

Running Head: Best Practices for Increasing School Breakfasts

WIN-WIN IN OHIO:

BEST PRACTICES FOR INCREASING SCHOOL BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Three years of programming by the Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA) to increase the participation of Ohio schools in the School Breakfast Program has produced impressive results. Between 2002 and 2006, school breakfast student participation increased by 76,468 students, an average of 8.6% in Ohio when prior yearly gains only averaged 2.5%. In addition, these strategies resulted in an increase in School Lunch participation. Cumulative gains in School Breakfast and Lunch in Ohio generated an additional \$76,804,921 in USDA dollars for food for children.

CHA employs five primary sets of strategies that have been most successful in expanding school breakfast participation—and therefore feeding more children—in Ohio: engage leaders in education, engaging the broader community, overcoming barriers to participation, advocating for public policy change, and promoting the program through media events. These strategies form a solid framework for other local communities interested in developing plans to increase child nutrition program participation in their schools.

Executive Summary

Because the School Breakfast Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is federally funded but not mandated, gains in participation come through the activities at the state and local level. There are five strategies that the School and Summer Nutrition Program of the Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA) used to increase school breakfast participation in Ohio by 76,468 students, an average of 8.6% between 2002 and 2006 when prior yearly gains averaged only 2.5%. In addition, these strategies resulted in an increase in School Lunch participation. Cumulative gains in School Breakfast and Lunch in Ohio generated an additional \$76,804,921 in USDA dollars for food for children.

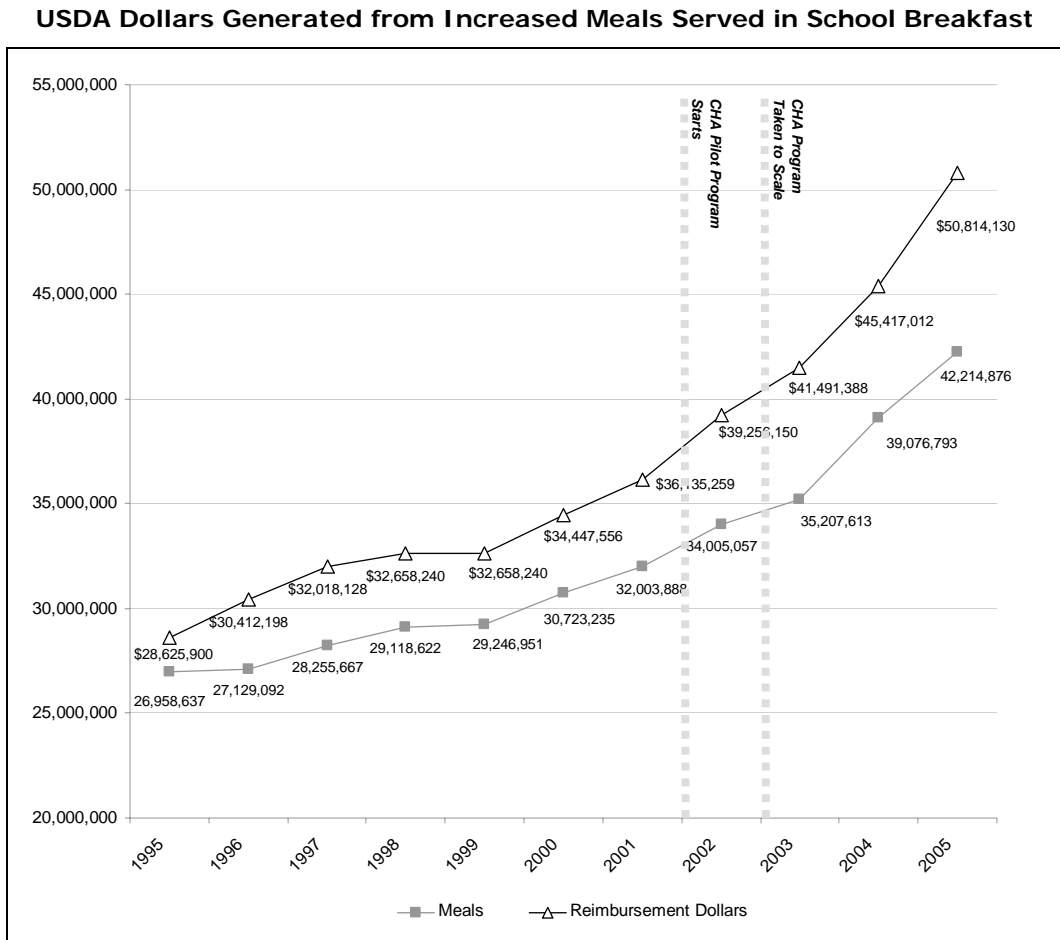
These strategies provide a framework for other statewide organizations and agencies to increase School Breakfast Program participation as a way to combat childhood hunger.

SCHOOL BREAKFAST IN OHIO

Founded in 1970 as the Ohio Hunger Task Force, CHA works to break the cycle of childhood hunger in Ohio through education, leadership, advocacy, and service. CHA educates and advocates for long-term solutions to hunger. Its mission to "feed hungry minds and bodies" emphasizes both the direct provision of meals and the accompanying education to Ohio communities, schools, child care providers, and children themselves. As one of its approaches, the goal of CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Program is to increase the participation of Ohio schools in USDA child nutrition programs.

After pilot-testing a number of strategies in early 2001 to increase interest and participation in School Breakfast, CHA approached the state legislature with a funding request to take the strategies to a statewide scale; the organization demonstrated the fiscal sense of its approach by promising the legislature a substantial return on its investment—a return that was

eventually many times the promised amount. In the prior decade, participation in school breakfast had been increasing steadily but moderately every year. But Ohio has seen especially sharp gains over the last three school years due to the intervention of CHA’s School and Summer Nutrition Program:



How did Children’s Hunger Alliance achieve such gains with its School and Summer Nutrition Program?

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

To achieve these remarkable outcomes, CHA used five key strategies for success:

1. Engaging educational leadership

2. Engaging the broader community
3. Identifying and overcoming barriers to participation
4. Legislating USDA program participation
5. Recognizing and encouraging participation through the media

Engaging Educational Leadership

One tactic employed by CHA to increase School Breakfast Program participation was a top-down strategy of engaging the leaders in education across the state:

- *The Ohio Department of Education* was a strong partner in helping to secure both support of school leaders around the state as well as funding for CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Program.
- CHA also engaged *principals and superintendents* directly through one-on-one meetings as well as presentations at their professional organizations and articles in their newsletters; these leaders were identified as the decision-makers when it came to whether a school would offer or expand school breakfast.

Engaging the Broader Community

CHA brought as many partners to the table as possible to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program. Three groups were especially important: state legislators, food associations, and other state and national organizations:

- *Community meetings with legislators* were convened in over thirty communities. These meetings, although arranged and planned by CHA, were hosted and convened by elected officials at the state and federal level throughout Ohio. Attended by school leaders, community leaders, and others, these meetings also sometimes received media coverage.

- *Food associations and providers* were also sought as partners. The American Dairy Association was especially helpful in providing milk coolers, educational materials, and incentive items to promote school breakfast.
- *Statewide and national agencies* engaged in the Ohio Action For Healthy Kids (OAFHK) initiative have also been involved in School Breakfast expansion. After this initiative divided the state into ten regions, CHA staffed each region for a bottom-up grassroots component that complemented the top-down leadership approach of another strategy.

Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Although schools are definitely interested in programs that will help their children learn and develop, they also may have barriers that seem to prevent them from participating in the School Breakfast Program. Based on its experience and the results of a formal survey, CHA identified several key objections from school personnel and worked to address them:

- *Cost and financial viability* were problems often cited by school personnel. CHA helped to overcome these concerns by providing data showing that offering breakfast can have a positive financial impact on a district, especially if administrators work to increase student participation.
- The problems of *scheduling and logistics* were ones given great attention by school administrators. These leaders questioned space limitations, transportation and supervision, concerns about meal quality, and time away from learning as key objections. CHA countered some of these concerns with examples of breakfast strategies (such as grab-and-go) that could alleviate the problem. In

other instances, CHA demonstrated alternative ways that other schools in the state had solved the issues.

