a breakfast program that could simply use some revitalization, strategies to improve breakfast access are largely the same.

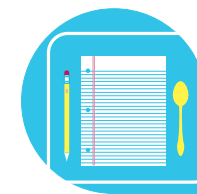
Two key strategies have driven growth in the School Breakfast Program over the past decade:

- **Breakfast After the Bell**, where schools provide breakfast after the start of the instructional day.
- **Universal breakfast**, where schools offer breakfast at no charge to all students.

### BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL MODELS

Breakfast After the Bell makes the morning meal more accessible by helping to overcome timing, convenience, and stigma barriers. While certain high-poverty schools are required to offer Breakfast After the Bell, any school can shift a cafeteria-based, before-school breakfast program to one served after the school day begins.

The following models provide options:



**Breakfast in the Classroom:** This model is often associated with younger students, but can be used in secondary schools as well. Typically, meals are delivered to and eaten in the classroom, after the official start of the school day. Meal delivery methods vary from school to school.



**Grab and Go:** Grab and Go provides remarkable flexibility for schools. Students pick up conveniently packaged breakfasts from mobile service carts or vending machines in high traffic areas—such as hallways and entryways—when they arrive at school or between classes. Students can eat in their classroom or in a common area.




**Second Chance Breakfast:** Breakfast service is shifted to later in the morning with this model, often between first and second period. Schools can serve breakfast in the same manner they would with Grab and Go, or can re-open the cafeteria and allow students time to eat there.

### New Study: Breakfast After the Bell Can Reduce Absenteeism

A new study shows that Breakfast After the Bell programs can significantly reduce chronic absenteeism rates by an average of six percentage points and improve other student outcomes. Read details at: [bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Chronic Absenteeism\\_MicroReport\\_0.pdf](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Chronic%20Absenteeism_MicroReport_0.pdf)





### Advice for schools with newly implemented Breakfast After the Bell programs:

While school nutrition directors are central to changing the way breakfast is served, making breakfast a part of the school day requires collaboration among school nutrition staff, school system leaders, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. This type of collaboration helps everyone to understand how Breakfast After the Bell can support the universal goal of developing successful students.

Some additional tips:

- Convene district leadership and school nutrition/food service leadership to discuss how many students are eating school breakfast, how Breakfast After the Bell can improve participation, and why school breakfast consumption is important.
- Schools required to serve Breakfast After the Bell under the state's new policy must also become familiar with the requirements and the implementation timeline.

### Advice for schools with established Breakfast After the Bell programs:

Schools with long-standing Breakfast After the Bell programs that have stagnant participation should consider strategies to refresh their programs. Programs must evolve over time and stay in tune with trends, especially as students' tastes change.

- Consider the strategies outlined on page 10 for secondary schools. They can help revive existing programs for all grade levels.
- When program complications arise, engage school stakeholders such as teachers, principals and students to help inform changes, create buy-in and generate excitement.
- Periodically evaluate the need to retrain staff, teachers, and other support staff. This is especially important with new leadership staff, like superintendents and principals, to ensure they understand how Breakfast After the Bell supports academic goals.

### UNIVERSAL BREAKFAST

Schools can offer breakfast at no charge—universal school breakfast—to all students. This option:

- Optimizes the impact of offering Breakfast After the Bell,
- Eliminates the stigma that breakfast is just for “poor kids”
- Boosts participation
- Removes the burden of collecting fees

*Universal Breakfast Models:*

**The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** is a federal option that empowers schools with a high percentage of low-income students to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students.

**Provision 2** is a federal option that allows schools to serve breakfast, lunch, or both to all students at no charge.

**Non-pricing** is a model in which schools formulate their own plan to pay for universal breakfast. The application and meal tracking processes are consistent with the School Breakfast Program, however, no fees are collected from students

### Advice for schools that still have low breakfast participation after implementing universal breakfast:

Implementing universal breakfast is a concrete step toward removing barriers to breakfast access. If low breakfast participation continues after its implementation, that's an indication other barriers are present. Often, the problem stems from an inability to accommodate all students, due time constraints and limited cafeteria capacity. Some suggestions:

- Adopt Breakfast After the Bell to eliminate time constraints that arise when serving breakfast in the cafeteria before the start of the instructional day.
- Move breakfast outside of the cafeteria to help overcome timing, space and stigma barriers.



