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# Food for Thought: 5<sup>th</sup> Annual New Jersey School Breakfast Report



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**Giving Every Child A Chance**

# Food for Thought: 5<sup>th</sup> Annual New Jersey School Breakfast Report

## About the NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign

Led by Advocates for Children of New Jersey and the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition, the NJ Food For Thought School Breakfast Campaign is driven by a statewide steering committee that includes the New Jersey Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health, anti-hunger and health groups and New Jersey's major education associations. The campaign's national partners are the Food Research and Action Center, the American Dairy Association and Council and the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association.

The statewide committee is working to build widespread support for school breakfast expansion and, assist local efforts to expand participation and is now working to expand summer meals to children across New Jersey.

**For more information, visit**  
[www.njschoolbreakfast.org](http://www.njschoolbreakfast.org)

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NJ Principal and Supervisors Association  
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NJ School Boards Association  
NJ School Nutrition Association  
NJ State School Nurses Association

### Acknowledgements

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### ACNJ staff contributing to this report:

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# Progress on Breakfast:

## NJ School Breakfast Participation Surges 75 Percent in 5 Years

By Kathleen Carroll  
Lana Lee and  
Nancy Parello

**B**reakfast after the bell, long the exception at New Jersey schools, is on its way to becoming the norm. The number of low-income students eating breakfast at school in New Jersey has jumped an inspiring 75 percent in the past five years, giving hundreds of thousands of students the nourishment they need.

At the same time, food insecurity is a challenge faced by a growing number of New Jersey families, with the number of low-income children who qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals jumping 19 percent during that time.

It's a daunting challenge, but one that schools are rising to meet. In the past five years, the number of children receiving free- or reduced-priced school breakfast has increased by 101,000 statewide, from 136,000 in 2010 to 237,000 in 2015. Nearly half, or 44 percent, of eligible children received school breakfast last year, compared to just 30 percent in 2010.

In addition, the number of children living in higher-income families who ate breakfast at school also rose 31 percent — a sign that a growing number of parents who can afford to pay for breakfast prefer to have their children eat at school.

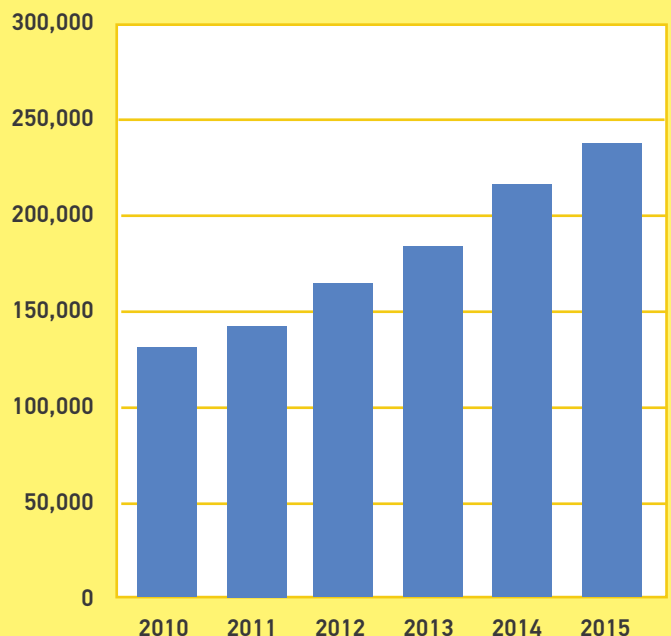
This increase is largely due to the growing practice of “breakfast after the bell,” where students eat breakfast in the classroom shortly after school begins. Districts that serve breakfast during the first few minutes of the school day, rather than before school when most students have not yet arrived, feed far more hungry children.

Childhood hunger has far-reaching effects. A healthy diet is a foundation for healthy child development — academically, physically and emotionally. When children do not have enough to eat, they are more likely to



### Major Progress for Breakfast in NJ

Number of Students Receiving Free/Reduced-Price School Breakfast in New Jersey





struggle academically, be suspended from school and have difficulty getting along with other children.