Legislating USDA Program Participation

The Ohio legislature supports school breakfast with a \$0.06 per meal supplemental reimbursement and a new mandate that requires schools to serve breakfast if 20% of their students qualify for free lunch. CHA was instrumental in support for the new legislation. CHA provides ongoing, customized information to legislators about their districts and enlists their insight and support with local community organizations and schools.

Recognizing and Encouraging Participation

Finally, the media is a crucial partner in securing support for the School Breakfast Program in Ohio. CHA's media strategy includes media events as well as regular communication with the media.

- Over thirty *media events* were held over the past three years around the state. These events help explain CHA's work to end childhood hunger and place positive stories about schools in their local papers. This increase in positive media attention was mentioned by schools as a significant asset of CHA's involvement in their schools and districts.
- *Regular, credible communication with the media* includes standard reports, press releases, and brochures as well as one-on-one meetings with editorial boards across the state. These board meetings garnered not only editorials in support of School Breakfast but also news stories on the importance of expanding participation in USDA child nutrition programs.

Employing these strategies has helped Children's Hunger Alliance increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by Ohio schools by 76,468 children since the 2002-2003 school year. When combined with the increases in School Lunch participation during this time, \$76,804,921 in additional USDA funds were brought to Ohio to feed children.

**WIN–WIN IN OHIO:
BEST PRACTICES FOR INCREASING SCHOOL BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION**

In the United States, over 29 million children eat lunch through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the oldest and largest child nutrition program in the United States. Seventeen million (58.8%) of those children are from low-income families with household incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) (FRAC, 2006). Lunch may be the first meal of the day for these children (Center on Hunger and Poverty, 2003) unless their school also participates in the School Breakfast Program, a federally-funded program to help schools serve breakfast to their low-income and other students.

Breakfast is a particularly important meal for children who are in school. When children skip breakfast, they are less able to distinguish among similar images, make more mistakes, and have slower memory recall (Pollitt, Cueto, & Jacoby, 1998). Children from low-income families who report they experience hunger are more likely to show behavioral, emotional, and academic problems on a standardized measure of psychosocial dysfunction than children out of the same low-income communities from families not experiencing hunger (Kleinman, et al., 1998). Children who are hungry are more likely to have lower math scores, repeat a grade (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001), be hyperactive (Murphy, Wehler, Pagano, et al., 1998), and have attendance issues (Murphy, Wehler, Pagano, et al., 1998). Skipping breakfast has a negative effect on students' cognition and learning. Derelian notes:

Students require nutrients and energy for concentration on academic tasks.... Breakfast can provide those nutritional necessities and prevent symptoms such as headache, fatigue, restlessness, and sleepiness from competing with educational outcomes. We have perhaps always known that breakfast is the most important meal, especially for children. Now, we have the research to prove it (California Department of Education, 1994).

School breakfast programs are an important way to put low-income students on an even foundation with other students as they sit in the same classrooms and process the same

information. There is also solid evidence that shows that breakfast at school could help in reducing obesity and increasing the intake of important nutrients in children (FRAC, 2006; University of Minnesota, 2002). In addition, combining school breakfast and school lunch generally provides children during the school year with at least one quarter and one third, respectively, of the daily nutrients that they need (FRAC, 2006).

In Ohio, like many states, school breakfast and other food programs may become even more important in the wake of a worsening state economy:

- Over three quarters of a million Ohio children live in low-income working families (defined as a combined family income of less than 200% FPL); nearly one-quarter million live in working families who are in poverty (CRP, 2004).
- Job loss in the state exceeded the national economy as a whole over the past several years; in addition, Ohio now ranks 47th in the nation in job creation (Schmitt, 2004; Niquette, 2006; FDIC, 2006).

The result:

- According to a recent survey, one in every six Ohio children is hungry or is at risk of hunger.¹

School lunch and other federal food programs can help mitigate the effects of state economy downturns on low-income workers and their children. Interestingly, however, Ohio does not currently maximize the resources available from the federal government for child nutrition programs, especially School Breakfast, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (FRAC, 2006).

¹ At risk of hunger means that one in six Ohio children experience household food insecurity. Food insecurity is a broad term that describes the inability to acquire or the uncertainty of being able to consume an adequate quantity or sufficient quality of food (CHA, 2006, based on Census Bureau data).

Because school breakfast is a federally funded but not mandated program, gains in participation result from the activities at the state and local level. In this paper, we examine the strategies that have led to success in increasing the participation of Ohio students and schools in the School Breakfast Program. First, we provide some background on the USDA School Breakfast Program and the effects that school breakfast has been shown to have on schools, students, and communities. Next we look at Ohio's particular programs and participation: we describe the School and Summer Nutrition Program of the Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA) and the results that the organization has achieved in promoting the School Breakfast Program to Ohio schools. In the remainder of the paper, we outline the successful win-win strategies CHA used to increase school breakfast participation in Ohio by a yearly average of 8.6% between 2002 and 2006 when prior yearly gains averaged only 2.5%. These strategies provide a framework for other statewide organizations and agencies to increase School Breakfast Program participation as a way to combat childhood hunger.

Background

The USDA School Breakfast Program

The USDA created the School Breakfast Program in 1966 as a two-year pilot project aimed at schools located in poor areas or areas in which children traveled great distances to school. During its first year, the School Breakfast Program served approximately 80,000 children. A few years later, in 1971, Congress directed priority consideration for schools in which there was a special need to improve the nutrition and dietary practices of children of working mothers and children from low-income families. For the first several years, the School Breakfast Program was a grant reimbursement system; however, in 1973, a per-meal reimbursement system replaced the grant structure. By 1975, the program had received

permanent authorization; Congress declared its intention that the program “be made available in all schools where it is needed to provide adequate nutrition for children in attendance.” In addition, schools and other institutions with the highest need were reimbursed at slightly higher rates per meal. In 1975 when it received permanent authorization, the program funded 294,700,000 breakfast meals; by 2005 that figure had grown to 1,603,400,000 breakfasts, 82.1% of which were free or reduced-price.²

Now, School Breakfast is an entitlement program available to any public or nonprofit school or residential child care institution. In this program, schools are reimbursed for free, reduced-price, and paid breakfasts served to their children based on income eligibility guidelines updated every year to account for the changing FPL. Income for reduced-price meals is calculated based on 135% FPL; for free meals it is calculated at 185% FPL. Schools are required to follow nutritional guidelines provided by the USDA, but how they implement school breakfast and what is served is up to them.

The Effects of School Breakfast

School breakfast programs offer an effective way to address problems caused by child hunger in educational settings. Murphy, Pagano, Nachmani, and colleagues (1998) reported that low-income students who increased their participation in school breakfast over a period of four months had significantly greater increases in their math grades and significant decreases in their rates of tardiness and absence compared to children whose participation remained the same or decreased during this time. Further, teachers of these children noted that psychosocial problems in participating students decreased for children whose participation in the breakfast program increased.

² See www.fns.usda.gov/pd/sbsummar.html for historical data on School Breakfast Program participation.

The Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning (1998) reported that universal breakfast programs in elementary school positively affected school climates. In this report, several stakeholder groups in the learning community acknowledged the benefits that school breakfasts offered students. Parents reported that the programs reduced morning stress in their households and provided their children food when they were ready to eat, as opposed to the early morning times before school. Teachers reported the universal breakfast program gave them more time to get to know their students and interact socially; they noted that students also started the day more energetically and complained less about mid-morning hunger. School nurses attributed a reduction in visits to their offices at the beginning of the day to the breakfast programs. Administrators noted that the breakfast program played an important role in the 40–50% declines in discipline referrals and created an important opportunity for less structured interaction among students.

