

Food For Thought: Expanding School Breakfast to NJ Students Mercer County Profile, 2015



School Breakfast NJ County Rankings

County	2015 Percent of Eligible Students Receiving Breakfast	2015 Rank	2014 Rank
Passaic	70	1	13
Cumberland	54	2	1
Essex	51	3	3
Camden	50	4	5
Hudson	50	5	4
Cape May	48	6	2
Atlantic	48	7	7
Somerset	48	8	9
Middlesex	48	9	6
Union	44	10	11
Salem	43	11	17
Gloucester	40	12	16
Monmouth	39	13	10
Ocean	37	14	14
Warren	37	15	8
Mercer	34	16	12
Burlington	32	17	15
Morris	30	18	20
Sussex	27	19	18
Bergen	25	20	19
Hunterdon	2	21	21

Sources: ACNJ calculated the above ranks using NJ Department of Education October 2014 enrollment counts to determine the number of eligible children and NJ Department of Agriculture school breakfast participation data, April 2015.

Breakfast After the Bell Fuels Increases in School Breakfast

Everyone agrees that children need to start their school day with a full stomach. After years of being nearly last in the nation for its participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, New Jersey has shown strong improvement over the past five years.

In 2015, the state moved to 28th nationally, compared to its previous ranking of 46th for student participation in this critical child nutrition program. This progress is the result of a growing number of New Jersey districts switching to serving “breakfast after the bell,” rather than before school, when most students have not yet arrived.

This approach, typically done in the classroom during the first few minutes of the school day, significantly boosts participation, giving more kids the nutritious start to the school day that can help them concentrate and learn.

Since the program is federally funded, most districts with high concentrations of low-income children can feed all students at little or no extra cost, leveraging the considerable investment New Jersey makes in public education.

As part of the NJ Food for Thought Campaign, Advocates for Children of New Jersey each year compiles breakfast participation data for every New Jersey school district with at least 20 percent of children eligible for free- or reduced-price breakfast. These districts are required by state law to offer breakfast at school.

Following is the news release and profile for Mercer County and ways local advocates can use this information to increase school breakfast participation.

For more information, visit njschoolbreakfast.org.

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Mercer County

2015 Rank

16

2014 Rank: 12

Recognizing that hunger is a major barrier to learning, New Jersey school leaders have made great progress in recent years in serving breakfast to more low-income students. From 2010 to 2015, New Jersey schools posted a 75 percent increase in the number of low-income students eating breakfast at school, primarily by serving “breakfast after the bell,” usually in the classroom. While encouraging, nearly 300,000 NJ students are still missing out on this morning meal that can help them concentrate and learn.

To help identify districts with low participation that would benefit from more effective breakfast programs, Advocates for Children of New Jersey provides this district-by-district breakdown of breakfast participation rates and the additional federal dollars districts would receive if 100 percent of eligible children participated.

School Breakfast Participation, April 2015

School District	# of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Breakfast	Eligible Students as % of Total Enrollment	% of Eligible Students Receiving Breakfast	# Eligible Students NOT Receiving Breakfast	Total Possible Federal Reimbursement*
East Windsor Regional	1,897	37	20	1,522	\$412,391
Ewing	1,619	45	14	1,387	\$378,047
Foundation Academy Charter School	643	82	32	439	\$120,316
Hamilton	4,530	38	19	3,683	\$1,001,565
International Academy Of Trenton Charter School	324	92	34	213	\$59,281
International Charter School of Trenton	63	70	49	32	\$9,209
Lawrence	968	24	11	864	\$232,762
Pace Charter School of Hamilton	148	67	84	23	\$5,461
Paul Robeson Humanities Charter School	349	94	38	218	\$60,703
Trenton	9,983	89	49	5,118	\$1,438,333
Trenton Stem-To-Civics Charter School	96	95	5	91	\$25,178
Village Charter School	301	84	34	200	\$53,424
TOTAL/AVERAGE	20,921	55	34	13,790	\$3,796,670

Note: This chart excludes school districts with fewer than 20 percent eligible students.

Sources: New Jersey Departments of Education and Agriculture, compiled by Advocates for Children of New Jersey. This chart excludes data from the Special Services Commission and vocational districts because accurate data were not available for these types of districts.