Throughout the state, schools served an estimated 49 million breakfasts during the 2014–15 school year — 29 million more than they had just five years before. Some cities have made breakfast after the bell free for all students, with administrators, teachers, food service workers, custodians and students working together to ensure everyone starts the day with the nutrition they need to concentrate and learn.

Districts that offer breakfast after the bell are not only helping address childhood hunger, they are also

bringing back more federal dollars to feed New Jersey children. Breakfast after the bell significantly boosts student participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, which reimburses states based on how many meals schools serve. According to the New Jersey FY 2016 state budget, school districts are expected to collect \$92 million in federal funds this fiscal year — nearly double the \$48 million districts received just four years ago, in FY 2011.

More meals, more funding and a better start to students' days: It's all the result of more New Jersey schools serving breakfast after the bell.

## NJ Achieves Highest Increase Nationwide for School Breakfast Growth

New Jersey's school breakfast participation rate jumped 13 percent in one year on the latest scorecard by the Food Research and Action Center — the highest one-year increase in the country, and far greater than the national average increase of 3 percent. That's because the NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign, a coalition of anti-hunger and education advocates, state agencies and national organizations, has succeeded in convincing more districts to serve breakfast during the first few minutes of the school day. While there's more work to be done, New Jersey is moving in the right direction. The state ranked 28<sup>th</sup> nationwide during the 2013–14 school year, compared to 46<sup>th</sup>, when the campaign started in 2011. For more information see *School Breakfast Scorecard: 2013–14 School Year*, at [frac.org](http://frac.org).



### New Jersey Statewide School Breakfast Totals

	2010	2014	2015	% Change 2010–2015
Total Student Enrollment	1,364,495	1,368,487	1,368,859	0
Total Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Meals	448,306	519,131	533,212	19
% Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Meals	33	38	39	19
Total # Students Receiving Free School Breakfast	123,293	193,651	220,990	79
Total # Students Receiving Reduced-Price School Breakfast	12,520	17,290	16,072	28
Total # Students Receiving Free/Reduced-Price School Breakfast	135,813	210,941	237,062	75
Total # Students Receiving Paid School Breakfast	26,387	31,630	34,543	31
Grand total of all students receiving school breakfast	162,200	242,571	271,605	67
% of Eligible Students Receiving School Breakfast (Participation Rate)	30	41	44	47

**Sources:** NJ Department of Education October enrollment counts for the 2009–10, 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years, and NJ Department of Agriculture participation data from October 2010, May 2014 and April 2015. Totals include all NJ districts, including vo-tech and special services districts and charter schools.

## Still Too Many Hungry Kids

The number of students who qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals has increased by nearly one-fifth in the past five years. In 2015, some 533,000 New Jersey children lived in families with earnings low enough to qualify for this federal child nutrition program, compared to 448,000 in 2010.

Despite school districts' progress in serving school breakfast, 296,000 low-income children did not receive it during the 2014–15 school year. While still far too many, that figure is 6 percent lower than the year before, when 314,000 low-income children missed out.

The challenge is not in getting schools to serve breakfast — state law requires those where at least 20 percent of students qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals to do so — but in getting them

to offer breakfast programs that work with students' schedules. Many districts continue to serve breakfast during the hectic minutes before the first bell rings, when bus and family schedules often prevent children from arriving in time to eat. And unfortunately, many school officials remain reluctant to change the way they serve breakfast, citing worries over clean up and lost instructional time.

These under-attended programs amount to a missed opportunity, times two: Low-income students miss out on nourishing breakfast at the start of the school day, and school districts miss out on federal funding to support school meals. Federal reimbursements

are a fraction of what they could be if districts served breakfast just a few minutes later, during the first part of the school day. Such ineffective programs persist at 48 high-poverty New Jersey districts, where far too many low-income children do not receive breakfast at school (see "School Breakfast Underachievers," on page 8).

As more districts adopt the proven practice of serving breakfast after the bell, educators have found that logistical challenges are easily overcome. And a new state law passed in November will help.

