

## Case Study: Colorado's Campaign to Increase Participation in School Breakfast

The Colorado No Kid Hungry campaign has seen tremendous success in increasing access to and participation in the School Breakfast Program, by using a three pronged approach which includes targeting of high need schools, challenging schools to increase participation, and advocating for breakfast legislation. The campaign partners are laying the groundwork for continued success in 2013.

## BACKGROUND: SCHOOL BREAKFAST IN COLORADO

During the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 40 percent of Colorado students, 86,935 students, who received a free or reduced-price school lunch also received a school breakfast.

The Colorado No Kid Hungry campaign, a partnership between Hunger Free Colorado, Share Our Strength, and the Office of Governor John Hickenlooper, is a statewide, public-private coalition working to ensure that all children have access to nutritious food where they live, learn, and play. The campaign steering committee identified increasing participation in the school breakfast program (SBP) as one of the key priorities for ending childhood hunger in the state of Colorado.

In 2012, the campaign lead partner, Hunger Free Colorado worked to increase participation in the SBP by six percent, from 41 percent of free/reduced price lunch eaters to 46 percent of free/reduced price lunch eaters receiving a free or reduced-price school breakfast every day.<sup>1</sup>

## STEPS TO INCREASING PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

To increase participation in the SBP, the campaign implemented three strategies: converting schools from traditional breakfast served in the cafeteria to alternative delivery models through individual outreach; launching the third year of the School Breakfast Challenge to encourage school-wide participation in school breakfast; and proposing and advocating for breakfast legislation in 2013.

### Targeting High Need Schools

Traditionally, schools serve breakfast in the cafeteria prior to the start of the school day. This serving model presents several barriers that impact participation in the SBP. For students relying on a bus to get to school, the bus schedule may not allow enough time to get to the cafeteria before the bell rings. Many students associate a negative stigma with going to the cafeteria for breakfast, and for some, eating breakfast before the school day starts is simply too early.

In an effort to overcome these barriers and maximize breakfast participation, Hunger Free Colorado staff focused on working with schools to implement alternative delivery models, including Breakfast in the Classroom, a model where students eat breakfast in their classroom after the official start of the school day; Grab N' Go, a model where students pick up packaged breakfasts from the cafeteria or mobile service carts when they arrive at school; and Breakfast After First Period, a model where students eat breakfast during a break in the morning, often after first period or midway between breakfast and lunch.

Analyzing school meals participation data from the 2010-11 school year, the campaign partners estimated that achieving its 2012 participation goal would require approximately 15,000 more students eating breakfast per school day. With this target increase in number of participants, the campaign partners next needed to determine how this translated to a list of schools to approach to adopt alternative breakfast models.

In order to target efforts most effectively, the campaign partners created a list of more than 260 schools with high levels of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals and low levels of breakfast participation. Assuming that schools that transition from traditional to alternative breakfast delivery models would increase participation by 50 percent, the campaign partners projected that they would need to transition 86 schools to achieve the goal of increasing average daily school breakfast participation by 15,000 students to hit a participation rate of 46 percent.

The target list provided a strategic direction for identifying schools as likely to benefit from implementing alternative delivery models. To reach schools on their target list, campaign partner Hunger Free Colorado hired breakfast ambassadors—contract employees responsible for outreach to the schools on the target list. The first set of breakfast ambassadors consisted of retired principals and teachers, who could use their experience in working in schools to stress the importance of increasing school breakfast participation. Hunger Free Colorado diversified hiring throughout the year, focusing on ambassadors with ties to a specific district on the target list, believing that ambassadors will experience greater success if they have existing relationships.

By dividing the target list by district and assigning each contractor a set of schools, the ambassadors worked to establish contacts, build relationships, and meet with school stakeholders to provide information and encourage schools to adopt alternative delivery models to increase participation in school breakfast.