* This represents the federal dollars districts would receive if every eligible child received a school breakfast all 180 days of the school year. These funds can only be used for breakfast expenses.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mercer County Drops to 16th for School Breakfast Participation

Mercer County dropped from 12th to 16th place for the number of low-income children eating breakfast at school, with Mercer public schools feeding just one-third of eligible children, according to county profiles released today by Advocates for Children of New Jersey.

More than half – 55 percent – of Mercer County students are eligible to receive free- and reduced-priced school meals, but just 34 percent of these students actually received breakfast at school in April 2015. This means that close to 14,000 eligible students are still missing out on a morning meal. The statewide participation rate is 44 percent.

Mercer County's participation rates ranged from a high of 84 percent at Pace Charter School to a low of 5 percent at Trenton Stem-To-Civics Charter School. Trenton – the county's largest school district -- fed less than half of its low-income children, meaning more than 5,000 students were not receiving breakfast.

Statewide, New Jersey has seen a 75 percent increase in the number of New Jersey students receiving a healthy breakfast at school, rising from about 136,000 children in October 2010 to 237,000 in April 2015. This is primarily due to a growing number of districts serving "breakfast after the bell," during the first few minutes of the school day, which significantly boosts breakfast participation.

New Jersey districts are expected to collect \$92 million in federal reimbursements for school meals as a result of this increase, according to the FY 2016 state budget. If Mercer County achieved 100 percent participation, the county's school districts would receive nearly \$3.8 million in additional federal dollars to provide school breakfast to students, according to state statistics compiled by ACNJ.

ACNJ also released its 5th annual NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Report, along with the district-level data today at the Fred W. Martin School in Jersey City, which is now serving breakfast after the bell in all of the district's schools.

Before making this change three years ago, only 18 percent of eligible Jersey City students benefited from school breakfast during the 2011-12 school year. Now, the district is serving 63 percent of eligible students. The increase in federal meal reimbursements has allowed the district to cover the cost of providing free breakfast to all Jersey City students, school officials said.

Jersey City Superintendent Marcia Lyles said the students are benefiting from having breakfast each morning and that many of our educators have expressed strong support for the program.

“The students are more focused and ready to learn,” Lyles said. “Initially, there were concerns that the program would be disruptive, however our talented and dedicated staff found ways to make it work for children. As a district, we have systems in place that are running smoothly. Everyone is working together to ensure that all of our students have the nutrition they need to succeed in school.”

ACNJ releases district-level data to help school and local officials, county leaders, parents and others identify districts that are doing well on this front – and those that need to rise up to meet the school breakfast challenge.

“It is our hope that local, county and state officials and advocates will use this information to convince school boards and superintendents that expanding school breakfast makes sense for children, their districts and the state as a whole,” Zalkind said.

The NJ Food for Thought Campaign is a statewide effort to increase the number of students eating breakfast at school. The coalition includes New Jersey anti-hunger, education and health organizations, the New Jersey Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health and child advocates. The Food Research Action Center, the American Dairy Association and Council and the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Council are the campaign’s national partners.

“This successful campaign has resulted in more students starting their school day with a healthy meal, while bringing additional federal dollars into the state and leveraging the considerable investment we make in public education,” Zalkind said. “Our children need and deserve this healthy start to their school day.”

For more information, visit www.njschoolbreakfast.org.

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

Food For Thought: Expanding School Breakfast to NJ Students



Join the campaign to expand school breakfast in New Jersey...

A growing number of New Jersey school districts are adopting innovative approaches to serving breakfast to children in school. These districts have met logistical concerns over instructional time and clean-up. School officials that serve “breakfast after the bell” report significant increases in participation rates and improved student behavior and performance. Plus, these districts are claiming more federal dollars to feed hungry kids.

ACNJ provides this district-level data on school breakfast participation to assist school officials and advocates in implementing more effective breakfast programs. ACNJ is a leader of the NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign, which has compiled a host of advocacy and implementation resources on its website, www.njschoolbreakfast.org.

You can use this information to influence change in your community by presenting the report and data to your:

- School board
- Superintendent, business administrator and food services coordinator
- Parent Teacher Association (PTA or PTO)
- Local community and government agencies that can become partners in your campaign

You can also help by becoming a supporter of ACNJ’s Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign at www.njschoolbreakfast.org . Need help or more info? E-mail Reginald Dorsey at rdorsey.acnj.org.