



Pictured above (L-R) Gavin Lee, Senior at Fort Wayne Community Schools, IN; Jada Curd, pictured at Burk County School District, GA.

Student Involvement in School Breakfast

Student involvement can directly help improve breakfast participation and create long lasting relationships between students and school nutrition professionals. Incorporating youth voices can shape food service initiatives to promote healthier food and create more inclusive meal options.

This resource contains best and promising practices that schools and districts can test out and incorporate what resonates with them in order to connect with student voices to improve breakfast participation.

Getting Students Involved

Allow students in the decision-making process:

Find ways to reach students, involve them and work together when possible, such as:

- *Utilize student government* - reach out to student leaders, request to attend student government meetings, offer an open invitation to discuss their needs with you, with the goal of improving the school breakfast program. For example: incorporate students in the meal planning and feedback processes, including menu ideas, and meal promotion.
- *Practice open and honest communication* - Reach out to students in an honest and open way. Share your goals, e.g. better meal participation, and ask for suggestions on how to achieve that. Put out suggestion boxes. Ask students for feedback via in-person interactions during breakfast, or via simple surveys (asking students what they like and what they don't like). add the information you are seeking to a flier or poster and put one in each classroom. Recruit teachers to encourage students to share feedback with school nutrition staffers. Avoid email communication to students, as it's not preferable for students, nor is it as effective as social media or in-person communication.
- *Avoid Causing Stigma* - How breakfast is marketed can make or break participation. Even if breakfast is being offered free to students, the phrase "free breakfast" can be stigmatizing. Using alternative phrasing, such as "no cost breakfast", can encourage students to participate more. However, it's important to ask students what phrasing most resonates with them. For instance, breakfast may need to be replaced with "morning fuel" or another fun phrase.

- *Follow-up with students* - keep communicating with students about why their input is valuable and how their feedback will be utilized. For example, if students suggested more scratch cooking and you added some scratch or speed scratch items to the menu, let them know! Once this trust has been built the students will more likely share information freely.
- *Build relationships with students* - Talk to students regularly. This builds trust and safety for the students to share ideas and opinions. Make an effort to get to know the students and showcase how valuable their voice is.
- *Use social media as a connection tool* - Most students have access to social media, particularly Instagram and Tick Tock. Use these platforms to connect with students and promote meals and new items. Keep in mind, using social media in rural communities can be tricky because of weak internet connections, and lack of access. Sometimes paper messaging about breakfast can be more reliable.



Fancy blue corn cupcakes adapted from The Fancy Navajo recipe shared by Shannon Reina, Food Services Manager Salt River Schools, AZ; <https://thefancynavajo.com/2017/02/19/fancy-blue-corn-cupcakes/>

“Taste testing is a great way to pilot new meals and build relationships with students. If you have taste testing events, make sure school directors are there so students and school meals professionals can get to know each other. In my district they piloted smoothies. Once they knew students really liked them, they were added to the menu.”
 Jada Curd, former student at Burk County District, Georgia

Taste Testing

Offering taste testing is a best practice and one of the most popular ways to get feedback on menu items is student taste tests. Be open to all types of feedback and be open to altering the menu to accommodate student preferences, which can make a positive difference!

Increase Choices

Students all agreed that they enjoy a variety of menu options, including culturally diverse items. Giving students choice and decision-making power can be a game changer. Even if the option is types of sauces, protein options or carbohydrate choices, offer some.

“What would help students be more involved is options, let the students have the freedom to have more choices.”
 Gavin, Senior at Fort Wayne School, IN

Students are the customers of school breakfast. It’s vital to engage them regularly and have open communication to elicit feedback and stay connected, which can ultimately positively affect the breakfast program.

Visit us at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast> for more resources.