The law formally encourages schools to increase participation by implementing breakfast after the bell, and directs the New Jersey Department of Agriculture,

*To qualify for free breakfast, a family of four in the 2014–15 school year could earn no more than \$31,005 per year, and no more than \$44,123 for a reduced-price meal.*



### The Benefits of Breakfast After the Bell

When children eat breakfast, research shows the following results:

- Better academic performance
- Less disruptive student behavior
- Fewer trips to the school nurse
- Increased attendance
- Reduced tardiness
- Reduced childhood obesity

in consultation with the state Department of Education, to “make every effort to assist, guide, and support” schools to do so. In the past, those departments had issued memos encouraging the practice — including the specific reassurance that breakfast time can count toward instructional time. Now, the agriculture department is working closely with high-poverty districts with low student participation, including by providing specific technical assistance to effectively implement breakfast after the bell.

It’s a simple shift with incredible potential. Expanding school breakfast participation by offering breakfast after the bell means more children will get the nutrition they need. It will also allow New Jersey schools to reclaim more of the dollars that state taxpayers already send to the federal government. And it can be accomplished with very little or no additional cost to state and local taxpayers.

In a state that spends billions of local and state tax dollars on public education each year, ensuring students are ready to learn at the start of each day is a smart way to maximize that investment. Hungry students struggle to concentrate, and well-nourished children are more likely to succeed in school.

Breakfast after the bell is good for children, parents, the school community, taxpayers and our state. It is the most effective way to ensure children get a healthy meal at the start of each school day.

### Not Just Breakfast: Childhood Hunger Persists in Summer

It’s critical that schools continue nutrition support for low-income students even when class is dismissed. ACNJ’s report, *Food for Thought: How to Expand Summer Meals in NJ*, released this July, found that among the 419,000 New Jersey students receiving free- and reduced-price school meals, just 19 percent received meals during the summer months. Federal funding is available to support summer meals. Had New Jersey districts served the FRAC-recommended minimum of 40 percent of low-income students, the state would have received an additional \$6.7 million in federal reimbursement — money that taxpayers across the state have already sent to Washington, D.C. For more information, visit [acnj.org](http://acnj.org) and search the library for *Food for Thought: How to Expand Summer Meals in NJ*.





## Breakfast Champions: The Top 20

Districts with high concentrations of students living in low-income families can benefit substantially from effective school breakfast programs. To spotlight high-poverty districts that are successfully serving breakfast, ACNJ identified the top 20 districts with the highest percentages of eligible students eating breakfast, among all school districts where at least half of students qualified to receive free- and reduced-price school meals.

The average participation rate in these 20 districts was 91 percent in April 2015 — more than double

the statewide average of 44 percent. These districts served breakfast to nearly 34,000 low-income students, or about 14 percent of all children receiving school breakfast that month.

This list includes a variety of types of districts, from charter schools like Greater Brunswick to rural districts like Fairfield, spanning 12 of the state's 21 counties. All 20 districts should be commended for their efforts to ensure that their students begin the school day with a healthy meal.

### School Breakfast Champions: Top 20 Districts of Those with 50% or More Eligible Children

County	School District	# of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Breakfast	Eligible Students as % of Total Enrollment	Total Receiving Free/ Reduced-Price Breakfast	% Eligible Students Served
Cape May	Woodbine*	127	70	127	100
Middlesex	Greater Brunswick Charter School	315	83	296	94
Camden	KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy At Lanning Square	102	98	96	94
Sussex	Montague	120	55	110	92
Passaic	Paterson	24,859	100	23,107	93
Salem	Salem	888	76	817	92
Atlantic	Egg Harbor City	389	77	352	90
Gloucester	Paulsboro	737	64	663	90
Atlantic	Atlantic City	6,558	90	5,790	88
Camden	Camden Community Charter School	379	95	327	86
Essex	Discovery Charter School	74	100	64	86
Camden	Environment Community Charter School	200	90	170	85
Atlantic	Atlantic Community Charter School	148	99	125	84
Essex	East Orange Community Charter School	279	56	234	84
Monmouth	Highlands	103	61	87	84
Camden	Mastery Schools Of Camden	335	91	283	84
Mercer	Pace Charter School Of Hamilton	148	67	125	84
Essex	Pride Academy Charter School	218	83	181	83
Cumberland	Fairfield	491	78	403	82
Passaic	Paterson Arts And Science Charter School	346	82	285	82
<b>Total/ Average</b>		<b>36,816</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>33,642</b>	<b>91</b>

\*Eligibility data are from the 2013–14 school year, as accurate data for the 2014–15 school year were unavailable.