### **Challenging Schools to Increase Participation**

As the campaign partners developed and refined a strategic target list to reach more students, they recognized the importance of expanding awareness about the school breakfast program and engaging schools across the state in additional ways. To expand access to school breakfast, in the 2010-2011 school year, the campaign partners launched the Colorado School Breakfast Challenge, in coordination with Governor Hickenlooper and the Commissioner of Education. Ninety six schools enrolled in the challenge, a contest where cash prizes were awarded to schools with the biggest increases in SBP participation as determined by examining participation rates from October 2010 compared to October 2009.

To support schools in implementing effective strategies to increase breakfast participation, Hunger Free Colorado created and distributed a Breakfast Expansion Toolkit to every school principal, superintendent, and district nutrition director in the state and provided technical assistance on breakfast expansion to nutrition directors, principals, superintendents, and teachers in over 200 schools in 36 districts in every region of Colorado.

Results from the School Breakfast Challenge have been encouraging: schools that submitted data increased school breakfast participation by an average of 66 percent. The winning school experienced an 82 percent increase in breakfast participation. Overall, schools across Colorado served almost 430,000 more total breakfasts in October 2010 than in October 2009, a 23 percent increase.

Building upon the successes of the initial Challenge, the campaign partners launched two additional challenges, awarding prizes for overall increases in school district participation and innovations related to school breakfast. There was no enrollment requirement for either Challenge, but schools had to apply to participate in the Innovation Challenge.

### **Advocating for Legislative Change**

Policy change can be a powerful tool to affect social change. School nutrition policy, and school breakfast policy, in particular, is an area ripe for policy advocacy. Successful efforts in schools, school districts and states across the country demonstrate that enacting school breakfast policy can result in relatively quick, meaningful changes to ensure that all children start the day with a healthy meal that prepares them for learning.

In Fall 2012, campaign partner, Hunger Free Colorado and a coalition of supporters, drafted a proposal for breakfast legislation (HB1006- Breakfast After the Bell Nutrition Program in Low-Income Schools) that would mandate universal free breakfast after the bell in any school with 70 percent or more free or reduced-price eligible students, more than 100 students enrolled, and more than 300 students in the school district. The campaign estimates this legislation would impact about 360 schools, resulting in more than 80,000 students receiving school breakfast every day.

Working with a coalition of stakeholders, including Share Our Strength, The Colorado Health Foundation, Colorado Education Association, and Live Well Colorado, the campaign worked through the Fall and Winter of 2012 to garner support from key advocacy organizations, Governor Hickenlooper's Office, the Department of Education, and congressional representatives.

On May 15, 2013, Governor Hickenlooper joined elementary students, school officials and other supporters to sign the Breakfast After the Bell Nutrition Program into law. Hunger Free Colorado and other campaign partners will work with school and district leaders to support implementation. For more information about the legislation and lessons learned from advocacy efforts, see [Pursuing Legislative Solutions to Ending Hunger: Lessons Learned from House Bill 13-1006](#).

## STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

While participation in the school breakfast program continues to rise in Colorado, challenges remain. The campaign's current strategy of school-by-school outreach is time intensive, and therefore, costly. Moreover, the diverse and expansive geography of Colorado makes reaching schools in rural areas challenging.

The breakfast ambassadors must contend with persuading a variety of stakeholders at the district and school level. To better understand opposition to implementing alternative delivery models and to improve upon current campaign strategies, the Center for Best Practices is conducting an evaluation of its efforts to increase breakfast participation. The evaluation includes interviews with school personnel, focus groups with parents, and surveys to better understand the most effective messages for persuading stakeholders to support school breakfast and/or alternative delivery models; determine who are the main stakeholders in the school and community; and assess what additional support schools need to implement alternative breakfast delivery models. Results will be available in late 2013.

## RESULTS TO DATE

Colorado realized enormous gains in school breakfast in 2012 and early 2013 and continues to connect additional students with school breakfast through their strategy of working with schools to implement alternative delivery models. For the 2011-2012 school year, 112,800 students received a free or reduced-price school breakfast, a 14 percent increase (14,000 students) from the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>ii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://frac.org/pdf/Scorecard\\_SY2011-2012.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/Scorecard_SY2011-2012.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.