Schools implementing school breakfast programs in Ohio have reported similar results. A recent survey of Ohio teachers, principals, and superintendents in schools serving breakfast found that each group believed that serving breakfast contributed to improving student attendance, tardiness, and discipline as well as achievement and attentiveness (UCESC, 2005). Principals believe “students work better when they have breakfast” and report fewer students referred to the principal’s office in the morning. Data also help to support these impressions. Greater year-to-year improvements in passing proficiency tests were seen among sample Ohio districts with high breakfast participation compared to sample districts with low participation (USESC, 2005).³

Given these data, increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program should be a priority for educators, parents, and educational institutions. The program has seen steady

³ Based on aggregated results from year to year.

national growth since 1975, although some states lag behind others in ensuring that students who need it have access to breakfast at school (FRAC, 2005). In Ohio, a statewide organization, the Children’s Hunger Alliance, working with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), has produced remarkable increases in the number of children and schools participating in school breakfast.⁴

School Breakfast in Ohio

Background

Founded in 1970 as the Ohio Hunger Task Force, the Children’s Hunger Alliance (CHA) works to break the cycle of childhood hunger in Ohio through education, leadership, advocacy, and service. CHA educates and advocates for long-term solutions to hunger with legislators, policymakers, corporate citizens, and faith-based organizations. Its mission to “feed hungry minds and bodies” emphasizes both the direct provision of meals and the accompanying education to Ohio communities, especially for child care providers. The goal of CHA’s School and Summer Nutrition Program is to increase participation of Ohio schools in the USDA’s child nutrition programs. Most notably, CHA School and Summer Nutrition activities focused on helping schools start or expand School Breakfast Programs and helping communities start or expand summer or after school meal and snack programs.

Between 2000 and 2001, CHA pilot-tested a number of strategies to increase interest and participation in School Breakfast across the state. After evaluating the success of these strategies in the small-scale pilot, CHA approached the Ohio legislature with a funding request to take these strategies to a larger scale. In its proposal, CHA promised the legislature a 6:1 return on

⁴ Buildings served by CHA represent a broad range of eligible sponsors for meal programs, including state institutions (MRDDs, jails, detention centers, child care facilities, and so on) which have fluctuating numbers of program participants.

investment – for every \$1 that the legislature granted CHA, its activities with schools would produce \$6 in USDA reimbursement funding. The legislature agreed in 2002 to provide a \$1 million grant to CHA for each of two years during state fiscal years (SFY) 2003-2004 through 2004-2005. The first two years produced significant results, and the Legislature appropriated \$1.4 million per year for two more years, SFYs 2005-2006 through 2006-2007 and asked CHA to include after school meals and snacks as well as child care meals in its work.

Figure 1. School Breakfast Incremental and Cumulative Reimbursements to Ohio, 2003–2006

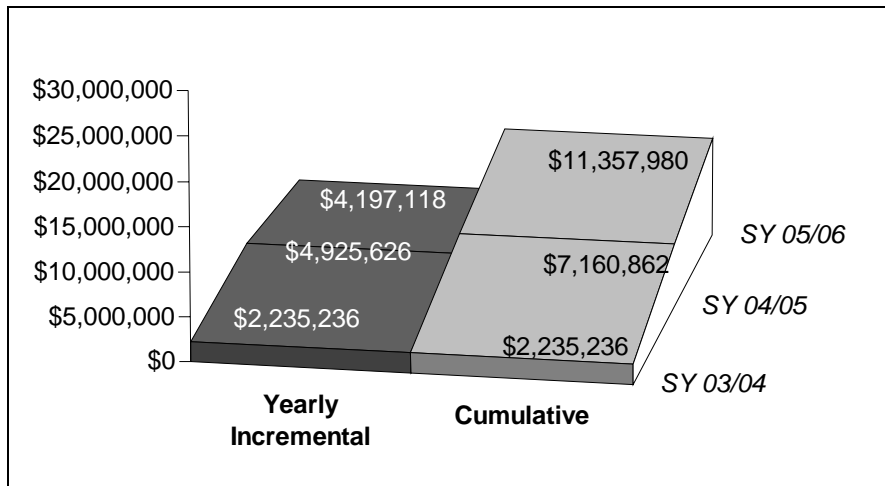


Figure 2. School Lunch Incremental and Cumulative Reimbursements to Ohio, 2003–2006

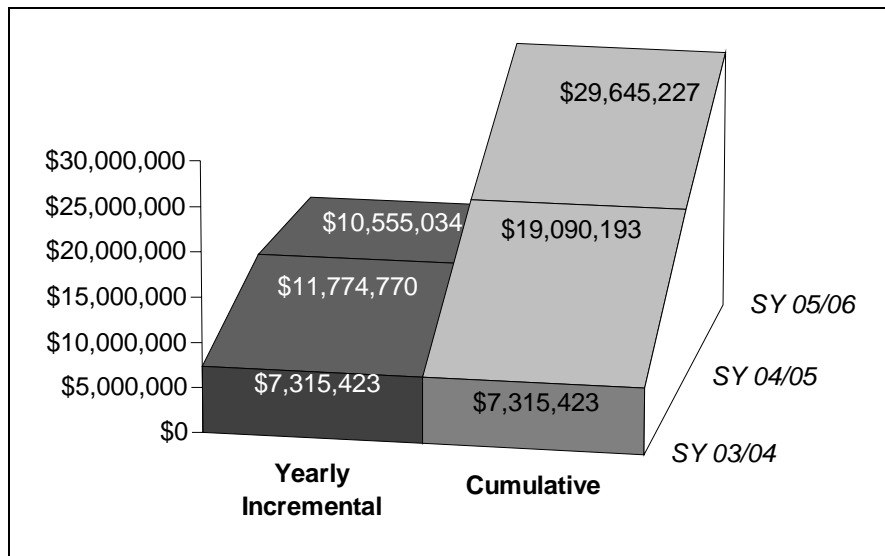
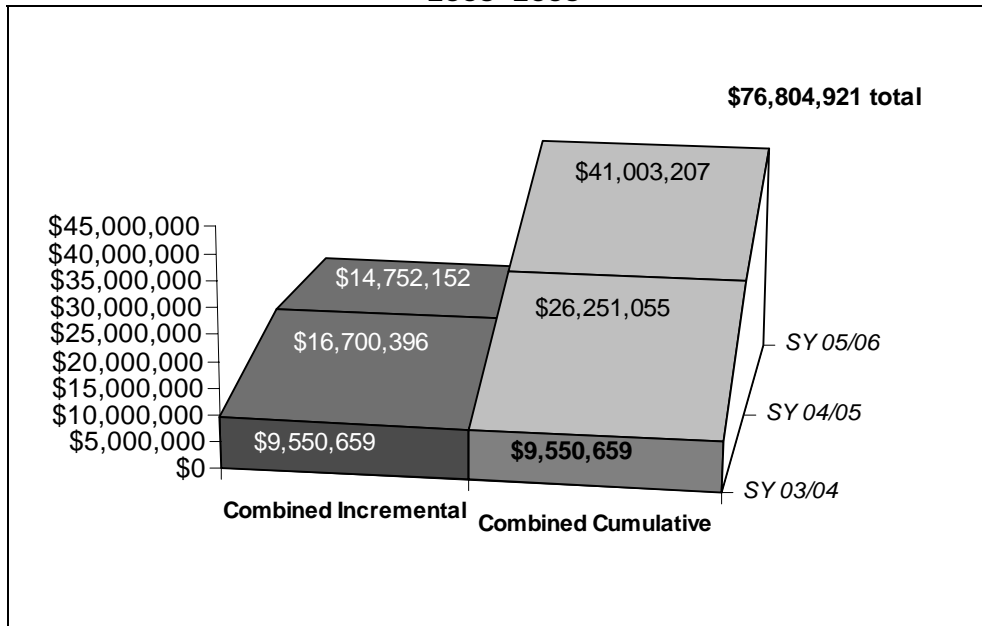


Figure 3. Combined School Breakfast and School Lunch Incremental and Cumulative Reimbursements to Ohio, 2003–2006



Source: USDA. Data are for school years.

