

Breakfast Up; PA Falls in National Ranking

Amid rising concern about childhood obesity and too little academic achievement, many Pennsylvania school districts are still ignoring one of the most obvious tools to reach their goals – implementation of the federally financed School Breakfast Program. A national report released December 13th by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) shows that Pennsylvania has slipped in the national rankings from 38th to 42nd among the states in making school breakfast available to students in need. The full FRAC report is available at http://www.frac.org/Press_Release/12.13.05.html.

Data provided by the PA Department of Education show that in the 2004-05 school year, daily participation in school breakfast programs across the state averaged 212,358 students. This compares to an average of 196,592 students in 2003-04 and is an increase of 8 percent. Among low-income students, the increase was 7 percent. While these increases demonstrate progress, they are less than what is being achieved in other states, thus accounting for the fact that Pennsylvania is being "left in the dust".

Sue Mitchem, a child nutrition specialist for the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, commented on Pennsylvania's ranking in the latest FRAC report. "Our state is making modest progress at a time when dramatic action is necessary. Our schools and our state policy-makers still haven't made the obvious connection between how a child starts his or her day and big problems such as obesity and academic achievement. They've put breakfast in a box and don't recognize it is part of the solution to bigger things."

Multiple research studies have shown that children have the best chance for academic success if they start their day with a nutritious breakfast. Studies have also shown that a healthy breakfast minimizes children's consumption of junk foods and reduces the incidence of obesity.

The **Pennsylvania School Breakfast Report Card** includes five categories. In addition to citing schools that are not providing needed nutritional support, it gives recognition to schools that are offering exemplary breakfast programs. Key findings follow.

Star Performers

"Star Performers" are school districts that integrate breakfast into the school day and encourage all children to participate. Selected for recognition this year are districts in which average daily breakfast participation was at least 50 percent of average daily lunch participation. Leading the way in 2004-05 for the fifth consecutive year was Farrell Area School District in Mercer County. Breakfast participation at Farrell last year was 86 percent of lunch participation.

New schools in this year's report include the following school districts: Avella Area (Washington), Union (Clarion), Purchase Line (Indiana), Turkeyfoot Valley Area (Somerset), Galeton Area (Potter) and Towanda Area (Bradford).

Getting the Job Done

Among school districts in which at least 29 percent of the children came from low-income families, fifteen stood out for serving breakfast to at least half of those students each day. Again topping this list of schools that are "Getting the Job Done" was Farrell Area School District; 82 percent of its low-income students had breakfast at school.

New to this category in the 2004-05 report are these districts: Avella Area (Washington), Jeannette City (Westmoreland), Conemaugh Township Area (Somerset), Turkeyfoot Valley Area (Somerset), Galeton Area School District (Potter), and Union (Clarion).

Moving Up!

Eleven school districts began offering the breakfast program last year including five school districts from last year's list of "failures". By starting breakfast, these eleven districts joined others that have made the link between nutrition, health and academics. Also meriting special recognition for a change for the better are Valley View School District, which increased its daily breakfast attendance by 89 percent increase, and West Shore School District, which increased daily breakfast attendance by 88 percent.

Improvement Needed

Twelve school districts with at least 25 percent low-income students are cited for reaching only a tiny fraction of those students with breakfast. Kennett Consolidated (Chester), with 1297 low-income students, led this list; only 1 in 25 received school breakfast on a typical school day. At Mifflinburg Area (Union), which has 601 low-income students, the ratio was also very poor (1 in 15).

Failing the Children

Twelve districts with a high ratio of low-income children did not offer breakfast to its students. Four districts on the list for 04-05 are beginning breakfast this year. They are Kiski Area, Antietam, Wilmington Area and Tamaqua.

Once again Pottsville Area School District, with 1,300 low-income children and no breakfast program, has the dubious distinction of leading this list. Barefield Development Corporation of Pottsville recently received a \$373,000 Physical Education Program (PEP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant, Pottsville Project Fit, will increase the opportunities for fitness, good health and nutrition in the Pottsville schools and community. Craig Shields of Barefield Development stated, "We are hopeful that 'Pottsville Project Fit' will help encourage the best possible health outcomes for our children, including bringing nutritious breakfasts to our schools."

