



IDEA Public Schools: Serves Universal Free School Breakfast

Snapshot of IDEA Public Schools in 2014-2015

Students Enrolled in District ¹		Campuses in District ¹	
Total Students	19,611	Total Campuses	36
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price	16,976 (87%)	Over 80% Free/Reduced Price Eligible	30 (83%)
Eating Breakfast (2014-2015)	13,553 (69%)	Over 70% Free/Reduced Price Eligible	35 (97%)

IDEA Public Schools Breakfast Program...

Background. IDEA Public Schools, located throughout South Texas, is a network of 36 charter schools that serves more than 19,000 students. IDEA has a high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price meals, with 87% of the student population qualifying in the 2014-2015 school year. In order to ensure that every student at IDEA begins their day with a healthy meal, the school network serves universal free breakfast to each campus.

Breakfast Champion. The mission of IDEA Public Schools is to prepare students from underserved communities for success in college and citizenship. Administrators, teachers, and parents all understand that

Breakfast at a Glance

- **Breakfast in the Classroom** across the entire district
- 22 campuses with 70% or higher breakfast participation

in order to achieve this mission, students must start the day with a nutritious breakfast, and because of this understanding, there are many champions for the breakfast program! One of those champions is the nutrition department, which works every day to ensure students not only have access to a healthy breakfast, but that the students enjoy that breakfast as well. With the administration's full backing, the breakfast program has become an essential part of every student's morning routine.

Getting Buy-in. In order to gain and sustain buy-in, the nutrition department works to keep everyone involved with the breakfast program comfortable with the service procedures. Trainings are held to keep teachers and other staff up to date on the breakfast service process. Feedback is also vital to the sustainability of the program. After the breakfasts are delivered to the classroom, cafeteria staff visit the classrooms to gain feedback from both teachers and students on that day's meal. Teachers can give advice on packaging and ease of clean up while students can provide feedback on the food itself. This feedback is helpful when comparing breakfast participation numbers across the school system. For instance, when participation is low, the feedback lets the nutrition department better understand the cause. Feedback also helps the department determine the favorite breakfast items of both teachers and students in order to sustain high participation. These efforts help to ensure all participants have a stake in the breakfast program.

1. NSLP and SBP Meal Data for 9/2014 through 5/2015, Texas Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition, 2015.

Program Cost. The Universal Breakfast Program at IDEA Public Schools is a self-sustaining operation. With high participation in school breakfast, reimbursements are able to cover the additional costs seen with serving all students. Similar to many districts in the state, IDEA Public Schools was interested to see how the new USDA meal requirements would impact their budget. In order to prepare for the additional fruit requirements during breakfast that will begin next school year, the nutrition department made adjustments at the beginning of this year. The department used both fresh and canned fruits, and is working to address the new issues that have arisen with serving breakfast in the classroom. For instance, juice from canned fruit was found to be messy, so the nutrition department decided to drain the juice in order for the fruit to be more functional in the classroom setting. The department also worked to balance the increased fruit cost by ordering their fresh fruit in-season. Maria Luisa Huerta, Child Nutrition and Wellness Program Coordinator, says that creating a breakfast menu that is both nutritional and budget friendly is an art.

Breakfast Challenges and Solutions. The biggest challenge with implementing universal school breakfast, was overcoming the hesitation to use class time for breakfast. As with many schools, IDEA Public Schools stresses the importance of beginning the day with instruction. To overcome the thought that breakfast took away from learning time, a campaign was started to educate IDEA employees on the correlation between eating breakfast and improved cognitive function. This campaign helped to ease the school into serving breakfast in the classroom.

Farm-to-School. IDEA Public Schools works to involve students in the school nutrition process through their Farm-to-School program. Three campuses within the network have school gardens where students learn to plant and grow vegetables such as spinach, carrots, and cherry tomatoes. Many of these vegetables are then used to create healthy school meals! Through this program, students are able to participate in the gardening process, learn about the growth process, and then see their work used in the cafeteria. By using these vegetables, the nutrition department not only involves students, but is also able to cut costs.

For More Information about IDEA Public Schools breakfast program, please contact Maria Luisa Huerta, at (956) 377-8236. Visit IDEA Public Schools' website at www.ideapublicschools.org to learn more about the district.



Implementation Tips

- Advertise the Breakfast Program
- Involve parents
- Constant Communication with campus principals and assistant principals
- Menu consistency across network
- Learn from participation numbers, and get feedback

CHILDREN AT RISK is a research and advocacy organization promoting the wellbeing of children in Texas. We are reaching out to school districts across the state encouraging and supporting their transition to Universal Free School Breakfast (USB). As part of our outreach efforts, we are developing a series of case studies featuring the best practices of school districts already implementing USB. These case studies will serve as a reference and guide for districts expanding their breakfast programs.

CONTACT: Jenny Eyer, CHILDREN AT RISK, Project Coordinator
214.599.0072 or jeyer@childrenatrisk.org

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