

PA School Breakfast Report Card

Do the children in your school district start the day ready to learn? The answer to that question varies considerably from place to place all over Pennsylvania. Hunger Action has compiled and released its fourth annual Pennsylvania School Breakfast Report Card , which can help school district residents gauge whether or not their school children are getting the best chance for success.

In Farrell Area School District in Mercer County, breakfast is almost as well attended as lunch. In Shamokin Area in Northumberland County, breakfast isn't available at all. In Wallenpaupack Area School District in Wayne County, about 6 of 10 low-income children get breakfast at school every day. In Bethlehem Area School District in Northampton County, not even 1 in 10 enjoy the privilege.

Why these dramatic differences? Because Pennsylvania, in contrast to most other states, has no state law requiring schools to offer the breakfast program. It's entirely a local option. So while all Pennsylvania school districts offer the school lunch program, only about two-thirds offer breakfast. And among districts that participate in the breakfast program, many offer it in only one school building. As a result, for every 100 low-income children who eat lunch at school, only 36 eat breakfast. This mediocre ratio places Pennsylvania well back in the pack among the states - 37th to be exact.

Statewide, during 2002-03, schools in Pennsylvania served 7,000 more breakfasts each day than they did during the previous year. The statewide total, 186,000 breakfasts a day, was up 4 percent from 2001-02. Last year the U.S. Department of Agriculture paid \$40.5 million to Pennsylvania schools to help cover the cost of breakfast. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) contributed an additional \$7 million, including a higher lunch reimbursement rate for districts that also offer breakfast.

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 2002-03 for the third consecutive year was Farrell Area School District in Mercer County. Breakfast participation at Farrell last year was 86 percent of lunch participation.

Donna Cartwright, Aramark School Food Service Director at Farrell commented on their district's excellent performance in the first two categories, "I think that the first thing that helps us is the 1993 commitment from the school district to go to Provision 2 (Universal Breakfast) to eliminate the stigma. That is what made our breakfast program so successful. We work hard at marketing and making the experience a positive one, like doing a school-wide show with kids on the benefits of school breakfast. We also have great support from Superintendent Richard Rubano and the administration."

Increasingly, the option of eating breakfast in school is also taken by children who can afford to pay. Statewide, during the past school year the number of full-price breakfasts increased by 7 percent.

Getting the Job Done

Schools with many children from low-income families have a special responsibility because of the likelihood that some of those children had nothing to eat before they were sent off to school. Among school districts in which at least 30 percent of the children came from low-income families, ten 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 every day.

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 Allentown City School District, which increased its daily breakfast attendance by 285 students, and Upper Darby School District, which increased daily breakfast attendance by 232 students.

Pat Rorke, Assistant School Food Service Director, of the Upper Darby School District commented on their district's improvement in number of breakfasts served. "We added the high school and more students were able to take advantage of breakfast. This year we added another elementary school and hope to add more."

Improvement Needed

Ten school districts with at least 30 percent low-income students are cited for reaching only a tiny fraction of those students with breakfast. Derry Area School District (Westmoreland County), with 974 low-income students, led this list; only 1 in 20 received school breakfast on a typical school day. At Bethlehem Area School District, which has over 5,000 low-income students, the ratio was a bit better (1 in 12) but still far from acceptable.

Gwen Kozar, School Food Service Director at Derry, said her district is "working on the numbers. Hopefully with some scheduling changes and new point-of-sale equipment, we will make a difference in the near future."

Failing the Children

Ten districts with a high ratio of low-income children did not participate at all in the breakfast program. Shamokin Area School District, with 1,500 low-income children and no breakfast program, had the dubious distinction of leading this list. In light of the strong link between nutrition and the ability to learn, the failure to offer breakfast at these schools lowers the likelihood that these schools will achieve their educational mission. (See "Breakfast" on page 6.)

Star Performers

	Daily <u>Lunches</u>	Daily <u>Breakfasts</u>
Farrell Area (Mercer)	909	780
Midland Borough (Beaver)	224	179
West Beaver County (Beaver)	547	429
Aliquippa (Beaver)	1,044	681
Southeast Delco (Delaware)	1,837	1,047
Jeanette City (Westmoreland)	1,073	608
Carbondale Area (Lackawanna)	688	383
Sto-Rox (Allegheny)	1,101	581
Harrisburg City (Dauphin)	5,542	2,817
Philadelphia City (Philadelphia)	92,424	46,850

Getting the Job Done

Farrell Area (Mercer)	82 percent served daily
Midland Borough (Beaver)	64 percent served daily
Western Beaver County (Beaver)	64 percent served daily
Wallenpaupack Area (Wayne)	58 percent served daily
Jeanette City (Westmoreland)	56 percent served daily
Sto-Rox (Allegheny)	52 percent served daily
Aliquippa (Beaver)	52 percent served daily
Western Wayne (Wayne)	51 percent served daily
Conemaugh Township (Somerset)	50 percent served daily
Cornell (Allegheny)	50 percent served daily

Moving Up!

	<u>Breakfasts</u> Daily
Carbondale Area (Lackawanna)	383
Valley Grove (Venango)	288
Mount Union Area (Huntingdon)	287
Allentown City (Lehigh)	285 more than 2001-02
Upper Darby (Delaware)	232 more than 2001-02
Union City Area (Erie)	198
Morrisville Borough (Bucks)	81

Improvement Needed

	<u>Needy Students</u>	<u>Daily Breakfasts</u>	<u>% Needy Students Getting Breakfast</u>
Derry Area (Westmoreland)	974	48	5 percent
Mountain View (Susquehanna)	505	41	8 percent
Bethlehem Area (Northampton)	5,123	434	8 percent
Forest Hills (Cambria)	802	86	11 percent
Bloomsburg Area (Columbia)	562	64	11 percent
Mifflin County (Mifflin)	1,919	238	12 percent
Monaca (Beaver)	278	36	13 percent
Northgate (Allegheny)	534	68	13 percent
Somerset Area (Somerset)	783	99	13 percent
Coatesville Area (Chester)	2,471	349	14 percent

Failing the Children

Shamokin Area (Northumberland)	56 % low-income
Pottsville Area (Schuylkill)	39 % low-income
Dubois Area (Clearfield)	36 % low-income
Rockwood Area (Somerset)	36 % low-income
Cranberry Area (Venango)	35 % low-income
Sayre Area (Bradford)	32 % low-income
North Schuylkill (Schuylkill)	32 % low-income
Forbes Road (Fulton)	31 % low-income
Johnsonburg Area (Elk)	31 % low-income
Upper Adams (Adams)	31 % low-income
Riverside (Lackawanna)	30 % low-income