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# Healthy Food, Strong Kids: *Building a Community Response to Childhood Hunger*



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**Giving Every Child A Chance**

## Healthy Food, Strong Kids: *Building a Community Response to Childhood Hunger*

Led by Advocates for Children of New Jersey and the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition, the NJ Food For Thought 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 and the American Dairy Association North East.

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

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



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# Healthy Food, Strong Kids:

## *Building a Community Response to Childhood Hunger*

By Nancy Parello

New Jersey is one of the richest states in the nation, yet in 2014, an alarming 340,000 New Jersey children suffered from hunger, according to Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap 2014*.

This hunger spills into the classroom, hurting all children's chances for school success. Nearly three-quarters of educators surveyed said they teach students who regularly come to school hungry because there isn't enough food at home, according to *Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength's Teachers Report 2013*. Half say that hunger is a serious problem in their classrooms, preventing children from concentrating on their schoolwork and causing classroom disruptions.

The good news is that childhood hunger is a solvable problem. But it requires a concerted community response rooted in leadership, partnership and the willingness to do things differently.

When ACNJ released its first school breakfast report five years ago, New Jersey was nearly last in the nation for its abysmally small number of low-income children who received breakfast at school. That first report led to the formation of the New Jersey Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign, an effective partnership of advocates, state agencies and national organizations. (See [njschoolbreakfast.org](http://njschoolbreakfast.org) for more information about the campaign and its partners.)

Working together, the campaign fundamentally changed the way breakfast is served in schools, with districts across New Jersey making the switch from serving breakfast before school — when children have not yet arrived — to serving it during the first few minutes of the school day.

Known as "breakfast after the bell," this approach significantly increases student participation in the federal School Breakfast Program. New Jersey now ranks 23rd nationally and will continue to rise through the ranks.

As ACNJ and the campaign partners continue to focus on increasing breakfast participation, the success on the

breakfast front has led us to examine ways to increase participation in other federal child nutrition programs, including summer and afterschool meals.

While a healthy breakfast and lunch at school is important, the need extends far beyond that, as many children don't get enough to eat in the summer and often come home to empty tables after school, with family budgets stretched tight.

This report reviews our continued progress on school breakfast, as well as areas where more breakfast work needs to be done, while also looking at other child nutrition programs and the community response needed to ensure children receive healthy nutrition all year long.

ACNJ hopes this information will be used to build partnerships across the state that will result in every child receiving the nutrition they need to grow up healthy and succeed in school.



Photo courtesy of the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, Greenwood Ave. Farmers Market, Trenton.

## School Breakfast: A Surefire Way to Fight Hunger

Classroom breakfast is one of the simplest and most effective ways to feed children who face hunger each day, especially when offered to all students during the first few minutes of the day, typically in the classroom, rather than before school when most students have not yet arrived.

This method also brings significant federal dollars into districts to feed hungry kids because reimbursements are based on the number of meals served meeting federal standards. Over the past five years, New Jersey's federal breakfast reimbursements have more than doubled, rising from \$48 million in FY 2011 to an estimated \$98 million in FY 2017.

That tracks a significant jump in students receiving school breakfast, soaring 77 percent and translating to nearly 105,000 more students starting each school day with a healthy meal. In April 2016, more than 240,500 low-income children received school breakfast, compared to about 136,000 in 2010.

The state's overall student participation rate has also shot up from 30 percent in 2010 to 44 percent in 2016. When

calculated as a percentage of low-income children who also eat lunch at school, the participation rate among low-income children is 59 percent.

In addition, the number of children living in higher-income families who ate breakfast at school also rose 37 percent — an indication that a growing number of parents who can afford breakfast prefer to pay a small fee to have their children eat at school. Not only is this convenient, parents know their children are receiving nutritious, balanced meals each morning.

### The Benefits of Breakfast After the Bell

When children eat breakfast, research shows the following results:

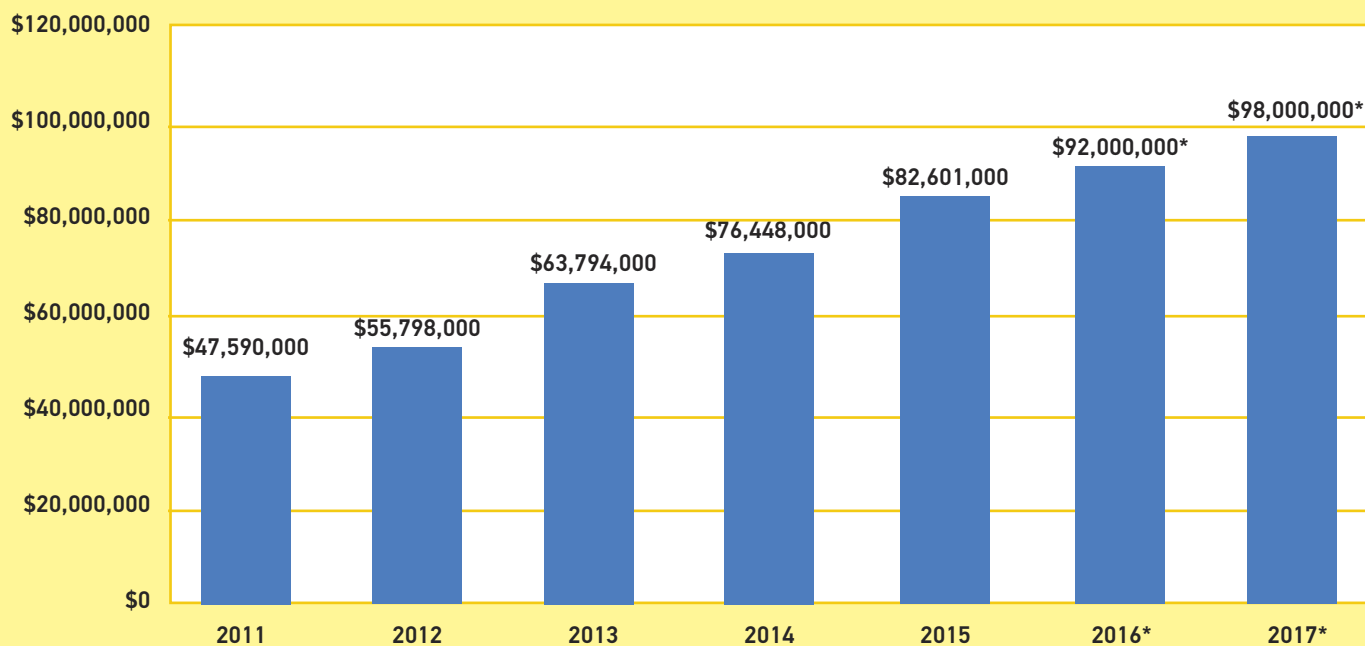
- Better academic performance
- Less disruptive student behavior
- Fewer trips to the school nurse
- Increased attendance
- Reduced tardiness
- Reduced childhood obesity