With schools across the state formulating federally mandated Wellness Policies to enhance student health, now is the perfect time for all schools to get on board with breakfast. If not now, when?

For the complete report, go to News at www.pahunger.org.

Star Performers

Making Breakfast a Regular Part of the School Day

Farrell Area (Mercer)	86%
Midland Borough (Beaver)	80%
Homer-Center (Indiana)	72%
Western Beaver County (Beaver)	71%
Aliquippa (Beaver)	70%
Mahanoy Area (Schuylkill)	68%
Harmony Area (Clearfield)	65%
Harrisburg City (Dauphin)	63%
Jeannette City (Westmoreland)	57%
Avella Area (Washington)	54%

Conemaugh Township Area (Somerset)	54%
Cornell (Allegheny)	53%
Sto-Rox (Allegheny)	53%
Union (Clarion)	52%
Purchase Line (Indiana)	51%
Turkeyfoot Valley Area (Somerset)	51%
Galeton Area (Potter)	50%
Towanda Area (Bradford)	50%

Getting the Job Done

Serving Breakfast to Most Low-Income Children

Farrell Area (Mercer)	82% served daily
Harmony Area (Clearfield)	66%
Midland Borough (Beaver)	66%
Western Beaver County (Beaver)	62%
Galeton Area (Potter)	61%
Homer-Center (Indiana)	60%
Aliquippa (Beaver)	60%
Jeannette City (Westmoreland)	59%
Conemaugh Twp Area (Somerset)	53%
Avella Area (Washington)	53%
Harrisburg City (Dauphin)	52%
Union (Clarion)	52%
Wallenpaupack Area (Wayne)	51%
Turkeyfoot Valley Area (Somerset)	51%
Forest Area (Forest)	50%

Moving Up!

Starting or Growing Breakfast Programs Last Year

	Daily Breakfasts
Valley View (Lackawanna)	89.1 % increase
West Shore (York)	88.4 % increase
Derry Area (Westmoreland)	82.8 % increase
Franklin Area (Venango)	66.7 % increase
Sharpsville Area (Mercer)	65.6 % increase
Upper Darby (Delaware)	63.1 % increase
Fort Leboeuf (Erie)	493 new program
Dover Area (York)	306 new program
Dubois Area (Clearfield)	268 new program
Twin Valley (Berks)	228 new program
South Williamsport (Lycoming)	172 new program
Rockwood Area (Somerset)	156 new program
Lakeland (Lackawanna)	97 new program
Schuylkill Valley (Berks)	90 new program
Red Lion Area (York)	82 new program
Penn Trafford (Westmoreland)	58 new program
Warwick (Lancaster)	52 new program

Improvement Needed

Lots of Need – Few Breakfasts Served

	Needy Students	
Kennett Consolidated (Chester)	1,297	4%
Mifflinburg Area (Union)	601	6%
Ephrata Area (Lancaster)	861	8%
West York Area (York)	706	8%
Lehigh Area (Carbon)	646	10%
Schuylkill Haven Area (Schuylkill)	402	10%
Bangor Area (Northampton)	752	11%
Mountain View (Susquehanna)	549	11%
Forest Hills (Cambria)	929	12%
Butler Area (Butler)	2,188	13%
Middletown Area (Dauphin)	652	13%
Easton Area (Northampton)	2,095	13%

Failing the Children

No Breakfast Despite the Need

Pottsville (Schuylkill)	41% low-income
Johnsonburg Area (Elk)	37%
Riverside (Lackawanna)	36%
North Schuylkill (Schuylkill)	35%
Weatherly Area (Carbon)	31%
Forbes Road (Fulton)	30%
Gettysburg Area (Adams)	29%
Hanover Public (York)	28%
Kiski Area (Westmoreland)	26%
Antietam (Berks)	26%
Wilmington Area (Lawrence)	26%
Tamaqua Area (Schuylkill)	25%