The first year produced an increase in USDA funds for School Breakfast of \$2,235,236 and for School Lunch of \$7,315,423. These types of increases continued and grew during the course of the expansion efforts with each previous year’s gain maintained in the new year and additional gains realized. All in all, \$76,804,921 additional USDA funds to Ohio for food for children would not have occurred had the legislature not supported this work in a significant manner. With these results, CHA’s School and Summer Nutrition Program convinced many political and educational leaders to take a closer look at school meal programs in Ohio.

Participation and Outcomes

Before CHA’s School and Summer Nutrition Program, participation in the School Breakfast Program by Ohio schools had been increasing moderately but steadily every year, like much of the nation, from a low of fewer than 200 schools in 1976 to nearly 2,400 schools participating in the School Breakfast Program in 2004-2005 (FRAC, 2006).

Increases in school participation means increases in the number of students and meals served. Since 1995, school breakfast student participation in Ohio has increased moderately by a few percentage points each year. The largest gain in number of children served prior to 2002 was 3.7%; in fiscal year 2004 (Table 1). Student participation in School Breakfast increased dramatically, an average of 8.6 percent and a total of 76,468 students, as a result of the expansion efforts. The significant growth in numbers of students participating in the past three years obviously resulted in increased meals served to those students as well. A total of 8,209,819 additional meals were served to hungry students in Ohio because of these expansion efforts between 2002 and 2005.

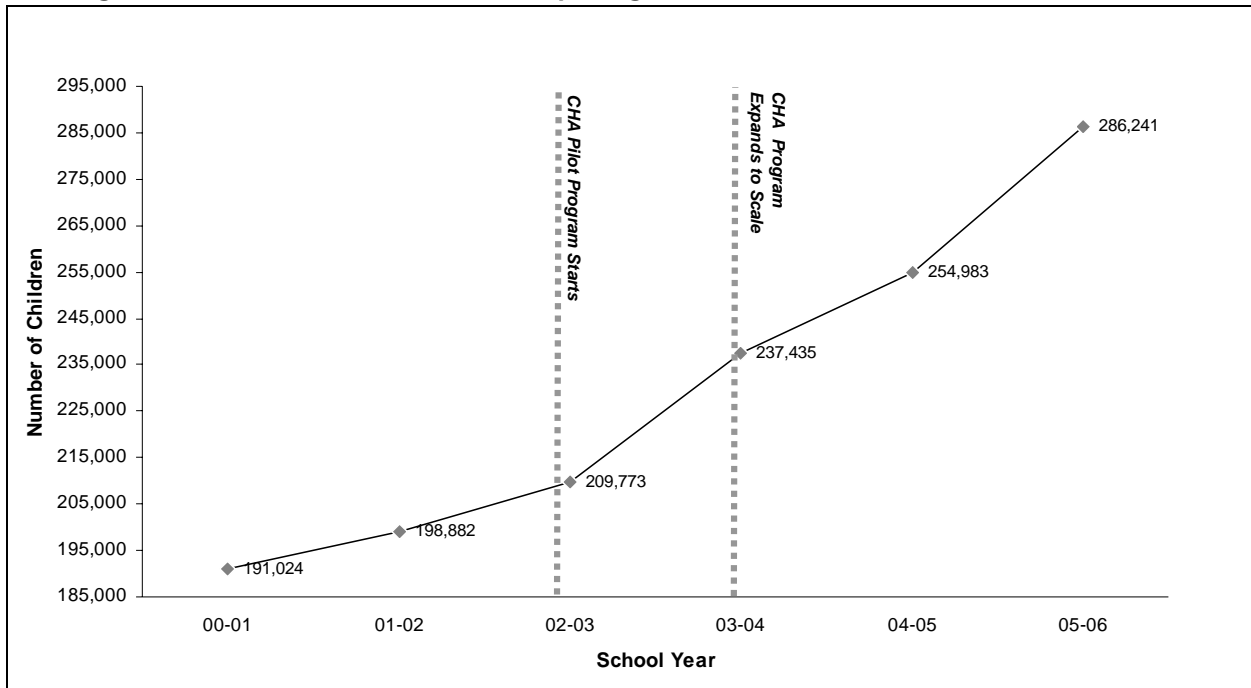
Table 1. School Breakfast Yearly Growth in Ohio, 1995-2006

Fiscal Year	School Breakfast Increases from Prior Year			
	Number of Students		Number of Meals	
1995 baseline	164,462		26,958,637	
	Increase in Students		Increase in Meals	
1996	-1,010	-0.6%	170,455	0.6%
1997	5,633	3.4%	1,126,575	4.2%
1998	3,075	1.8%	862,955	3.1%
1999	6,092	3.5%	128,329	0.4%
2000	6,614	3.7%	1,476,284	5.0%
2001	6,212	3.4%	1,280,653	4.2%
2002	8,890	4.7%	2,001,169	6.3%
2003	11,669	5.8%	1,202,556	3.5%
2004	25,798	12.2%	3,869,180	11.0%
2005	17,548	7.4%	3,138,083	8.0%
2006	31,258	10.9%	N/A	
TOTAL Increase Since 1995	121,779		15,256,239+	

Source: USDA.

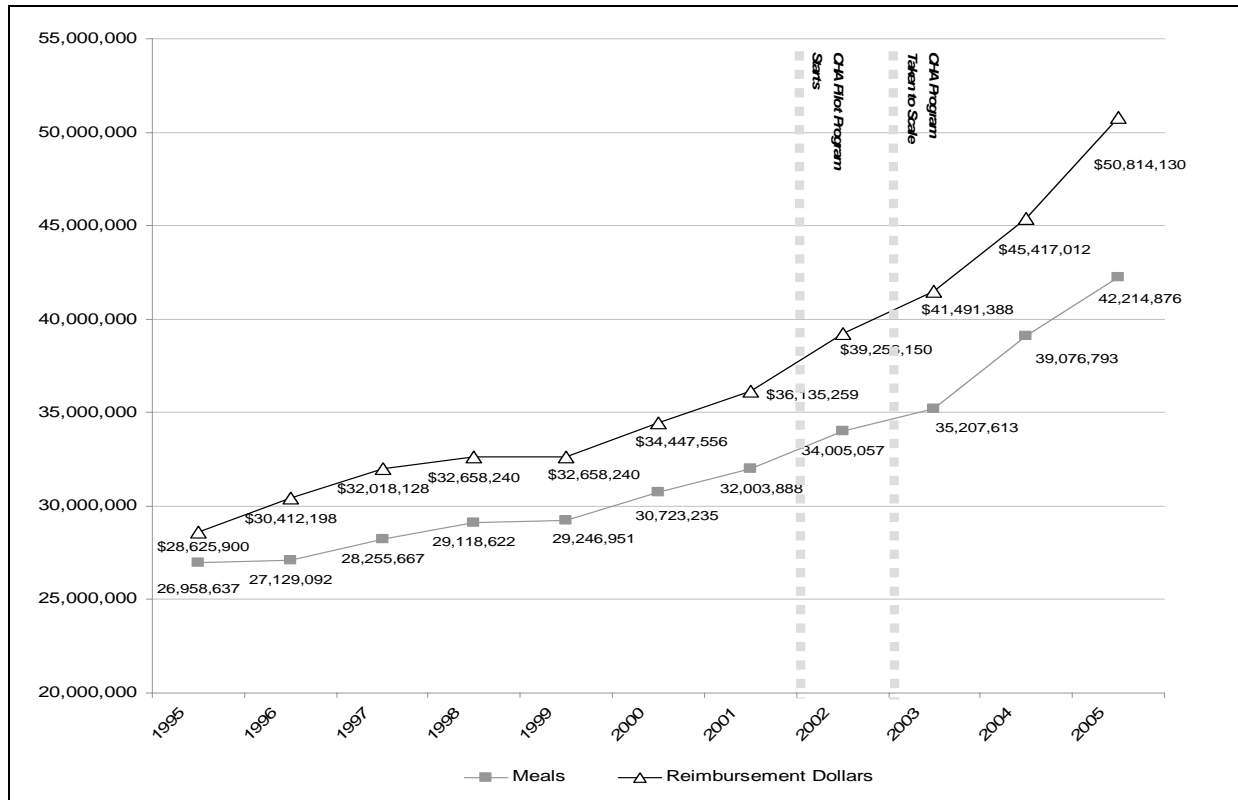
Note: Data are for fiscal years. 2006 figure is preliminary and based on April 2006 data.