### New Jersey Statewide School Breakfast Totals

	2010	2015	2016	% Change 2010-2016
<b>Total Student Enrollment</b>	<b>1,364,495</b>	<b>1,368,859</b>	<b>1,370,320</b>	<b>0</b>
Total # Students Eligible for Free/Reduced School Meals	448,306	538,353	542,325	21
% Students Eligible for Free/Reduced School Meals	33	39	40	20
Total # Students Receiving Free School Breakfast	123,293	214,483	225,096	83
Total # Students Receiving Reduced School Breakfast	12,520	16,072	15,481	24
Total # Students Receiving Free/Reduced School Breakfast	135,813	230,555	240,577	77
Total # Students Receiving Paid School Breakfast	26,387	32,914	36,126	37
Grand Total of All Students Receiving School Breakfast	162,200	263,469	276,703	71
% of Eligible Students Receiving School Breakfast (Participation Rate)	30	42.8	44.4	46
% of Eligible Students Receiving School Breakfast As a % of Those Also Receiving Lunch.	38	55	59	57

**Sources:** NJ Department of Education October enrollment counts for the 2009–10, 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years, and NJ Department of Agriculture participation data from October 2010, April 2015 and April 2016. NJ DOE 2015–16 enrollment counts accessed on 8/1/16. Column totals for 2015 updated since prior report. Totals include all NJ districts, including vo-tech and special services districts and charter schools.

## NJ Federal School Breakfast Reimbursement, By State Fiscal Year



\*Indicates estimated figures.

### More work remains...

Nearly 302,000 low-income children did not receive school breakfast in April 2016 — a number that has remained stubbornly high despite New Jersey’s great progress. That is partially because the number of children eligible for free or low-cost school meals continues to steadily rise — increasing 21 percent since 2010 — a clear indication that many more families are struggling to put food on the table.

This is also because many school leaders and staff continue to resist the change to breakfast after the bell, despite ample evidence that this method is doable and effective. While the campaign’s efforts have resulted in nearly all large urban districts serving breakfast after the bell, dozens of smaller districts with high poverty continue to serve breakfast before school. This has slowed New Jersey’s progress, with districts achieving a 4 percent increase in student participation from 2015 to 2016 — lower than the double digit increases seen during the first few years of the campaign.

When districts serve breakfast before school, many students simply can’t access the meal. Time constraints, the need to care for younger siblings, transportation, early start times and other issues prevent children and

teenagers from getting to school with enough time to eat breakfast before the first bell rings.

In addition, many high schools have been slow to make the breakfast switch, even in districts where breakfast is served after the bell in elementary and middle schools. According to a recent ACNJ analysis of data provided by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, just 12 percent of secondary schools were serving breakfast after the bell, compared to nearly one-third of elementary schools. (See companion piece, *Food for Thought: Boosting Breakfast for Teens*, at [www.njschoolbreakfast.org](http://www.njschoolbreakfast.org)).

School leaders often cite cleanup, lost instructional time and cost as barriers. In high schools, the large size of the buildings is often an issue. These challenges, however, are easily overcome.

Cleanup is made easy with trash bins stationed in or just outside classrooms for breakfast waste, which custodians simply collect when breakfast is finished. Meal costs are typically covered through federal reimbursements in districts with high concentrations of low-income students — 50 percent or more. In fact, if all eligible New Jersey students ate breakfast at school, districts would receive an estimated \$74 million in federal funds.

To address building size issues, some New Jersey high schools use grab-and-go kiosks stationed in high-traffic areas. This eliminates the need to deliver breakfast to every classroom in large high schools.

Breakfast actually helps make instructional time more productive, with students fed, focused and ready to begin their school day. In addition, many New Jersey teachers have found effective ways to use the 10 to 15 minutes it takes for students to eat breakfast. Some use the time for attendance, morning announcements and other housekeeping chores, while others incorporate lessons, such as journaling or working on math problems.

In addition, the New Jersey Department of Education has issued guidance that breakfast can count as instructional time and also recently issued a memo encouraging districts to serve breakfast after the bell.

Despite all these reasons to serve breakfast after the bell, 44 high-poverty New Jersey districts have still not made the switch, serving less than one-third of their low-income students. (See “School Breakfast Underachievers,” page 7).

Breakfast after the bell is a relatively simple change, brings federal dollars into districts and, most importantly, ensures that children have the morning nutrition they need to concentrate and learn.