## More Breakfast Champs

The following chart shows the top 20 school districts among all districts with lower concentrations of low-income students, where 20 to 49 percent are eligible for free- or reduced-price school meals. On average, 57 percent of students in these districts received school breakfast, compared to 44 percent statewide, during the 2014–15 school year. They ranged from larger districts

like Franklin in Somerset County, where 68 percent of the district's 3,000 eligible students ate school breakfast, to tiny Greenwich in Cumberland County, where all 11 eligible students were served. In all, these 20 districts served almost 8,300 students, or 3 percent of low-income New Jersey children eating breakfast at school.

### School Breakfast Champions: Top 20 Districts of Those with 20-49% Eligible Children

County	School District	# of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Breakfast	Eligible Students as % of Total Enrollment	Total Receiving Free/ Reduced-Price Breakfast	% Eligible Students Served
Cumberland	Greenwich	11	21	11	100
Hudson	The Ethical Community Charter School	115	37	114	99
Burlington	New Hanover	79	43	61	77
Cumberland	Compass Academy Charter School	69	48	52	75
Somerset	Franklin	3,053	41	2,086	68
Gloucester	Franklin	512	37	321	63
Gloucester	Greenwich	168	36	101	60
Somerset	Central Jersey College Prep Charter School	124	39	73	59
Atlantic	Hamilton	1,195	39	687	57
Middlesex	Edison	3,216	22	1,839	57
Salem	Quinton	161	45	88	55
Bergen	East Rutherford	277	36	150	54
Middlesex	North Brunswick	2,301	37	1,206	52
Atlantic	Folsom	153	37	77	50
Atlantic	Estell Manor City	32	20	16	50
Cape May	West Cape May	30	38	15	50
Ocean	Little Egg Harbor	777	48	380	49
Ocean	Long Beach Island	77	33	37	48
Morris	Morris	1,819	35	860	47
Camden	Berlin	226	36	103	46
<b>Total/ Average</b>		<b>14,395</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>8,277</b>	<b>57</b>

## High-Poverty Districts Making Progress

Many New Jersey school officials are working to improve their school breakfast participation. During the 2014–15 school year, 22 high-poverty school districts, where at least half of students qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals, posted at least a 15 percent increase in their school breakfast participation.

A handful of districts showed school breakfast turn-arounds. After Paterson shifted to breakfast after the bell, participation nearly tripled to 93 percent of eligible students in 2015, compared to 34 percent the year

before. Salem also saw major improvements, jumping to 92 percent from 45 percent the year before, as did Paulsboro, where participation was 90 percent compared to 55 percent the year before. Much of this progress was due to the efforts of local advocates, who worked with school officials to adopt breakfast after the bell.

These advocates, along with school leaders and staff at all of these districts, should be commended for meeting the school breakfast challenge.

### High-Poverty Districts Making Progress (at Least 50% Eligible Children)

County	School District	Percent Eligible Students Served May 2014	Percent Eligible Students Served April 2015	Percent Change
Passaic	Paterson	34	93	177
Salem	Salem	45	92	107
Gloucester	Paulsboro	55	90	63
Atlantic	Atlantic City	72	88	22
Essex	Discovery Charter School	56	86	54
Camden	Environment Community Charter School	74	85	16
Monmouth	Highlands	21	84	305
Essex	East Orange Community Charter School	46	84	82
Camden	Camden's Pride Charter School	60	81	34
Monmouth	Asbury Park	63	78	24
Middlesex	New Brunswick	67	77	15
Gloucester	National Park	37	73	96
Essex	Merit Prep Charter School Of Newark	20	72	252
Ocean	Lakewood	61	71	17
Union	Union County Teams Charter School	43	70	63
Camden	Freedom Academy Charter School	27	67	150
Camden	Knowledge A To Z Charter School	45	67	48
Gloucester	Westville	39	65	65
Camden	Pennsauken	38	57	51
Union	Plainfield	26	56	116
Hudson	West New York	42	52	23
Essex	Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School	44	52	18

## School Breakfast Underachievers

Unfortunately, other high-poverty districts continue to lag behind. In April 2015, of New Jersey's 168 school districts and charter schools where at least half of students are eligible for free- or reduced-price school meals, 48 served fewer than 31 percent of eligible students.