## Strategies to Improve Access to School Breakfast in Secondary Schools

High school and middle school students have unique needs. The most successful breakfast programs in secondary schools incorporate the following strategies:<sup>9, 10</sup>

### 1. MOVE BREAKFAST OUT OF THE CAFETERIA

Grab and Go breakfast works particularly well in secondary schools. Older students, who have varying schedules and are often on the move, enjoy the flexibility and choice it provides. Schools throughout the state use carts stocked with hot and cold menu options, and are also finding success with vending machines that dispense a complete breakfast.

#### *In Action*

Debra Donleavy, director of food and nutrition services for the Enlarged City School District of Middletown, said her district installed four vending machines in the high school for the 2017-2018 school year. They were so well received that two more were installed in both middle schools the following semester. Next year, the high school will have six vending machines and there will be four in at least one of the middle schools. Yogurt parfaits are the most popular vending machine offering, she noted.

Caitlin Lazarski, director of school nutrition for the Newburgh Enlarged City School District, serves about 1,100 high schoolers breakfast daily, the majority of them within a 25-minute window. She accomplishes

that with a combination of vending machines, a cafe that serves lattes and a cafe-inspired breakfast menu, and three additional grab and go stations.

Breakfast participation has picked up considerably since the Broome Tioga BOCES “Rock on Cafe” School Nutrition Services installed vending machines in various secondary schools in the 15 districts they serve.

“Since 2016 we have installed 20 vending machines in 16 schools within nine districts,” said Mark Bordeau, senior food service director of Broome Tioga BOCES. “We have seen our participation increase by over 1,200 students a day since we installed them.”

*Courtesy Whitney Point Central School District*



## Food Service Directors' Tips for Success in Secondary Schools

### **Debra Donleavy**

*director of food and nutrition services*

#### **Enlarged City School District of Middletown**

- Hold taste tests and find other ways to solicit student input.
- Offer foods not typically associated with breakfast.
- Use vending machines, and make sure to have them stocked with popular offerings.

### **Lyn Prestia**

*director of school nutrition*

#### **Pine Bush Central School District**

- Establish a partnership with your principal to advance the breakfast program.
- Watch where students enter the building and be sure breakfast offerings are easily accessible in those areas.
- Think of creative ways to reach students who can't readily access breakfast. Her district allows certain classes to call in their breakfast order, then pick it up.

### **Caitlin Lazarski**

*director of school nutrition*

#### **Newburgh Enlarged City School District**

- Make breakfast marketable to older students by providing them with a large variety of menu options.
- Get breakfast staff excited about the program. Give out t-shirts, hold a program kick-off event or think of other creative ways to improve employee morale.
- Use social media to market your program to your students and school community.
- Collaborate with other departments to create a logo/brand for your breakfast program.

### **Mark Bordeau**

*senior food service director*

#### **Broome Tioga BOCES**

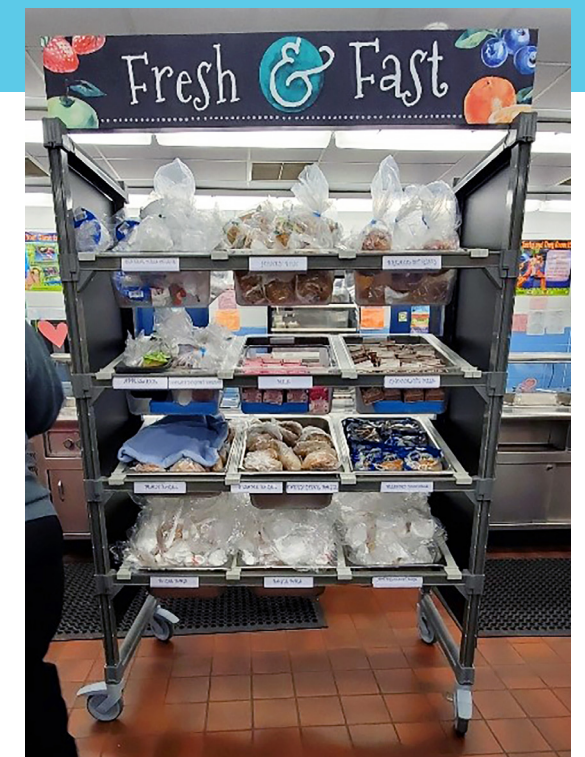
- If your school feeds a high percentage of secondary school students who are eligible for free breakfast, take advantage of Provision 2, a federal program that allows schools to serve breakfast, lunch, or both to all students at no charge.