## School Breakfast Recommendations

### ■ Provide Leadership.

School leaders, especially superintendents, must provide leadership and work with their principals, teachers, custodians, other school staff and parents to implement breakfast after the bell in all schools.

### ■ Fiscal Incentives.

New Jersey should provide fiscal incentives for districts to serve breakfast to more students, making these programs more financially feasible.

### ■ Community Eligibility.

Qualified districts should adopt the federal Community Eligibility Provision to feed more children, increase reimbursements and reduce paperwork.

### ■ Advocate.

Parents, community and faith-based leaders and others should use the data in this report and the accompanying county fact sheets to convince school leaders in towns where they work and live to adopt breakfast after the bell.



## School Breakfast Champs

Since breakfast is such an important piece to the nutrition puzzle, each year we recognize the top 20 high-poverty districts with the highest student participation. In these districts, where at least half of students qualified to receive free and low-cost meals,

the average participation rate was 78 percent — nearly double the 44 percent statewide average. ACNJ and the NJ Food for Thought Campaign commend these champs for stepping up to serve breakfast in a way that reaches more students.

### 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
Monmouth	Hope Academy Charter School	189	91	188	99
Middlesex	Greater Brunswick Charter School	333	86	319	96
Atlantic	Atlantic Community Charter School*	148	99	134	91
Somerset	Bound Brook*	1,310	73	1,143	87
Essex	Pride Academy Charter School	227	79	194	85
Salem	Salem City**	1,174	100	993	85
Cape May	Cape May	103	55	87	84
Atlantic	Egg Harbor City	431	82	361	84
Camden	Camden's Pride Charter School	203	84	170	84
Atlantic	Atlantic City	5,761	81	4,817	84
Sussex	Montague*	120	55	98	82
Passaic	Community Charter School Of Paterson**	895	100	722	81
Cumberland	Fairfield**	640	100	511	80
Camden	Mastery Schools Of Camden**	1,406	100	1,117	79
Camden	Leap Academy University Charter School	1,209	84	959	79
Camden	Kipp: Cooper Norcross Academy**	498	100	392	79
Camden	Environment Community Charter School**	184	100	144	78
Cape May	Lower Township	970	56	728	75
Hudson	Union City**	11,815	100	8,793	74
Union	Plainfield	6,045	78	4,494	74
<b>Total/Average</b>		<b>33,661</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>26,364</b>	<b>78</b>

*Note: Data for Greater Brunswick Charter School and Salem City came directly from school officials.*

*\*Eligibility data are from the 2014-15 school year, as accurate data for the 2015-16 school year were unavailable; 2014-15 Montague eligibility data as reported by school officials.*

*\*\*Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) District. In CEP districts, all enrolled students are eligible for free breakfast.*



## More Breakfast Champs

A growing number of districts with lower child poverty are also recognizing the importance of offering breakfast to all children in the morning – even for families who can afford to pay. These districts often use a mixed approach — providing the meal free to students who qualify and offering a paid breakfast to those who do not. This method enables the districts to cover the cost of the

program, while also ensuring that all students begin their day with a healthy meal.

In these top 20 districts where low-income students make up from 20 to 49 percent of total enrollment, the average participation was 57 percent, compared to 44 percent statewide in April 2016.

### 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
Burlington	New Hanover	87	45	65	75
Atlantic	Estell Manor	43	25	31	72
Gloucester	National Park	123	45	86	70
Salem	Quinton	132	38	91	69
Camden	Runnemede	320	37	219	68
Somerset	Central Jersey College Prep Charter School	119	28	80	67
Cape May	West Cape May	23	27	15	65
Gloucester	Franklin	513	37	329	64
Somerset	Franklin	3,296	45	2,079	63
Bergen	East Rutherford	296	36	182	61
Cumberland	Deerfield	154	47	94	61
Middlesex	Edison	3,036	20	1,773	58
Cumberland	Compass Academy Charter School	71	41	41	58
Cumberland	Greenwich	16	27	9	56
Burlington	Pemberton	1,824	39	954	52
Hudson	Jersey City Global Charter School	71	22	37	52
Cape May	Lower Cape May Regional	681	50	349	51
Salem	Upper Pittsgrove	80	23	41	51
Atlantic	Hamilton	1,285	42	652	51
Middlesex	North Brunswick	2,375	39	1,199	50
	<b>Total/Average</b>	<b>14,544</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>8,326</b>	<b>57</b>

## School Breakfast Underachievers

Unfortunately, other high-poverty districts continue to lag behind. In April 2016, 44 districts with at least half of their students eligible for free or low-cost meals served fewer than 31 percent of eligible students.

In these districts alone, more than 39,000 children — many at high risk of hunger — did not receive school breakfast. If all of these eligible students received breakfast each school day, these districts would receive an estimated \$13.4 million more in federal funding to support school breakfast each year. And most important, more low-income students would start their day with the nutrition they need to concentrate and succeed in school.

Eight districts — Belmar, Clayton, Burlington City, Hillside, Brooklawn, Ocean Gate, North Bergen, Passaic Arts and Science Charter School — have improved their

participation numbers since last year and are no longer on the underachievers list. These districts should be commended for taking steps to improve breakfast service.

New to the list this year are Brigantine, North Wildwood, Benjamin Bannecker Prep Charter School, South Bound Brook and Edgewater Park. These districts had fewer than 50 percent of students eligible last year, but are now at 50 percent or above. Three others — Pine Hill, People’s Prep Charter School and Somers Point — were added to the list because their student participation actually declined from last year.

We urge all districts on this list to implement breakfast after the bell to help provide their students with the nutrition they need to succeed in school.