In these districts alone, more than 46,000 of New Jersey's needy children did not receive school breakfast. If all eligible students received breakfast each school day, the districts would receive an estimated \$12.7 million more in federal funding to support school breakfast each year — money they can access only by boosting their breakfast programs, because it is earmarked for morning meals and cannot offset other educational expenses. And most important, more low-income students would start the day with the nutrition they need to concentrate and succeed in school.

School breakfast participation remains very low in a handful of districts serving communities with high rates of child poverty. Nine districts reported feeding less than 10 percent of their eligible students: Guttenberg, Kearny, Fairview and Belleville, along with charter schools Trenton Stem-to-Civics, Gray, Robert Treat Academy, Soaring Heights and Queen City Academy.

This amplifies the urgent need for high-poverty districts to serve breakfast after the bell, a proven way to boost student participation. It is especially important for superintendents to provide leadership on this issue. School officials with effective programs say that superintendent support is essential to school breakfast success.

### School Breakfast Underachievers

County	School District	# of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-price Breakfast	Eligible Students as % of Total Enrollment	% Eligible Students Served	# Eligible Students NOT Receiving Breakfast	Total Possible Federal Reimbursement*
Mercer	Trenton Stem-To-Civics Charter School	96	95	5	91	\$25,178
Essex	Gray Charter School	211	65	7	197	\$54,785
Essex	Robert Treat Academy Charter School	447	72	7	414	\$112,828
Hudson	Soaring Heights Charter School	121	51	7	112	\$29,477
Hudson	Guttenberg	761	78	8	701	\$195,908
Hudson	Kearny Town	3,401	58	8	3,117	\$857,369
Bergen	Fairview	1,066	81	8	976	\$271,688
Union	Queen City Academy Charter School	205	83	9	187	\$52,319
Essex	Belleville	2,638	59	9	2,403	\$655,441
Bergen	Lodi	1,993	61	10	1,794	\$481,648
Camden	Brooklawn	195	58	11	174	\$48,028
Passaic	Haledon	718	69	11	637	\$175,925
Bergen	Englewood On The Palisades Charter School	141	69	11	125	\$34,254
Monmouth	Keyport	596	55	12	523	\$143,368
Essex	Newark Prep	366	89	13	320	\$89,496
Essex	Paulo Freire Charter School For Liberty Ed	107	54	14	92	\$25,679

School Breakfast Underachievers (continued on next page)

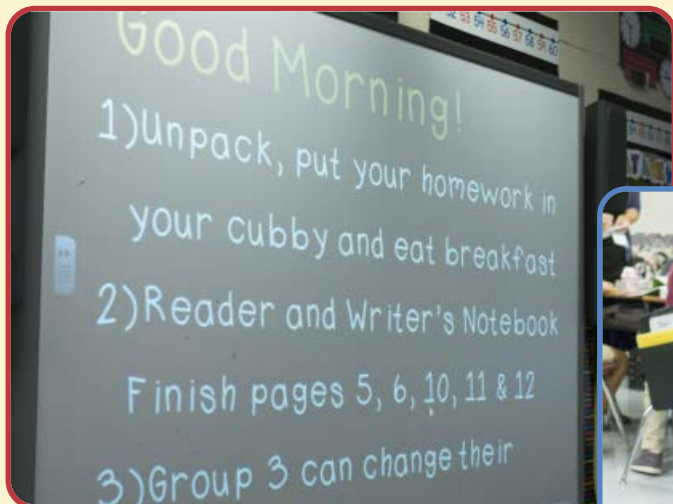
**School Breakfast Underachievers** (continued from previous page)