Figure 4. Number of Children Participating in School Breakfast in Ohio, 1995–2005



Source: USDA. Data are for school years. 2006 figure is preliminary and based on April 2006 data.

Figure 5. Ohio School Breakfast Program Meals Served and Dollars Reimbursed, 1995–2005



Source: USDA. Data are for fiscal years.

The CHA School and Summer Nutrition Program consistently increased the number of schools providing breakfast programs, the number of children participating in school breakfast programs, and the number of breakfasts served. Schools vary in how they structure breakfast. Some breakfast programs deliver meals in cafeterias, others deliver them to classrooms, and others provide “grab-and-go” breakfasts students can pick up on their way to class. In 2004, the Food Research and Action Center highlighted Ohio’s remarkable growth in its national *2004 School Breakfast Report Card* report for doubling the national average for growth in its School Breakfast Program (FRAC, 2004).

Other Outcomes. As part of an evaluation of the CHA School and Summer Nutrition Program conducted by the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center (UCESC), principals, food directors, teachers, and parents were surveyed about the school breakfast program in Ohio schools. Results indicate that school personnel and parents reported more overall positive effects of breakfast on students than students themselves reported. Staff and administrators at the schools reported better classroom behavior, better attentiveness, improved attendance, and improved academic performance as a result of children eating breakfast at school (UCESC, 2005).

Three main reasons were given for participating in school breakfast programs by school districts with high participation: educational benefits, health and nutrition, and financial reasons. Over the past three years, CHA has sought to educate school administrators about both the educational and economic benefits of serving breakfast in their schools; when administrators start programs with the help of CHA, they are overwhelmingly likely to find ways to expand them. The findings of the evaluation of CHA’s School and Summer Nutrition Program shows support for breakfast by school administrators, teachers, and staff increased as student participation increased. Teachers in schools with higher meal participation during

2003–2004 were more likely to express the belief that breakfast contributed to an increase in attendance and a reduction in disciplinary problems and tardiness (UCESC, 2005). Additionally, CHA’s survey of participating schools found that more than 60% of principals and superintendents reported that breakfast in the classroom provided an opportunity to build classroom community. In general, everyone in a participating school seemed to agree that the breakfast program benefited students. They agreed that even if the program simply created a positive climate for students, school breakfast contributed to better student welfare and better chances to improve learning.

Win–Win: Ohio’s Strategies for Success

In partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, CHA as a statewide anti-hunger organization has employed a variety of methods to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program over the past three years. Its supposition is that School Breakfast Program participation is a win–win for everyone involved: not only the students, teachers, parents, and schools but also the community, corporate partners, and the state as a whole. CHA employs five primary sets of strategies that have been most successful in expanding school breakfast participation – and therefore feeding more children – in Ohio:

1. Engaging educational leadership
2. Engaging the broader community
3. Identifying and overcoming barriers to participation
4. Legislating USDA program participation
5. Recognizing and encouraging participation using the media

The descriptions of these strategies below are based on the reported experiences of Children’s Hunger Alliance staff and volunteers and school systems as well as on data collected during the

UCESC evaluation of CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Program.⁵ By implementing these strategies at a statewide level, other agencies and organizations can help to increase their school systems' participation in the School Breakfast Program and other USDA child nutrition programs.

1. Engaging Leaders in Education

Learning more about how schools and districts operate helped CHA understand that rather than relying on a strategy of approaching only food service directors, its staff must also convince high-level educational leadership of the importance of school breakfast to children and its value to schools and districts implementing the program. CHA also adopted a strategy of direct appeal to state-level educational leaders.

Ohio Department of Education. Perhaps CHA's most central partnership is with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), which has provided leadership for the state as the administrator for child nutrition programs. ODE also helps reach out to superintendents and principals; in 2003 CHA produced an eight-minute video communicating the value of School Breakfast participation, which was mailed or personally delivered to all superintendents in the state. The video includes Ohio legislators, food service staff, superintendents, parents, and children who talk about the value of school breakfast in their districts. The video also features Dr. Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, who urged superintendents to do all they could to ensure children have access to healthy foods so they can learn and grow. Dr. Zelman supports the expansion of School Breakfast and stresses the importance of breakfast to Ohio schools in speaking engagements and public service

⁵ At the time of the evaluation, the CHA program was titled Meal Connection; since then, CHA has used the title School and Summer Nutrition Program. Throughout this paper we use the most recent program title, but the References list contains the initial title in the evaluation report listing.

announcements. The endorsement of the ODE is crucial for CHA's continued expansion across the state.

In 2003, the state legislature appropriated \$1 million to ODE to contract with CHA for outreach to expand access to School Breakfast and other programs. With this funding, CHA and ODE worked together to increase participation. CHA also aligned its statewide staff geographically to work "on the ground" and assist ODE personnel, who are located in the state capital. This partnership also works to benefit ODE: while ODE provides leadership and support for schools that need help with USDA requirements and identifies the opportunities for program growth, CHA provides direct service to schools to identify and overcome their unique barriers to participation. CHA's staff brings diverse backgrounds and skills to support the schools in their areas.

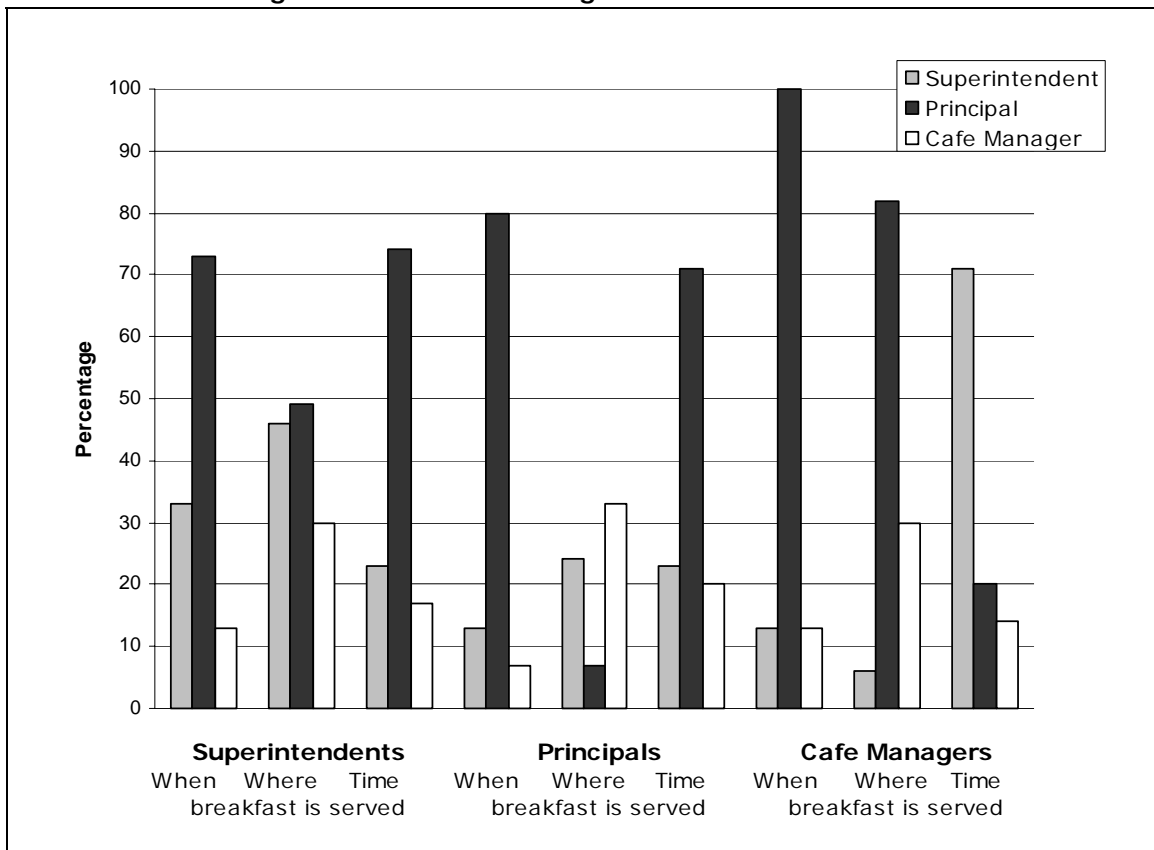
This partnership has also been important for generating additional resources for schools and communities with School Breakfast programs. In 2002 the partnership created *Start Smart...with School Breakfast* with \$500,000 funding from the USDA; this funded mini-grants to schools just starting new breakfast programs. The partnership received another \$100,000 grant from the USDA Team Nutrition program in 2002 to expand access to school breakfast and improve meal quality and received \$188,000 to recognize schools that had significant increases in breakfast participation or that maintained a 75% participation rate.⁶