### 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	175	87	3	170	\$59,814
Hudson	Guttenberg	808	81	7	752	\$265,478
Hudson	Kearny	3,385	57	7	3,132	\$1,092,020
Bergen	Englewood On The Palisades Charter School	118	56	8	109	\$38,180
Essex	Belleville	2,713	60	8	2,486	\$862,783
Hudson	Soaring Heights Charter School	128	54	9	117	\$39,317
Union	Queen City Academy Charter School	246	76	9	223	\$78,799
Bergen	Fairview	993	74	10	897	\$317,093
Bergen	Lodi	1,916	60	10	1,726	\$594,898
Cape May	North Wildwood	137	51	10	123	\$43,303
Burlington	Benjamin Bannecker Prep Charter School	83	58	11	74	\$25,103
Essex	Paulo Freire Charter School	167	62	11	148	\$52,636
Monmouth	Keyport	586	55	12	518	\$180,985
Passaic	Prospect Park**	914	100	12	801	N/A
Somerset	South Bound Brook	227	50	15	193	\$66,433
Passaic	Haledon	772	73	16	646	\$225,835
Burlington	Riverside	779	56	16	651	\$228,004
Essex	Burch Charter School Of Excellence	261	74	17	217	\$76,055

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*
Passaic	Clifton	6,073	56	17	5,039	\$1,760,150
Middlesex	Academy For Urban Leadership Charter School	314	80	17	260	\$91,404
Camden	Woodlynne	342	91	17	283	\$99,211
Essex	People's Preparatory Charter High School	344	91	18	283	\$100,183
Atlantic	Brigantine	343	52	18	281	\$98,602
Middlesex	Carteret	2,583	70	19	2,105	\$737,865
Union	College Achieve Central Charter School	214	69	19	174	\$61,355
Essex	Robert Treat Academy Charter School	478	73	19	388	\$135,634
Essex	Gray Charter School	264	80	19	214	\$74,873
Essex	Newark Prep Charter School**	448	100	19	363	N/A
Bergen	Cliffside Park	1,816	61	19	1,462	\$510,350
Union	Linden	3,288	55	20	2,626	\$909,502
Hudson	Hoboken	1,021	53	22	797	\$280,409
Camden	Camden Academy Charter High School	407	82	22	317	\$111,335
Union	Rahway	2,013	54	22	1,567	\$542,075
Hudson	Great Futures Charter High School for the Health Sciences	147	64	22	114	\$40,403
Hudson	Jersey City Golden Door Charter School	302	55	23	234	\$81,119
Morris	Dover	2,332	73	24	1,773	\$619,645
Somerset	North Plainfield	2,142	67	26	1,589	\$554,330
Hudson	University Academy Charter School	348	80	26	258	\$89,716
Essex	North Star Academy Charter School	3,457	87	26	2,543	\$887,845
Monmouth	Neptune City	207	57	27	152	\$52,826
Burlington	Edgewater Park	456	53	27	332	\$116,168
Bergen	Garfield	3,191	67	28	2,301	\$798,470
Atlantic	Somers Point	685	69	29	483	\$168,151
Camden	Pine Hill	1,030	55	30	726	\$252,115
<b>Total/Average</b>		<b>48,653</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>39,647</b>	<b>\$13,420,472</b>

Note: Eligibility data for Great Futures Charter High School for the Health Sciences came directly from school officials.

\*These figures assume 100% participation during the 180-day school year.

\*\*Not applicable. These are Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) districts, in which all enrolled students are eligible for free meals, reimbursement rates not calculated.

## Community Eligibility: A Great Way to Feed All Students

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is starting to take hold in New Jersey, with 31 public school districts now taking advantage of this option that allows high-poverty schools to provide free school meals to all students, increase federal reimbursements and reduce paperwork. That number nearly doubled from last year when just 16 districts were using this option.

Included in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, community eligibility completely eliminates paper meal applications. Instead, schools are reimbursed through a formula based on the number of “identified students” — those certified for free school meals because they are in foster care or Head Start, are homeless, migrant or living in households that receive NJ SNAP (food stamps) or welfare assistance.

Forty percent of a school’s enrollment must be “identified students” to participate in this option.

“CEP has been a blessing,” said Dave Buchholtz, Paterson School District’s food service director. “We did our own calculations and decided it would be beneficial, not only financially, but for feeding kids. You can’t put a price tag on that. It has been a win-win.”

Union City has also successfully used CEP, increasing its federal meal reimbursements and saving money on paperwork, said Business Administrator Anthony Dragona. The district was able to use the savings to significantly improve the quality of meals served to students, Dragona added.

“The lunch forms were a burden,” he said. “But the real benefit is for the kids. No child has to pay and we’ve seen breakfast participation increase dramatically.”

While a growing number of school districts are opting in to Community Eligibility, the need to collect household financial information remains a barrier for some school leaders, who fear loss of state and federal aid. New Jersey’s school funding formula is based, in part, on the number of students who qualify for free and low-cost school meals.

But at a recent roundtable convened by the USDA and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, state officials said that districts participating in CEP have not lost state or federal funding. The New Jersey Department of Education has created a household income form that replaces the school meals application. Districts have to verify household income only for those students who are not directly certified, which reduces administrative burdens, state officials said.

While some districts have struggled with collecting these forms in the first year, they are putting systems in place to ensure all forms are collected. In Paterson, for example, the district had the surveys printed and sent to all school principals with a list of students whose families need to complete the form, Buchholtz said.

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In Bridgeton, principals, parent liaisons and attendance officers are all working with families to get the forms completed, impressing on parents the importance of this information in terms of state support for their schools, said Warren DeShields, food service director. They also put the form online and are using robocalls to encourage parents to complete the forms.

“Our message to parents is that this impacts funding for teachers, sports, afterschool programs — everything that we have going on in our schools,” DeShields said.