County	School District	# of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-price Breakfast	Eligible Students as % of Total Enrollment	% Eligible Students Served	# Eligible Students NOT Receiving Breakfast	Total Possible Federal Reimbursement*
Burlington	Riverside	771	56	15	655	\$181,260
Hudson	Great Futures Charter High School For The Health Sciences	84	67	15	71	\$20,030
Middlesex	Carteret	2,476	67	16	2,083	\$571,345
Monmouth	Bradley Beach	144	51	16	121	\$33,332
Ocean	Lakehurst	210	55	17	175	\$47,772
Union	Central Jersey Arts Charter School	296	73	17	245	\$68,166
Passaic	Clifton	6,191	57	17	5,123	\$1,408,921
Bergen	Cliffside Park	1,907	64	17	1,575	\$432,594
Monmouth	Neptune City	202	53	19	164	\$44,644
Union	Rahway	2,185	58	19	1,769	\$480,775
Union	Linden	3,486	58	19	2,821	\$765,970
Passaic	Prospect Park	618	71	19	500	\$139,554
Morris	Dover	2,475	78	20	1,988	\$545,596
Ocean	Ocean Gate	100	63	20	80	\$22,212
Hudson	Jersey City Golden Door Charter School	352	66	22	274	\$73,822
Middlesex	Academy For Urban Leadership Charter School	275	71	23	213	\$58,903
Hudson	University Academy Charter School	323	76	23	249	\$68,062
Camden	Woodlynne	347	91	23	267	\$74,747
Gloucester	Clayton	811	56	23	622	\$169,823
Camden	Camden Academy Charter High School	400	86	24	304	\$85,486
Somerset	North Plainfield	2,245	68	24	1,704	\$465,386
Bergen	Bergen Arts And Sciences Charter School	529	55	24	401	\$106,592
Hudson	Hoboken	1,178	62	24	891	\$246,380
Morris	Wharton	425	54	25	320	\$86,958
Essex	North Star Academy Charter School Of Newark	2,856	84	25	2,145	\$590,004
Hudson	North Bergen	5,732	71	26	4,261	\$1,178,510
Monmouth	Belmar	330	62	26	245	\$67,842
Essex	Burch Charter School Of Excellence	254	71	26	188	\$51,415
Bergen	Garfield	3,414	70	27	2,479	\$678,668
Burlington	Burlington City	1,037	61	28	744	\$206,302
Union	Hillside	2,108	68	30	1,481	\$400,102
Passaic	Passaic Arts And Science Charter School	456	85	30	317	\$86,537
<b>Total/ Average</b>		<b>57,277</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46,336</b>	<b>\$12,711,101</b>

\*Based on all eligible students eating breakfast all 180 school days.



## Jersey City Embraces Breakfast After the Bell



**Brrring!** It's 8:30 a.m. and the first bell has just rung at PS 28 in Jersey City, where the hallways are suddenly full: 1,050 students in grades prek-8 stream through doorways, move quickly down the hall and file into their classrooms.

But first, a pause. "Grab and go! Grab and go!" calls out food service worker Lois King. She's stationed at a folding table on the second floor, where students in grades 5-8 pick up the day's free breakfast for all: cereal, milk, juice, crackers and fruit.

It's a seamless stop, and an important one. In the past three years, school breakfast has become a daily routine in Jersey City, where 79 percent of students qualified for free- or reduced-price school meals in 2014-15. Three years ago, just 18 percent of eligible students ate breakfast at school. That number has since jumped to 63 percent, or roughly 13,700 students last spring.

Among them: Axel, 13, who is scooping up his morning meal on a busy September morning. He swipes his ID card to contribute to the day's breakfast headcount and heads down to his 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, where teacher Melissa Comandatore is about to start writing class.

"Take out your writing notebooks while you're finishing your breakfast, please," she announces promptly at 8:45 a.m., and black-and-white composition notebooks materialize alongside bowls of cereal and half-eaten

apples. The students continue eating and start writing, a living portrait of what has fueled the popularity of school breakfast here: breakfast after the bell.



The district started breakfast after the bell with a pilot of 10 schools in 2012-13, and expanded it to all schools in 2013-14. The expansion came after significant outreach to teachers, staff and parents, to support a clear mandate by Jersey City Superintendent Marcia Lyles.

"For me, it was very important that we provide the opportunity for our students to start school well nourished," said Lyles. "It was not limited to poverty levels, but also what our

households are like in the mornings. I thought it was very important to set the right tone for the day, to help students concentrate."