One district also added a breakfast kiosk to one middle school three years ago and saw a 400% participation increase as a result, he said.

Lyn Prestia, director of school nutrition for the Pine Bush Central School District, said one of the smartest things her district did was to replace breakfast in the cafeteria with a breakfast cart in the lobby, which speeds up service and eliminates the need for two cafeteria monitors.

“A breakfast cart doesn't need to be a \$5,000 cart,” she noted. “It can be a stainless steel cart that you push out for 10 or 15 minutes.”

*Courtesy Pine Bush Central School District*





## 2. TREAT STUDENTS AS CUSTOMERS

Secondary school meal programs often compete with a nearby coffee shop or fast food restaurant. School breakfast programs must use creative marketing strategies and menu offerings to sell the fact that school breakfast can be just as appealing as breakfast at a cafe, but costs less and is more nutritious.

### In Action

Prestia recently sent an email to high school students who qualify for free breakfast but have had little or no participation. The letter gave details about the no-cost breakfast available to them and included photos of menu offerings.

Donleavy's program has found success with thinking beyond conventional breakfast foods. Each Wednesday in the high school, they serve pizza for breakfast.

"We sell out of the pizza every single time we have it out," she said.

The district also offers sweet and white potatoes—roasted or in the form of french fries, tater tots or hash browns—during breakfast as a fun way to sneak an extra vegetable into students' diets.

Both the Middletown and Pine Bush districts do taste-tests, allowing students to weigh in on whether certain foods should be added to the menu.

"Go with something that your students want," recommended Prestia. "Kids appreciate the offerings that look like they're in a food court or look like they're in a restaurant."

She puts out sample plates so kids can see what the breakfast offerings look like. Popular breakfast items in her secondary schools include bagels like those you'd find at a bakery, and fruit smoothies.

Lazarski said her district has found success with that same sort of bagels. Both she and Prestia said it's worth it to opt for a non-whole-grain bagel to entice older students to eat breakfast.

"I really do want to stick to the whole grain as much as possible across the district but that's one I kind of eased back on, especially for the high school level," Lazarski noted. "We've tried to serve them a whole grain bagel and they're like, 'Yeah, no. We're going to go to Dunkin' Donuts or we're going to go to the deli or whatever and we're going to get something legit.' So, we did bring those back. This year, that has been a tremendous pull."

Incorporation of smoothies into the breakfast menu resulted in a participation boost for the districts served by Broome Tioga BOCES, Bordeau noted.

**"Go with something that your students want. Kids appreciate the offerings that look like they're in a food court or look like they're in a restaurant."**

## Benefits of Breakfast After the Bell in Secondary Schools

Secondary school principals have reported positive outcomes including:

- Increased school breakfast participation
- Improved student attentiveness
- Fewer visits to the school nurse
- Improved classroom environment
- Fewer occurrences of absenteeism
- Fewer disciplinary referrals
- Improved reading and math test scores

Source: FRAC and NASSP, *School Breakfast After the Bell: Equipping Students for Success*. Available at: [frac.org/wp-content/uploads/secondary-principals-bic-report.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/secondary-principals-bic-report.pdf)

The Newburgh District has a separate menu for middle schoolers.

"They still like the same, routine type of things, but they don't want to feel like they're getting the same as the little guys," Lazarski explained.

In addition to the regular K - 5 menu, middle schoolers can order smoothies and yogurt parfaits.

"They can feel like they've got a little bit more choice, a little bit more decision-making process and they get something that's special to them," she said.

## 3. INCORPORATE STUDENTS' VOICES

Secondary schools with strong breakfast programs empower students to provide input. They treat students like customers and acknowledge that their students have different needs and tastes than elementary school students.

### In Action

"We feel that listening to them, whether we have the opportunity to do a one-on-one conversation, or a reflection of our production records, they'll tell us what they like," said Donleavy.

Prestia also recommends getting input from students.

"You don't have to do an official survey but just talk to the kids and find out what they want to see," she said.