Dragona added that once principals became used to the household income forms, “we got cleaner surveys — and we’re able to provide a great service to the community.”

The New Jersey Departments of Education and Agriculture provide all the tools districts need to calculate how CEP would impact their food budgets.

To learn more, visit [nj.gov/education/finance/cep/](http://nj.gov/education/finance/cep/). To find out if your school is eligible, visit <http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn/childadult/cepnotification.html>. Additional information and resources are available on the Food Research and Action Center website, [frac.org](http://frac.org).

## Summer Meals Fill the Nutrition Gap When Schools Close

Serving school breakfast to more children is critical, but what happens when schools close? For far too many children who rely on school meals, summer is the hungriest time of the year.

The federal Summer Food Service Program helps fill that gap and is another critical piece to solving childhood hunger. Without adequate summertime nutrition, children from low-income families often experience learning loss and weight gain because they must consume fatty, unhealthy foods to fill the gap, according to Share Our Strength's *2015 Summer Nutrition Program Impact Analysis*. In the long-term, sufficient summertime nutrition can increase high school graduation rates and reduce susceptibility to chronic diseases, the report found.

Traditionally, participation in the federal summer meals program is far lower than the number of children who receive free or low-cost school lunch or even breakfast. Last year, ACNJ released its first report on summer meals, which found that just 19 percent of New Jersey's low-income children received meals.

The Food Research Action Center recommends that states serve at least 40 percent of these low-income children. If New Jersey expanded summer meals to reach that goal, communities and school districts could collect \$7.2 million more federal dollars each year to fight childhood hunger, according to the report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Summer Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*.

Since releasing its 2015 report, ACNJ, the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture have been working together in communities across the state to increase the number of summer meal sponsors and sites, as well as raise awareness among families that these meals are available.

Those efforts resulted in cities across New Jersey, including Bridgeton, Atlantic City, Newark and Trenton, among others, to expand meal sites this past summer. Preliminary Department of Agriculture data show that the number of sites rose 21 percent from 1,100 in 2015 to 1,350 in 2016. Child participation statistics were not available prior to publication of this report, but ACNJ plans to release summer meals data later this year.

In addition to providing free, healthy meals, these programs also offer an opportunity for children 18 years and younger to play together, engage in enrichment activities, hone their academic skills and be better prepared when they return to school in September.

### Increase in Meal Sites

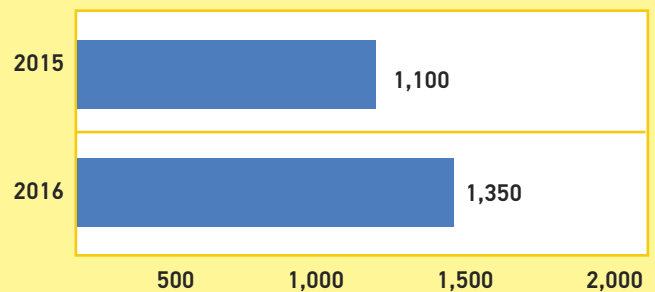


Photo courtesy of the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, Greenwood Ave. Farmers Market, Trenton.

At most sites, parents do not need to fill out an application nor provide identification for their children to receive meals, according to federal rules. The meals must meet federal nutrition standards. The USDA recommends low-fat, low-sugar and whole-grain foods.

Providing summer meals does present certain logistical challenges, including paperwork, stringent federal operation requirements and inconsistent attendance at summer programs. These logistical challenges can be met, however, resulting in more children having the nutrition they need to stay healthy during the summer months. In fact, sponsors across New Jersey routinely navigate the logistics of starting and maintaining a summer meals program.

To help spread awareness of summer meals, the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign launched a statewide communications campaign to inform parents of this critical nutritional assistance and worked with local leaders to conduct grassroots outreach.

This effort was hampered, however, by a lack of information on the location of meal sites. The USDA operates a national directory that allows parents and others to find sites online or through texting, but New Jersey sites were not available on the database, making it difficult to conduct effective statewide outreach. Stakeholders in areas serving summer meals also reported difficulty in getting information about site locations, thus reducing the effectiveness of their local outreach efforts.

Some of the difficulty stemmed from a very high number of incomplete or inaccurate applications from summer meals sponsors, state officials said. This delayed official approval of sites, which is required before the USDA will allow sites to be entered into the database, according to state officials. Another reason was that department officials — desiring to increase the number of meal sponsors — were still recruiting sponsors in May and allowing them to submit applications later than had previously been done. While this was well-intentioned and aimed at increasing meal service, it delayed final approval of sites.

State officials say they are implementing several strategies to ensure this does not happen again next year. This includes streamlining applications to reduce duplicative paperwork that sponsors must submit, using all fillable PDF applications, rather than hand-written ones, and setting firm deadlines for sponsors to submit their applications to allow enough time for corrections to be addressed.

## Recommendations for Expanding Summer Meals

### ■ Partner to Expand Meals.

Expanding summer meal programs starts in the community. Local government, school leaders and community organizations in high-need, low-participation communities should work together to identify summer meal sponsors and sites and partner to meet the logistical challenges of implementing such a program, with help from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

### ■ Reduce Paperwork.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture should continue to explore ways to make the paperwork less burdensome for sponsors.

### ■ Make Meal Site Locations Available Early in the Summer.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture must ensure that all site locations are widely distributed and included in the USDA online directory by the beginning of July at the latest.

### ■ Conduct Effective Outreach.

Summer meal sponsors, with assistance from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, should engage in aggressive community outreach to ensure the programs reach all children in need.

### ■ Support Changes to Federal Law.

Various federal legislation is pending that would make it less onerous for sponsors to operate the Summer Food Service Program. State and local advocates can stay abreast of these developments by visiting [www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org) to learn about updates and actions they can take to support these efforts.