Initially, students who did not qualify for free- or reduced-price meals were charged a nominal fee — a dollar or so per day — and just one hot meal was



Jersey City Food Services Director Karen De Lamater and PS 28 Principal Janet Elder.

available each week. In 2014–15, to further boost participation, the district dropped the fee and added another hot breakfast each week, said Food Services Director Karen De Lamater. In all, the number of school breakfasts served has nearly tripled since the district started breakfast after the bell, and reached more than 2.8 million meals last year. The cost is minimal, thanks in part to increased federal reimbursement for school breakfast.

“I found that the classroom was more like a family if all of the students ate together,” De Lamater said. “It’s worth it to me to just cover the cost and make it universal. We are definitely feeding more kids.”

Offering breakfast to more than 20,000 students each day is not without challenges, from getting the food to students’ desks on time to ensuring cleanup is quick and integrated with other custodial duties. At PS 28, Principal Janet Elder shifted student schedules to ensure first-period classes took place in students’ homeroom, so they did not have to rush through eating and clean-up before switching classrooms. In addition, she added aides and shifted some early-morning duties from hallway patrol to food parcel delivery.

The changes were well worth it, said Elder. Breakfast after the bell “puts everybody on a level playing field, so they all start off the morning in a good place,” she said. “No one is hungry, and the kids seem to be more focused.”

In the early grades, red cooler bags filled with hot and cold breakfast packages are delivered each morning by cafeteria aides in time for the 8:30 a.m. bell, so students can quickly hang up their backpacks, pick up a breakfast and eat at their desks. Garbage cans stand at the ready, lining the hallways in neat rows. Students have until 8:45 a.m. to eat their meal, and the empty coolers and full garbage bags are collected by school staff shortly after.

During a recent morning, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students helped themselves to cereal, fruit and milk, and quietly ate at their desks while working on a reading fill-in-the-blank worksheet assigned during mealtime. When a minor spill spread across 7-year-old Cecilia’s desk, she knew just what to do: use her napkin to clean it up and deposit the messy remains into the garbage can in the hall.

“I like to eat breakfast at school,” she said. “I didn’t eat anything at home. This is good.”

As her classmates finished their meals, they methodically poured excess milk into a communal bucket to cut down on leaky garbage bags and keep hallways clean. When their teacher, Kristin Camilo, announced a two-minute warning, the students quickly finished their food, wiped their mouths and hands and cleared their garbage. Two helpers got up without prompting, and worked together to open the heavy classroom door and return empty cooler bags to the hallway for pickup.

And with that, breakfast was over in about 10 minutes, thanks to a series of smooth transitions that pleased Camilo.

“At first, we had to add it to our morning routine,” she said. “But now it’s independent, and it’s part of the culture. The kids are definitely not as hungry. You do see positive results.”





**PS 28 Principal Custodian Pat McCarthy leads breakfast clean-up.**

After mealtime comes cleanup — a quick-fire round of garbage collection that has the hallways clear shortly after 9 a.m. While the classroom meal wasn't the most popular idea among the custodial staff initially, they have found that "it's not hard at all," said PS 28 Principal Custodian Pat McCarthy, a 40-year veteran in Jersey City schools.

"Sure, I'd like to see it in the cafeteria, if you want my honest opinion," he said. "But this way we make sure everybody eats. It's worth it. It's about the kids, right?"

The scheduling and logistical challenges were in some ways the easiest to address, said Superintendent Lyles. When she first introduced the idea of breakfast after the bell, the merits of school breakfast were met with some skepticism, she said.

"I had anticipated the biggest challenge would be around logistics, but schools are masters around figuring out logistics," she said. "It was the continued discussion about the value of the program."

To promote the importance of breakfast, Lyles referenced the considerable research base supporting its positive effects. However, she found that making a moral argument was more persuasive, and that issuing a mandate from the top was the clearest way to ensure school and union leaders made breakfast a priority. Official assurance from the state Department of Education confirming that breakfast after the bell counts as official instructional time helped allay teachers' concerns.

"I believe it is a moral obligation that we not allow children to go hungry when we have the resources to

provide them with nourishment," said Lyles. "We talked to everyone but, at the end of the day, we had to say, 'This will happen. You will do this'."

