



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

December 7, 2023

Dear Partner in Education:

I hope the 2023-24 school year finds your school community engaged, happy, and well. As the new year gets into full swing, I am excited to report that your students have the amazing opportunity to access healthy, nutritious breakfasts each day at no cost to their families!

The Commonwealth's investment in the Universal Free Breakfast Program was a commitment of Governor Josh Shapiro and demonstrates his unwavering support of the importance for all children to start the day with a full belly. While this is great news, in order to continue Universal Free Breakfast in future years, we need to increase availability and stability in schools across Pennsylvania. Recent studies show that up to 78% of school age children may be dependent on school meals for a good source of nutrition—so it is imperative that we ensure the continued use of this critical program.

That's where superintendents and school administrators play a vital role, and we are inviting Pennsylvania schools to join the Governor's School Breakfast Challenge! Goals like increasing student participation and building in healthy options will be on the menu for this three-month challenge. The Department of Education will be reaching out to schools in the future with exciting updates on what's in store for the challenge winners.

[Visit our website](#) for more information about the challenge and ways to participate!

The School Breakfast Program is a federal program administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. All students in participating schools have access to a school breakfast, and schools are reimbursed for each student that receives a reimbursable meal.

There is a long list of the benefits of school breakfast, some of the most important including:

- Students perform better academically, have higher standardized test scores, are more attentive, have fewer nurse visits for stomach issues, and have fewer behavioral problems when their brains and bodies are well nourished.
- Attendance and punctuality are improved when breakfast is provided for free.

- When students can depend on receiving nutritious meals at school, it relieves them from at least one major stressor in their life.
- Even students that are in food secure households benefit from a nutritious school breakfast. Early arrival times, activities/practices before the start of the school day, long commute times, and students that are just not hungry before they leave for school all benefit from having a meal when they arrive at school.
- Free breakfast for all students establishes a level playing field. No students are stigmatized as needing breakfast at school because their family is poor.
- Student meal debt associated with breakfast is non-existent. Ultimately staff are saved from tracking down students and families for the funds and the general fund is saved from bearing the cost of the unpaid debt.
- Greater participation leads to efficiency in meal production and service and cost savings.

As Superintendent or Chief Administrator of your school/district, I know these things are important to you. As a former superintendent, they are still important to me. I witnessed first-hand the benefits to students that started their day with a school breakfast. I also witnessed the benefits the teachers, principals, and entire school community gained when students started their day with a healthy, nutritious meal.

You can play a vital role in the success of school breakfast in your school/district with just a little attention to this topic and by establishing expectations for school personnel as it relates to breakfast.

Things to consider:

- Ensure that students have easy access to the meal. It is not always easy for a student to get to the cafeteria in a timely manner.
 - Alternative serving styles like breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast, and breakfast after first period have all been shown to increase breakfast participation because they remove barriers for students.
 - Per [Basic Education Circular 24 P.S. §15-1504, Instructional Time and Act 80 Exceptions](#), time when students are eating breakfast during homeroom periods or during classroom instruction, **counts as pupil instruction time**.
 - Food waste is significantly associated with the amount of time students have to eat. It is recommended that students have at least 15 minutes of eating time for breakfast (20-25 for lunch).
- Reinforce the importance of a nutritious breakfast to school nutrition staff and students.
 - The School Breakfast Program has numerous nutritional requirements, but there are opportunities for School Nutrition staff to offer a breakfast that is even more nutritious.
 - It is also important to encourage students to make healthy choices.
 - Hot breakfast items tend to increase participation and can be more substantial and nutritious than cold breakfast items.

- Set the tone at the top. Educate the school community (principals, administrators, school board, teachers, counselors, coaches, students, and parents) on the importance of a nutritious breakfast to start the school day and the availability of free school breakfast.
 - Encourage students to participate in the School Breakfast Program and engage with school nutrition staff on their favorite nutritious breakfast meals.
 - PDE has developed a [breakfast promotion toolkit](#) that contains messaging for parents, ideas for breakfast promotions with special guests, social media tag lines, etc. Use this toolkit to help spread the word!

Thank you for all that you do to ensure your students have access to a world-class education, healthy meals, and infinite possibilities of success!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Mumin", followed by a large, stylized, oval-shaped flourish.

Khalid N. Mumin, Ed.D.
Secretary of Education