## The Next Frontier: Afterschool Meals

**A**s school breakfast and summer meals continue to expand, the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program, a relatively new addition to the array of federal child nutrition programs, is starting to take hold in pockets around the state.

Recognizing that children need nutrition when the school day ends, many afterschool programs have long served a snack — often at their own expense. This program offers generous reimbursements for organizations to serve snacks and dinners to children who may otherwise go home to an empty table.

The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 permanently established the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program as part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The program is open to organizations providing afterschool activities located in areas where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free and low-cost meals.

Since the program was made permanent in 2010, the number of suppers served throughout the U.S. each year more than quadrupled, according to No Kid Hungry, Share Our Strength. In FY 2015, U.S. schools and other organizations served more than 390 million snacks and meals to children participating in afterschool activities.

Because of the way state data had been collected, it is not possible at this time to capture a comprehensive picture of child participation in afterschool meals programs. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which administers this program at the state level, has now changed the way statistics are being collected. Comparable data is expected next year. Yet, it is widely accepted that the program currently reaches just a fraction of children who would benefit.

Diane Genco, executive director, NJSACC: The Statewide Network for New Jersey's Afterschool Communities, said a growing number of afterschool programs are trying to tap into the program. She added that her group is working on logistical and bureaucratic concerns that make it difficult for some programs, especially smaller ones, to participate.

She did, however, point to some pockets of success. The Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City offers snacks to children when they arrive at 2:50 p.m. and then provides a dinner before the kids head home. This nutrition helps

fill the gap for the many children who come from families with budgets stretched so tight that they are unable to provide a nutritious dinner, said Michelle Carrera, chief executive officer of the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City.

"We see the need every day, especially with the current economy and high unemployment rate," Carrera said. "Families struggle to have the resources to provide a healthy dinner every night. The kids love the meals and we are able to cover our costs with the federal reimbursements."

The Community FoodBank of New Jersey is also serving afterschool meals at its 28 Kids Cafes located in Passaic, Bergen, Morris, Middlesex and Essex counties. Each weekday, the food bank delivers pre-packaged dinners to Boys and Girls Clubs, churches and other community organizations, said Lindsey Kennedy, the food bank's nutrition program manager.

"We wanted to create a healthy menu for the kids, so at least two days a week we include fresh fruit and veggies and other days we provide fruit cups or frozen vegetables," she said.

"We're looking to grow," she said, adding they are now contracting with a vendor to prepare and deliver meals to more sites.

The Cumberland Cape Atlantic YMCA is another organization at the forefront of the afterschool meals movement. The organization provides healthy snacks — baby carrots and dressing, fruits and vegetables — to children in the Mullica Township School District and to its own YMCA programs, said Theresa Booth, senior director of child development.

They are trying to expand the program, although finding food vendors in South Jersey has been a challenge, she said. Paperwork can also be daunting, but she adds the need is so great that the YMCA is committed to working through the logistics to feed hungry children.

"Children have told us there's hardly any food at home," Booth said. "Your heart breaks for them. To see the kids eat, it's worth all the effort."

To learn more about the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program and implementation in New Jersey, contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 984-1250.

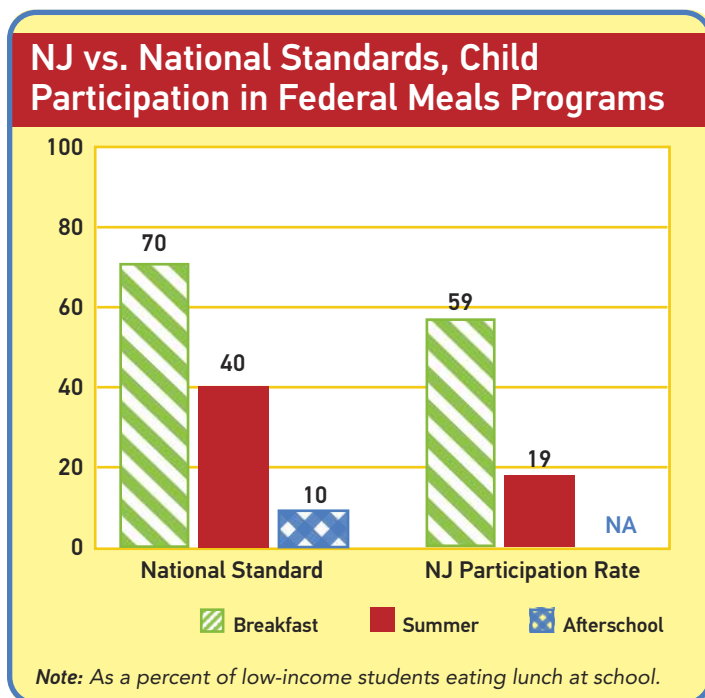
## Communities Responding to Childhood Hunger

National standards recommend that 70 percent of low-income children who receive free or reduced-price lunch also receive breakfast, while 40 percent should receive summer meals and 10 percent should have afterschool meals.

In 2016, 59 percent of New Jersey’s low-income students who ate school lunch also had school breakfast. In 2015 — the most recent data available — 19 percent of these children received summer meals. Data are not currently available for participation in the relatively new afterschool meals program.

While a healthy school breakfast and lunch are important, the need is far more pervasive. To meet that need, school leaders, local government, community organizations, the healthcare community and faith-based organizations must make a collective commitment to feed children and then partner to meet the logistics of delivering healthy food all year long.

This is especially important in high-poverty areas where working families struggle with tight budgets that make it nearly impossible to put healthy food on the table every single day.