"I had principals who said afterwards, 'I really thought this was one of your worst ideas — but it is amazing. The students are eating, it is not disruptive, we have systems in place and everyone is cooperative'," she said. "We have increased tremendously, and it's been because everyone cooperated and figured it out."

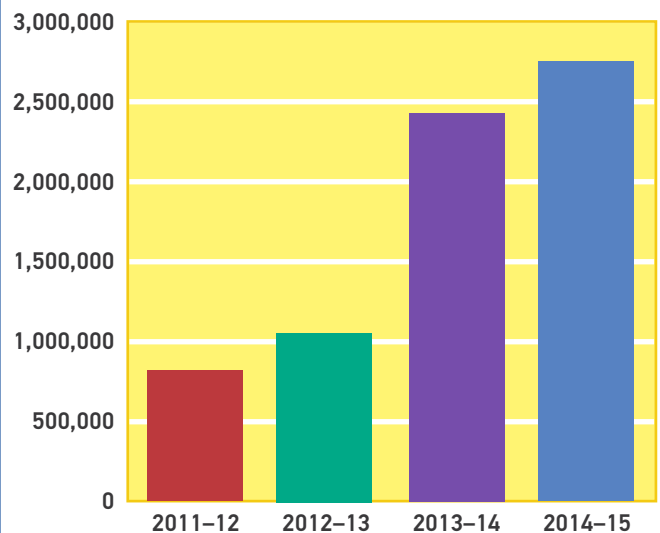
Next up for school breakfast in Jersey City: making the meal even more delicious. To move participation upward from the current 63 percent, officials are soliciting advice from the students themselves, and have installed a new comments button on the district website where students can log concerns.

Back at PS 28, Axel, for one, likes eating breakfast at his desk, after the bell. "I didn't eat at home, I was too busy," he said. "I like breakfast at school. It keeps me active, so I can do my work."

Comandatore, his teacher, is a fan as well.

"It really goes smoothly — and it's good for the kids," she said. "Breakfast is food for the brain."

### Breakfast is Served Number of breakfast meals served to Jersey City students



Source: Jersey City School District



## Fresh Ways to Serve School Breakfast

### Breakfast in the Classroom

Classroom breakfast dramatically increases school breakfast participation, often to nearly 100 percent of students. Typically, food services staff members pack meals into insulated containers for each classroom and deliver to the classrooms before the first bell rings. Some districts have student monitors who deliver breakfast to the classrooms. Students come into the classroom, grab their meal and sit down to eat. When breakfast is over, students dispose of their trash in garbage cans for custodial staff to collect.

### Grab-and-Go Breakfast

Breakfast carts are stationed at the entrance of the school or in other high traffic areas. Upon entering the building, children “grab” a nutritious breakfast and “go” to their first period class. This model is often used in middle and high schools.

### Second Chance Breakfast

Often, teenagers are not hungry when they arrive at school. Sometime before lunch, though, their stomachs start to rumble. Serving breakfast after first period, commonly known as “Second Chance Breakfast,” allows students to eat when they are hungry. Students are offered meals, often Grab-and-Go style, either between classes or during a “nutrition break” that occurs later in the morning.

### Breakfast Boosts — Help is available!

New Jersey school districts may qualify for grants and other technical assistance through various organizations to more effectively serve school breakfast.

- New Jersey Department of Agriculture can provide guidance on various issues. Contact Arlene Ramos-Szatmary at (609) 984-0692 or [arleen.amos-szatmary@ag.state.nj.us](mailto:arleen.amos-szatmary@ag.state.nj.us)
- The American Dairy Association and Council, provides technical assistance and grants to Central and North Jersey school districts, [www.adadc.com](http://www.adadc.com)
- The Mid-Atlantic Dairy Council provides technical assistance and grants to South Jersey school districts, [www.dairyspot.com](http://www.dairyspot.com)
- Advocates for Children of New Jersey has compiled a list of school officials with successful breakfast programs who are willing to assist other neighboring districts with tackling the logistics of breakfast after the bell. Contact Reginald Dorsey at [rdorsey@acnj.org](mailto:rdorsey@acnj.org).

For more information and resources, visit [www.njschoolbreakfast.org](http://www.njschoolbreakfast.org).

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