School Leadership. CHA, along with similar organizations around the nation, has in the past targeted outreach efforts for school-based child nutrition programs to food service directors. What staff members realized, however, is that although these stakeholders are quite

⁶ In addition to legislative support, Children's Hunger Alliance and the Ohio Department of Education were responsible for Ohio being selected as one of ten USDA pilot projects to test use of USDA Provisions 2 and 3 and to determine feasibility and overall impact of these provisions on participation, student performance, and school food service viability.

important, they are not the primary decision-makers in a school district, and this conclusion was supported by feedback from members of school communities. From a 2004 survey of 893 teachers, principals, superintendents, food service directors, and custodial staff in 43 Ohio school districts, principals were identified by every group as the key decision-makers in a building in terms of when, how, and where a school breakfast program might be offered. Superintendents, principals, and cafeteria managers agreed that principals decide when breakfast is served at school, where it is served, and the time allotted for it (Fig. 6):

Figure 6. Decision-Making About School Breakfast



Source: USESC, 2005.

All respondents (including teachers, administrative staff, and custodians) indicated that principals and cafeteria managers were the main personnel that made decisions about specific activities involved in breakfast in Ohio schools during the 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 school years.

With this information in hand, CHA focused on strategies to ensure engagement of these decision-makers. Its outreach efforts began with the highest level of leadership possible in a district, whether that was the superintendent, principal, or another administrator. Schools with the greatest participation gains over the past two years were schools that had the firm support of leadership to overcome any barriers to program participation. Support for breakfast by school administrators also increased as student participation increased. Districts that served more breakfasts in Ohio had supportive leadership that was able to face the logistical challenges of serving breakfast with creative scheduling.

CHA connected with leadership in different venues. The organization visited and made presentations about School Breakfast at all Educational Service Centers in the state; attended, presented, or displayed at state-level conferences for superintendents and principals; and provided newsletter articles and meeting presentations for professional organizations of superintendents and principals. In smaller one-on-one meetings, CHA met with superintendents to provide detailed data on current participation and the USDA dollars lost when a district did not offer school breakfast or had low participation. CHA also held community meetings across the state (see Section 2 below) about the School Breakfast Program that many superintendents attended.

In addition, CHA engaged some school and district leadership by linking the School Breakfast Program to their District Continuous Improvement Plans (DCIPs). In Ohio, school districts are now encouraged to include improved school climate as an element of their DCIPs. CHA demonstrated that a healthy nutrition environment and high quality school food service are key components in a student's growth, development, physical well-being, and readiness to learn and therefore should be included in the district's plan. CHA also demonstrated with clear and credible national data that School Breakfast Programs can increase student attendance and

performance, decrease student tardiness, and promote the financial viability of schools' food service departments – all components of the DCIP (see Section 3, Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Participation).

2. Engaging the Broader Community

CHA uses the saying “it takes a village to raise a child” as its strategy for increasing local participation in the School Breakfast Program in Ohio. Bringing many partners to the table has helped the organization achieve the significant growth in participation that the state has reported over the last three years. Some of these partners include the state legislature, professional associations, other statewide hunger and education agencies, corporations, community and faith-based organizations, and food service management companies.⁷

Community Meetings with Legislators. CHA reaches out to the Ohio General Assembly and Ohio's Congressional delegation in two ways. First, it advocates for public policy changes on behalf of the continued support for and expansion of USDA child nutrition programs in the state as a way to end childhood hunger. (This role is discussed in more detail in Section 4, Legislating USDA Program Participation, below.) Second, the organization assists these elected officials in convening meetings with decision-makers and leaders in their districts around the issue of childhood hunger in the community and the specific opportunities for local school districts to increase their participation in USDA school nutrition programs, including School Breakfast. Over the last two years, CHA has convened over thirty community meetings with elected officials in their home communities to focus attention on the importance of USDA-funded child nutrition programs. All meetings have focused on the positive aspects of school

⁷ Media attention is an important component of engaging the community, and CHA's media outreach is discussed in more detail in Section 5, Recognizing and Encouraging Participation.

meal programs, opportunities for expansion, and the economic opportunities from USDA reimbursement for the state itself.

The primary goal of community meetings is to convene groups of community members to discuss childhood hunger and the available means to end it through USDA food and nutrition programs. CHA has discovered that the best strategy to bring community leaders, schools, youth-serving organizations, and other decision-makers to the discussion is to have a public official issue the invitations and convene the meeting. CHA identifies school districts that are not reaching full potential with School Breakfast Program opportunities and calls on legislators or their staff members who represent those districts. After the office holder agrees to host the meeting, CHA provides all logistical arrangements, from invitations to securing space, and sets the agenda. CHA supplies materials and handouts for the meeting to educate the attendees about the availability of School Breakfast Program funding. These meetings are beneficial for all participants. These elected officials are given the opportunity to connect with their districts and constituents around an important and nonpartisan issue. School districts receive solid information about the School Breakfast and other nutrition programs. And CHA enhances its relationships with the office holders outside of standard advocacy strategies and provides them with concrete examples to prove that the investments they have made in CHA's programming were directly worthwhile for their home communities.

Each meeting follows a similar structure, in which CHA staff members describe some of the results of childhood hunger in school settings and explain the credible research linking breakfast consumption with positive student outcomes. They also present data on each school district included in the community meeting which show the districts' rates of participation and possibilities for expansion. In addition, staff members elicit dialogue between district representatives about their obstacles to providing breakfast at school (which CHA staff can later

announced a district-wide, no-cost universal breakfast program. In doing so, Mayor Mallory called on city organizations to work with CHA and the public schools to make sure that there are adequate numbers of sites for summer nutrition programs in the city.

Community meetings with legislators also help communities become aware of Children's Hunger Alliance as a resource for school and summer nutrition programs and inform them about USDA programs that bring meals and dollars to their communities. For example, when the Marietta City Schools (Washington County) announced the implementation of universal breakfast in grade K-8, some local parents expressed concerns publicly about the schools' expenditures on breakfasts and about the nutritional value of the initial breakfasts served. CHA staff members helped Representative Jennifer Garrison, a newly-elected state representative, to convene a community meeting in which they demonstrated how USDA reimbursement worked to the economic advantage of school districts. They also explained that the initial breakfast meals would improve as the program expanded, even as they assured parents that the food being served fully met USDA nutritional guidelines.