This approach is beginning to occur in pockets of New Jersey. Communities are tapping into an array of federal child nutrition programs that pay for each meal a child receives — breakfast, lunch, snacks, dinner and summer—bringing needed federal dollars into towns and giving kids the nutrition they need to grow, learn and be healthy.

Here is a look at some of those efforts and recommendations for how to replicate them across New Jersey.

### Schools as Nutrition Hubs for Kids

Child nutrition is closely tied to schools’ success in educating children who are college- or career-ready. And schools are uniquely positioned to play a leading role in feeding hungry children. Most have a food service system, with the staff, knowledge and equipment to serve meals to children. Families are usually closely connected with their local schools. Schools are safe places that can offer enrichment programs and homework help to nourish young minds, as well as bodies.

School districts can also be valuable partners to community agencies by acting as the food vendor for summer and afterschool meals, as many small agencies struggle to find vendors willing to supply food on smaller scales. Likewise, larger districts can provide leadership and assistance to charter schools to expand meal service throughout the day and the year.

Districts like Paterson offer instruction in how to turn schools into nutrition hubs.

In Paterson, breakfast after the bell is now served in all schools, with the high schools serving both before school and in the classroom using grab-and-go kiosks. The district was one of the first in the state to take advantage of the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides increased meal reimbursements, reduced paperwork and the ability to provide meals to all students free of charge – a critical goal in a district where the vast majority of students come from low-income families who struggle to put food on the table.

The district is also the city’s main summer meals sponsor, serving free meals to children at child care centers, houses of worship, parks, schools and other places where children congregate. In July 2016, the school district fed an average of 2,700 children each day at 43 sites.



Recognizing the need for afterschool meals and snacks, Food Service Director Dave Buchholtz is now beginning to roll-out snacks in one or two schools this spring, with plans to eventually expand district-wide.

“We know our students need nutrition all year long to achieve academic success,” Buchholtz said. “Not only are we feeding more children, we are building ties to the community and supporting our parents.”

More New Jersey school districts should follow Paterson’s lead.

## What Schools Can Do

- Serve breakfast after the bell with models like classroom breakfast or grab-and-go.
- Take advantage of the Community Eligibility Provision to feed more students, while increasing federal reimbursements and reducing paperwork.
- Become a summer and afterschool meals sponsor and work with local government and non-profits to expand these meals throughout the community.
- Couple afterschool and summer meals with enrichment and physical activity programs.
- Work with your school’s athletic program to allow athletes to drop in on the afterschool program at your school to receive a meal or snack.
- Promote summer meals through robocalls to parents, in the school newsletter, website and social media feeds, distribute flyers to parents and recruit parent-teacher associations to spread the word about summer meals.
- Participate in local coalitions focusing on addressing hunger.

## Mayors at the Forefront of Child Nutrition

Mayors are the leaders of their communities. By making child nutrition a top priority, they can help end childhood hunger in cities and towns across New Jersey. They have the ability to mobilize city agencies, forge partnerships with community organizations and work closely with school leaders to create a seamless nutritional safety net for children.

While mayors across the country have taken steps to address childhood hunger, New Jersey has its own examples of these leaders. Bridgeton Mayor Albert Kelly knew children in his town were going hungry. So he

decided to convene a “Need to Feed” summit in January 2016, partnering with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to bring together Cumberland County community organizations, local and school leaders, food vendors and others to highlight the issues and forge solutions.

In addition to working with the schools and community partners, Mayor Kelly is poised to have the first mobile feeding in the state. Kelly used a grant to retrofit a bus to offer “meals on wheels.” With help from the state Department of Agriculture, he plans to launch the year-round mobile feeding this coming spring. Plans call for physical activity and health services to be integrated into the mobile feeding bus.

The mayor has also been instrumental in expanding summer meals throughout Bridgeton by working with state officials, the school district and local community agencies. This past summer, the city hit a roadblock when one of its primary meal vendors was unable to deliver the food. The school district stepped up and provided the food, thanks in part to the strong relationship the two entities have built, Kelly said.

The mayor and his partners kicked off the summer meals program with an event that attracted 400 parents, children and other community members. Then, in an innovative approach to outreach, the mayor, through a grant from Robert Wood Johnson’s New Jersey Health Initiatives, harnessed the power of youth to distribute flyers in the community, while also equipping them with leadership skills and a summertime paycheck.

Meanwhile, Bridgeton schools are expanding the breakfast after the bell program this school year and taking advantage of the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which will bring more federal dollars into the district to feed more children. Last year, the district started a dinner program at the high school, according to Food Service Director Warren DeShields, where students eat during a mandatory study hall.

“It’s going wonderful,” DeShields said. “We averaged about 250 dinners a day at the high school.”

Kelly credits all of this progress to partners who share a common goal.

“It has been an excellent partnership,” Kelly said. “Everybody is dedicated to the mission — making sure our community is being fed.”

## What New Jersey mayors can do to combat childhood hunger

- Convene a multi-sector taskforce comprised of schools, libraries, parks and recreation centers, afterschool and summer programs, food banks and pantries, hospitals and faith-based organizations to assess the problem and develop local solutions, including working with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to expand federal child nutrition programs.
- Partner with community organizations and school leaders to expand access to federal child nutrition programs.
- Raise awareness about free summer meals by visiting a summer meals site and promoting sites through robocalls to families, social media, websites and a city services hotline.

### Community Organizations: Valuable Partners in Combating Childhood Hunger

Ending childhood hunger is impossible without the partnership of community and faith-based organizations, including social service providers, food banks and pantries, health centers, hospitals and other community leaders. With a keen understanding of the needs of the families in their neighborhoods and strong connections to those families, these organizations play a key role in combating childhood hunger.

The value of community partners was evident in Atlantic City this year. With the city struggling from a spate of casino closings that meant job losses for city residents and budget woes for city administrators, the need to expand access to food for children and families was more important than ever.

