



# Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD: CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program

## Snapshot of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD in 2014-2015

Students Enrolled in District		Campuses in District	
Total Students	32,341	Total Campuses	42
Eligible for Free Meal <i>(PSJA is a CEP district, there is no reduced rate)</i>	30,077 (93%)	Campuses eligible for CACFP	42 (100%)
Average daily participation in CACFP At Risk Afterschool Meal Program	933	Campuses Serving CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meal	24 (57%)

### ***The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program...***

**Background.** Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD is a school district in South Texas that serves more than 32,000 students, more than 90% of whom are eligible for a free meal. Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) ISD recognized there was a great need for them to serve their students not only breakfast and lunch, but dinner as well. The district has worked to meet this need for many years, by diversifying their menu and developing unique service models. For instance, the district expanded their breakfast program in order to serve this important meal in the classroom at most every campus and to every student free of charge. With the addition of an Afterschool Meal Program, students at many school campuses can enjoy a healthy and hearty meal three times a day.

**After School Meal Champion.** Imelda Palacios, Director of Child Nutrition Programs, began to hear the chatter about Afterschool Meals during school nutrition conferences, and at the same time, the PSJA ISD Superintendent, Dr. Daniel King, began to hear more about the program as well. Dr. King approached Palacios about the opportunity for the Afterschool Meal Program at PSJA ISD, and they both decided it was a program the district needed to implement. Dr. King was a great champion for the nutrition department and the Afterschool Meal Program. He introduced the program to principals and their schools, and made sure they knew it was important to him that this program be successful in PSJA ISD. Once the school staff was on board, it was up to Palacios to gain the support from her Child Nutrition department staff and train them on the new protocols. Palacios attributes the success of this program to the Superintendent's support and his desire to feed every child.

**Getting Started.** With the support of Dr. King, and the excitement of the school staff, Palacios and her nutrition team were able to focus on the implementation of the program. Before beginning, Palacios first wanted to make sure her staff knew exactly what the Afterschool Meal Program was, the time commitment associated with the program, what type of foods would be served, and how to engage students. The Afterschool Meal Program officially began in October 2013, and any campus with a desire to participate was allowed. In addition to the school staff, students were excited about having access to the program, as many of them stay at school until the evening participating in educational enrichment programs and extracurricular activities, and would not have access to a healthy meal during this time if the district did not provide one. Furthermore, some students do not have access to healthy meals at home and would probably not eat a substantial meal until the next day at school. The benefits associated with the Afterschool Meal Program extend to more than just the students though, as the nutrition staff has the opportunity to work additional hours during the week to supplement their usual earnings.

**Logistics and Sustainability** The Afterschool Meal Program is provided to students five days a week, and three to four of those meals are served warm. The district staffs two people at every campus to prepare and serve the Afterschool Meals, and requires one of the two to be a cafeteria manager or someone that is very knowledgeable about reimbursable meals and service details. To ensure the efficiency of the service of the Afterschool Meal Program, all students are fed in the cafeteria in a central location. While the service is similar at all sites, there are some special circumstances that require Palacios and her team to adjust the serving model. In those cases, the meal service is delivered directly to the classroom. In order to sustain this beneficial program, the Child Nutrition department constantly promotes the program through emails to principals and announcements on the district's website. In addition to these strategies, Palacios also encourages her staff to venture out of the cafeteria and into the school to invite students to participate in the Afterschool Meal Program. By doing this, all students feel welcome to enjoy a warm meal during their afterschool enrichment program.

### Tips for Implementing Your Program

- Get the administration on board
- Contact your ESC center, as they are very well trained on how to get started with your program
- Talk to your staff and explain the program to see who would be available and interested

**Application Process** While the initial application can take time, Palacios said that the renewal application was much less strenuous. On both applications, there are many questions that do not apply to school districts; therefore making the application much shorter. During the process, Palacios communicated directly with the Texas Department of Agriculture by phone and email. This open line of communication greatly helped Palacios successfully navigate the application process.

**Program Cost** The CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program is cost-neutral at PSJA ISD. This is due to the popularity of the program, as well as the hard work of the Child Nutrition department. It is because of this hard work and dedication, to serving students both in the district and in the community, that the Child Nutrition department is looking to serve meals at off-campus sites as well. This extended service will allow children in the community to eat a delicious and healthy meal at their afterschool program, as well as provide more opportunities for the PSJA ISD child nutrition staff.



**For More Information** about Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD's supper program, please contact:

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To learn more about the district, visit Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD's website at :

<http://www.psjaisd.us/Domain/74>

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 participation in the CACFP "AT RISK" supper program. As part of our outreach efforts, we are developing a series of case studies featuring the best practices of school districts already implementing the "At Risk" supper program. These case studies will serve as a reference and guide for districts expanding their meal programs.

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