The community meeting in Marietta was also attended by other school districts in the county interested in the School Breakfast Program. As a result of the meeting, one district, Frontier Local, visited the Marietta City Schools to observe the School Breakfast Program in action, then instituted its own breakfast program. Community meetings not only help legislators connect with their districts and CHA convey important information about school nutrition programs, they also serve as a springboard for local collaboration and information-sharing between districts and other organizations.

Food Providers and Associations. The American Dairy Association is one of CHA's strongest partners and has helped with pilot funding for CHA's breakfast outreach. (The

Association is also a strong supporter of the national Action For Healthy Kids initiative.) The Association provided resources for mini-grants for schools to test successful strategies for increasing student participation in school breakfast. It also provides milk coolers, educational materials, and incentive items that promote school breakfast such as pencils, stickers, and key chains. Milk coolers are especially helpful for schools that do not have adequate refrigeration; the Dairy Association makes these coolers available wherever they are needed so that no school declines a breakfast program because of a milk storage problem. The Association also provides support for training around wellness policies and help schools make more healthful choices for vended food. This kind of partnership is a win-win for both School Breakfast Programs and the Dairy Association. Its support of CHA's expansion efforts enhanced the likelihood that a school could begin a breakfast program; the Association's members benefit from the promotion of dairy products as an important nutritional source for children.

In the same vein, CHA connected with food service management companies and they helped to spread the word about School Breakfast options – another win-win strategy that met the business growth needs of the food service companies at the same time as it promoted a variety of school breakfast options to schools and districts. Contracted food services management companies can assist districts that have little or no food service infrastructure in school buildings to administer the School Breakfast Program; these companies provide high quality food with minimal effort on the part of the school.

Statewide and National Agencies. The United Parcel Services (UPS) Foundation National Collaboration to Reduce Hunger & Improve Nutrition has awarded Children's Hunger Alliance \$250,000 to promote and strengthen Ohio's Action For Healthy Kids (OAFHK) initiative to improve the health and educational performance of children statewide through better nutrition and physical activity. OAFHK has three goals: expand access to School

Breakfast, improve the quality of food served, and increase the opportunities children have for physical activity. Nationally, Action for Healthy Kids addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished, and sedentary youth by focusing on changes at school.⁸

Currently, 65 state and local organizations are engaged in the initiative. By supporting the OAFHK, CHA engaged broad and diverse organizations, including local health departments; the American Cancer Society; the American Heart Association; the Ohio State University Extension; local pediatricians, nurses, principals, teachers, and parent-teacher organizations; Ohio Pediatric Nurse Practitioners; Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators; and the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians Foundation. Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) around the state have been involved as strong OAFHK partners; CHA shares information directly with parents to encourage them to ask for their schools' participation in the School Breakfast Program. OAFHK divided the state into ten zones to create a bottom-up grassroots component that complemented CHA's strategy of engaging school leadership, a top-down approach. CHA staffed each zone to provide support for local work to expand School Breakfast participation. Resources from the UPS grant were allocated to the zones; each zone identified goals and a work plan to expand School Breakfast and improve the quality of food. All in all, 39 new breakfast programs started, and more students were fed, as a result of this partnership.

3. Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Participation

School leaders are overwhelmingly concerned with student welfare when they consider participation in the School Breakfast Program for their districts and schools. Key decision factors for School Breakfast participation, as reported by Ohio superintendents, principals, and

⁸ See <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/>.

food service directors, fall into three groups: (1) supporting education, (2) improving health and nutrition, and (3) assuring financial viability. Serving nutritious breakfasts and helping children achieve academic success were two of the most important student factors considered as a school became involved in the School Breakfast Program. Nearly 80% of principals and 87% of superintendents cited academic success as a key decision factor; another 82% and 73%, respectively, identified nutrition as an overriding concern; and 76% and 60%, respectively, cited making school breakfast as easy as possible for all children to participate as a key factor in their decisions to institute School Breakfast (UCESC, 2005).

However, school leaders can also be reluctant to engage in this initiative for several reasons. As reported in the findings of the evaluation of the CHA School and Summer Nutrition Program and accounts of breakfast program expansion efforts in Minnesota and Maryland (University of Minnesota, 2002), many barriers to starting or expanding a breakfast program have been consistently identified by school staff. Barriers to participating in the School Breakfast Program that were most often identified by school leaders were (1) cost or a concern about funding, (2) not enough students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, and (3) scheduling and other logistical issues (UCESC, 2005). In response to these research findings, and based on years of experience, CHA hired staff with diverse expertise in areas such as food service, transportation, curriculum, logistics, policy, media/communications, and of course USDA program implementation. This range of staff experience enables CHA to provide a comprehensive array of technical assistance to schools to overcome these perceived barriers.

Cost and Financial Viability. CHA helped to overcome concerns about cost and financial viability by providing credible data showing that participating in the School Breakfast Program can have a positive financial impact on a school district. A well-run program can actually generate a positive cash situation for schools. CHA brought data to superintendents

and principals on the current participation of children in School Breakfast in their districts' schools in each of the three reimbursement categories: free, reduced-price, and paid. Then CHA staff identified the USDA reimbursement dollars that would be available to the district if it served all the children eligible for child nutrition programs. The biggest predictor of school success is student participation: the more children eating breakfast, the greater the ability of a school to cover the infrastructure of staffing and space for the School Breakfast Program. CHA staff also assured school leaders that the menus for breakfast are cost effective, that vendors provide pricing structures that are affordable, and that the meals served are enjoyable to the children as well as nutritious.

CHA helped to overcome a district's specific financial concerns by demonstrating that even if the district included lower numbers of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, School Breakfast would be at the least a break-even proposition for the school or district. Most importantly, CHA showed schools that the best way to assure that a program breaks even is to increase student participation. Where appropriate, staff members suggested implementing a universal free breakfast program, breakfast in the classroom, promotional activities, and grab-and-go kiosks in middle and high schools. In addition, CHA assisted food service directors in identifying how to improve the quality of food and assure that students would actually eat it.

CHA followed up regularly with participating schools to assure that the program was working. Once strategies were in place, CHA staff members visited to be sure that the strategy was implemented as planned. Schools surveyed as part of the CHA School and Summer Nutrition Program evaluation reported that the technical assistance and program information provided by CHA was very useful in expanding their breakfast program participation. Respondents pointed to CHA's information about increasing participation through various

modes of breakfast delivery and its media and public relations support as important technical assistance for their breakfast programs (UCESC, 2005).

Scheduling and Logistics. Implementing and running a new program requires the attention of school leadership and staff to make it successful. The main concerns of school leaders were that School Breakfast activities could potentially take time away from academics or require busing and staffing changes. Other concerns include space limitations and the composition of the meal itself.

Space limitations. Schools were concerned about space limitations when providing breakfast to students because school cafeterias typically accommodate only a portion of the student population. During lunch, students are organized into multiple lunch times; in the morning, it is more difficult to move groups of students through cafeterias in a timely manner. CHA helped to overcome this concern by providing information about alternative ways of providing breakfast, such as serving breakfast in the classroom (especially appropriate for elementary students) and providing grab-and-go kiosks in the hallways (especially good for middle and high school students). According to the USDA, breakfast in the classroom strategies increased national student participation in School Breakfast pilot programs by 65% (McLaughlin, 2004).

Transportation and supervision. Bus schedules are especially difficult barriers for some schools to overcome as they are considering a School Breakfast Program. CHA helped to address this concern by working with transportation staff and other leaders to identify solutions such as changing bus schedules, informing parents of breakfast programs so that they can bring their students to school in time to participate, and providing supervision for students when

they arrive. Some of the transportation issues are ameliorated, however, if a school chooses to provide breakfast during regular school hours.

Supervising students who participate in school breakfast may be a barrier depending on local and district union contracts and staffing situations. As CHA discovered, engaging union leadership is an important strategy for some schools. In addition, asking teachers to volunteer time to offer breakfast in the classroom worked well in many instances, and other teachers soon joined the effort. Finally, identifying alternative times to offer breakfast helped some schools' participation.