But precisely because of these financial difficulties and staff cuts, the city's recreation department was unable to serve meals last summer, as it had done in past years. With help from the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, the Care AC Coalition, funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, brought together city and school officials and community organizations in May to create a plan for serving summer meals.

Two community organizations — the Community Food-Bank of New Jersey, Southern Branch, and Vision 2000 — agreed to be sponsors of the federal Summer Food

Service Program. Sponsors take responsibility for administering the program, tracking meals served and providing food to sites.

Other community organizations, including several churches and a child care center, agreed to be meal sites. The city's housing authority also volunteered to host sites at three of the city's major housing developments and enlisted community volunteers to supervise the meal service, said Kim Arroyo of the Community FoodBank of New Jersey.

It wasn't easy getting the programs running on such short notice. Arroyo struggled with food vendor issues, while Vision 2000 had difficulty handling all the paperwork, limiting their expansion plans.

Still, the community working together meant that Atlantic City had 17 summer meals sites — up from 11 in 2015 when the city was the primary sponsor. Together, these sites served an average of more than 700 children each day, sponsors said.

"It was the willingness of the sites to work with us through all the challenges that made this possible," Arroyo said.

Shermaine Gunter-Gary, project administrator for Vision 2000, said that while the first year of the program was challenging, the payoff was in seeing the kids eating each day.

"I delivered food to the sites one day and at one of the sites there was one little kid I'll always remember," Gunter-Gary recalled. "He said, 'Oh I hope it's peanut butter and jelly. I really love these lunches.' He was so excited that he was getting a meal for the day. I felt so good doing this. Stuff like that makes it worth it."

## What community organizations can do to combat childhood hunger

### ■ Advocate.

Community leaders can be strong advocates in convincing school districts and city leaders to partner to expand child nutrition programs. Forming a coalition and using data to make the case for expansion has proven effective in many communities across New Jersey. Advocacy tools and data are available at [njschoolbreakfast.org](http://njschoolbreakfast.org).

### ■ Become a sponsor.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is consistently recruiting organizations to sponsor summer and afterschool meals. The department provides technical assistance and support in becoming a sponsor. Call (609) 984-0692.

### ■ Become a site.

Smaller organizations that lack the resources to sponsor a program can still be summer or afterschool meal sites. Check with your city and school officials to identify sponsors and connect with them.

## Community Nutrition Hubs at a Glance

- Schools serve breakfast after the bell to ensure all children begin their day with a healthy meal.
- Eligible schools take advantage of the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows them to feed all students for free with increased reimbursements and reduced paperwork.
- Local government, schools and the community partner to provide afterschool and summer meals to children.
- Communities take advantage of other programs and strategies, such as the Healthy Corner Stores Initiative, the Child Care and Adult Food Program, community gardens and WIC.

## Many Paths to Good Child Nutrition

**W**hile this report focuses on three major, underutilized child nutrition programs — breakfast, afterschool and summer meals — several other programs exist to combat childhood hunger. Many, unfortunately, are underused.

New Jersey WIC provides supplemental nutritious foods to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to the age of five. Enrollment in the program, however, has been on a steady decline in recent years, despite increases in poverty and food insecurity.

In addition to afterschool programs, the Child Care and Adult Food Program also provides funding for meals served in child care centers. This program also has the potential to reach far more young children. This is especially important in ensuring our youngest children receive the critical nutrition they need to grow and to establish healthy eating habits early on.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is another federal program that provides children with fruit and vegetables, helping them to develop lifelong dietary habits. The federal program, which came to New Jersey for the first time in the 2008–2009 school year, is being used in schools across New Jersey. In 2016–17, more than 4.3 million federal dollars will go to 156 schools to serve fresh fruits and vegetables, according to state agriculture officials.



Still other initiatives are aimed at improving the quality of food for children and families.

Farm to School, an initiative of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, delivers New Jersey grown food to school cafeterias and gives students the chance to taste Jersey fresh foods and learn how their food is grown. It encourages farmers to

sell their products to schools and inspires schools to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as other healthy, local products from New Jersey farmers. The state is working to expand this program to preschools and summer meal programs.

The New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative transforms local corner stores — common sources of junk food and soda — into community retail anchors that profitably sell affordable, fresh food to their customers. In turn, jobs are created, tax revenue is raised and healthy options are increased. The project is a partnership between The Food Trust and the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids.

Community gardens are also taking root in suburban, rural and urban towns across New Jersey. Typically, these gardens provide a piece of land subdivided into individually-tended parcels, although some schools are now adopting the concept.

All of these strategies and initiatives can be part of a community's plan to combat childhood hunger.

## Help is available!

Technical assistance, advocacy tools, grants and other resources are all available to community and school leaders looking to expand access to child nutrition programs. Here are a few places to look for help.

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers fact sheets, toolkits, grant information and other resources for all of its child nutrition programs. Website: [fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs](https://fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs)
- The New Jersey Department of Agriculture also offers information and resources on the child nutrition programs it operates. Website: [nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn](https://nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn)
- The American Dairy Association North East assists local school officials in implementing effective school breakfast programs, offering both technical and financial assistance. Website: [adadc.com](https://adadc.com)
- The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) provides a comprehensive list of resources on school breakfast, as well as regularly hosting webinars to aid in implementation. Website: [frac.org](https://frac.org)
- No Kid Hungry offers an online tool to calculate the cost of running or expanding school meal programs, breakfast toolkit, available grants and other resources. Website: [nokidhungry.org](https://nokidhungry.org)
- Implementation and advocacy tools and links to other resources are also available at [njschoolbreakfast.org](https://njschoolbreakfast.org).

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