

NEWS

School Breakfast Participation Rises 55 Percent



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Contact: Nancy Parello, Communications Director, Advocates for Children of New Jersey, (908) 399-6031, nparello@acnj.org

New Jersey schools are feeding breakfast to about 75,000 more low-income children each school day, giving students the morning meal they need to concentrate and learn, according to a new [report](#) released today by Advocates for Children of New Jersey.

The number of New Jersey students eligible for free- or reduced-price school meals who ate a healthy breakfast at school rose from about 136,000 children in October 2010 to nearly 211,000 in May 2014, the report found. The percent of eligible children participating in this federally-funded program increased from 30 percent in 2010 to 41 percent in 2014.

As a result of this success, districts are expected to collect \$21 million more in federal reimbursements this year alone to feed hungry students, according to the state FY 2015 budget.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) released its 4th annual [NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Report](#) and [district-level data](#) today at the Lafayette School in Bound Brook, which won a statewide contest for the highest increase in the number of students eating breakfast at school. Bound Brook is now serving breakfast in the classroom in all its schools.

“School breakfast addresses a major barrier to learning,” said Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of Advocates for Children of New Jersey. “School districts should be commended for stepping up to meet the school breakfast challenge. Unfortunately, there is much work to do. An alarming 300,000 children are still missing out on that all-important morning meal at school.

“And the need is growing,” Zalkind added. “New census data show a 22 percent increase in the number of children living in poor families since 2009. That’s means more children are likely arriving in the classroom hungry.”

The increase in breakfast participation is largely the result of more districts changing the way they serve breakfast. Traditionally, New Jersey schools have served breakfast before school – when children have not yet arrived. Now, a growing number of schools are serving breakfast during the first few minutes of the school day. Known as “breakfast after the bell,” this approach

significantly boosts student participation in the federal School Breakfast Program.

Still, too many districts continue to serve breakfast before school. The report identifies 50 high-poverty districts that are serving 30 percent or fewer of their eligible students. These school breakfast “underachievers” could increase student participation simply by serving breakfast during the first few minutes of the school day. If all New Jersey schools that are required to have a school breakfast program fed all eligible children, districts would receive an estimated \$81.3 million more in federal funds to feed hungry children.

Last year, the NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign issued a school breakfast challenge. Six winners were chosen based on their increase in the total number of students eating breakfast at school. In North/Central Jersey, New Brunswick claimed second place behind Bound Brook, while East Newark came in third. In South Jersey, Quinton captured first place, followed by Folsom and Trenton.

11 winners were recognized at the event today and received breakfast grants provided by the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council, the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association, the New Jersey Education Association and Advocates for Children of New Jersey. In addition, former Giants player Mark Herzlich visited Bound Brook for the report release and held a pep rally with students afterward, courtesy of the American Dairy Association. Quinton will receive a visit from a Philadelphia Eagles player later this fall, courtesy of Mid-Atlantic Dairy Council.

“We recognize that hungry students struggle to learn so it is incumbent on us, as a district, to ensure that all of our students begin their day with a healthy meal,” said Bound Brook Superintendent Dan Gallagher. “We have seen great results with breakfast after the bell. Our students are more focused and ready to learn. This has simply become an important part of our morning routine.”

ACNJ also released data for every school district with at least 20 percent of students eligible for free- and reduced-priced school meals. State law requires these districts to provide school breakfast.

“We are calling on school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers to provide leadership in expanding school breakfast because this makes smart sense for children, schools and the state as a whole,” Zalkind said. “Hungry children struggle to learn. Providing breakfast leverages the billions of dollars we invest each year in educating our children, ensuring that more students succeed in school.”

For more information, visit www.njschoolbreakfast.org.

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Advocates for Children of New Jersey is a statewide, non-profit child action and research organization dedicating to ensuring that every child has the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.