Photos this page courtesy Newburgh Enlarged City School District







### We Can Help

We provide support, one-on-one technical assistance, and resources to help facilitate the implementation of successful Breakfast After the Bell programs—at no cost to your school district. Contact Jessica Pino-Goodspeed at [Jessica.PinoGoodspeed@HungerSolutionsNY.org](mailto:Jessica.PinoGoodspeed@HungerSolutionsNY.org), or visit [SchoolMealsHubNY.org](http://SchoolMealsHubNY.org).

*Courtesy Newburgh Enlarged City School District*

## Conclusion

Hunger is a reality facing one in six children in New York State.<sup>11</sup> Lack of proper nourishment has a profound impact on a child's health, learning, behavior, and social-emotional development. The School Breakfast Program is a critical support to protect children from the impact of hunger.

School breakfast participation is linked to health and educational benefits including reduced food insecurity, improved dietary intake, better test scores, calmer classrooms, stronger attendance and graduation rates, and improved student health.

Too many students miss out on school breakfast, and thus, the benefits it can provide. New York consistently ranks among the poorest performing states in reaching low-income children with school breakfast.

We can move the dial to ensure every child in New York State public schools starts their day with the nutrition they need to focus, concentrate and learn.

Breakfast After the Bell and universal breakfast are proven strategies to end low breakfast participation.

This report reveals a clear action plan for the state to turn around years of stagnant growth in the School Breakfast Program: focus expansion efforts on the two areas of greatest unmet need—secondary schools and the 15 districts with the largest School Breakfast Gap.

Beyond simply identifying which districts need to reach more students with breakfast, this report offers improvement strategies and tips on how to meet students' unique needs. Individualized technical assistance and support is available at no cost to schools.

The new state Breakfast After the Bell legislation also provides a catalyst to improve student access to breakfast in high-poverty schools. In the coming years, this law is predicted to help reverse years of stagnant School Breakfast Program participation.



## Additional Resources:

### **How School Breakfast Benefits Kids:**

Share Our Strength's Center for Best Practices compiles research that shows school breakfast is good for kids, classrooms and communities:

- <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/how-school-breakfast-benefits-kids>

Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) research briefs summarize how school breakfast supports students' health, learning, and behavior:

- <https://live-frac.pantheonsite.io/programs/school-breakfast-program/benefits-school-breakfast>

### **Breakfast After the Bell Support:**

Share Our Strength's Center for Best Practices provides various resources on implementation of Breakfast After the Bell, engaging stakeholders to expand school breakfast, and promotion strategies:

- <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/implement-breakfast-after-the-bell>
- <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/engage-stakeholders>
- <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/download-resource/School%20Breakfast%20Promotion%20Strategies.pdf>

FRAC and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) jointly developed a Secondary School Principals' Breakfast After the Bell Toolkit to assist middle and high school principals with launching Breakfast After the Bell. The toolkit includes strategies for launching a successful Breakfast after the Bell program, sample outreach materials, and event-planning resources:

- <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/secondary-principals-sbp-after-the-bell-toolkit-1.pdf>

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10. FRAC and NASSP. Secondary School Principals' Breakfast After the Bell Toolkit <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/secondary-principals-sbp-after-the-bell-toolkit-1.pdf>
11. See reference #1.



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Hunger Solutions New York Child Nutrition Specialist Jessica L. Pino-Goodspeed, LMSW, is the lead author of this report. Published March 2020.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## About Us

Hunger Solutions New York is a caring and informed voice for hungry New Yorkers. We promote:

- Awareness of hunger in communities across the state
- Awareness about programs that address chronic and crisis hunger
- Participation in nutrition assistance programs for all who are eligible
- Public policies that contribute to ending hunger
- Awareness of the health, economic and educational benefits of nutrition assistance programs

Those efforts improve the health and well-being of New Yorkers while boosting local economies throughout the state.

For more information about Hunger Solutions New York or to sign up for our electronic mailing list, visit [HungerSolutionsNY.org](http://HungerSolutionsNY.org). Please also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Linda Bopp  
Executive Director

*Front cover photo courtesy Patchogue-Medford School District*



[WICHelpNY.org](http://WICHelpNY.org)  
[FoodHelpNY.org](http://FoodHelpNY.org)  
[SummerMealsNY.org](http://SummerMealsNY.org)  
[ChildcareMealsNY.org](http://ChildcareMealsNY.org)  
[SchoolMealsHubNY.org](http://SchoolMealsHubNY.org)  
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