The meal itself. Some of the criticisms of the School Breakfast Program from participating administrators and teachers in Ohio were about the quality and nutritional value of the food served. Children won't eat what they don't like. Nearly one-quarter of surveyed Ohio school personnel believe that an important role for CHA was in helping develop healthy menus and providing breakfast items that meet nutritional requirements without too much sugar (UCESC, 2005). CHA determined that providing a variety of nutritious foods increases student participation and connecting schools with contract food service organizations can also be helpful. The Columbus Public Schools' food service director, for example, included more fresh fruits on the menu, created a wider variety of offerings, and improved the "eye appeal" of breakfasts. These changes, along with changes in delivery, resulted in a 9% increase in breakfast participation despite an enrollment decline in the school system.

Time away from learning. All time is precious in the school day, especially in the midst of high-stakes testing and pressure on teachers to cover all state educational standards in their classrooms. CHA helped schools overcome concerns that breakfast participation will interfere with instructional time. Providing breakfast before the day begins, in the classroom, or after

first period are all strategies that have proved effective in Ohio and other states' schools. CHA also helped to overcome this concern by linking breakfast to learning. Its staff shared the results of studies showing that students learn better when they have eaten a morning meal.

Additionally, providing evidence for decreases in the incidence of visits to the school nurse also alleviated administrators' fears. In these ways, schools and teachers were assured that the time spent for children to eat breakfast was well spent. CHA also demonstrated that some strategies, such as grab-and-go kiosks, took very little instructional time away from teachers because students could serve themselves in between and on the way to classes.

4. Legislating USDA Program Participation

The Ohio legislature has supported school breakfast in the past with a \$0.06 per meal supplemental reimbursement and a mandate that requires schools to serve breakfast if one-third of their students qualify for free lunch. Yet despite Ohio's recent gains in School Breakfast participation, according to the Federal Food and Research Action Committee (FRAC), Ohio is one of the top 10 states in the nation that leaves federal funds unspent that could otherwise go toward child nutrition programs (FRAC, 2005). In fact, if Ohio had reached school breakfast participation rates of 55% among low-income students in 2004–2005, the state would have received over \$15 million more in federal reimbursements. CHA works diligently to demonstrate to lawmakers that School Breakfast is in fact a revenue generator. Not only can it bring additional federal dollars to the state, but it has a positive impact on the Ohio economy: every USDA dollar generated has a twofold impact, as these dollars are also spent in Ohio for farmers, grocers, food vendors, and so on.

All stakeholders (administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and even students) agree that participating in School Breakfast helped to improve student outcomes, particularly in terms

of students' general well-being, academic achievement, and school attendance. Legislators seeking to improve the lives of citizens in their districts listen to these important voices. CHA also provides customized information to elected officials, making sure they know the impact of hunger in their districts, as well as providing monthly legislative briefings, community meetings, e-newsletters, and newsletters. This consistent communication with lawmakers often brings CHA in an advisory role with legislators where important policy decisions can be made. In addition, these relationships helped CHA pilot and expand its programs. The support of the Ohio Legislature was critical to CHA's initial outreach work. In a time of very tight fiscal constraints, the legislators directed dollars to explore and expand strategies to increase the number of schools participating in the School Breakfast Program and other child meal programs. Its support of CHA's work totaled \$2.8 million in the second biennium

As part of its mission, CHA regularly makes and advocates for policy changes and recommendations to Ohio policymakers. For example, CHA recommended that the Ohio legislature require all publicly funded schools to offer School Breakfast when 20% or more students qualify for free lunch. CHA demonstrated to policymakers that by adopting this policy, over 90,000 additional Ohio students could participate in the School Breakfast Program. As a result, on July 1, 2006, House Bill 530 became law in Ohio. House Bill 530 directs all public schools with 20% of students qualifying for Free School Lunch to offer School Breakfast. In addition, for the first time, this mandate also applies to all charter (community) schools.

5. Recognizing and Encouraging Participation

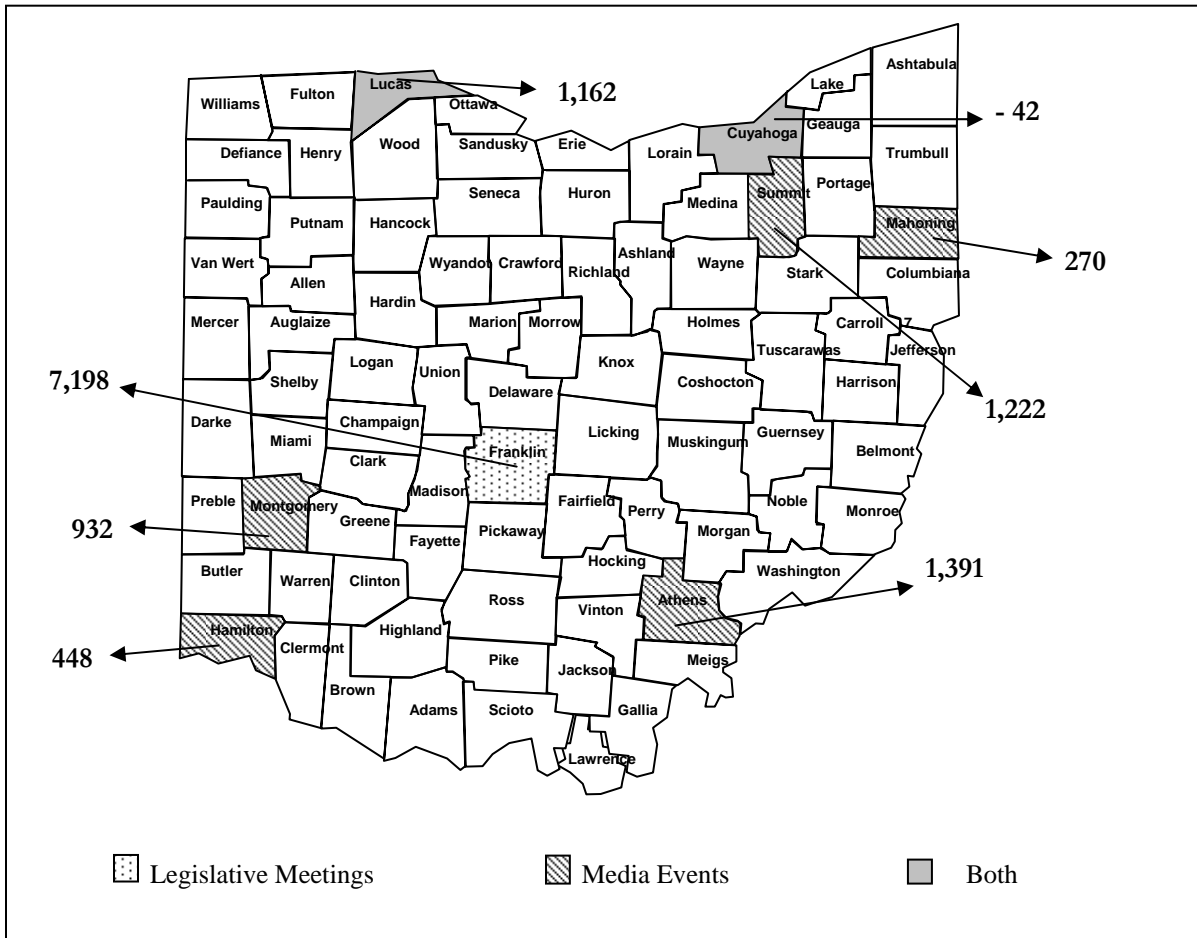
Finally, the media is a crucial partner in securing the support of school district leadership and strengthening grassroots advocacy for School Breakfast Programs. Over the last three years, CHA has convened monthly events to promote School Breakfast in local

communities, for a total of 36 media opportunities. These events, while initially met with caution by the schools, were soon embraced by them for the positive publicity generated. CHA's primary goal is to use media to draw attention to issues of childhood hunger and ways to combat it.

CHA's media strategy has several underlying goals as well as the goal of recognizing local schools and districts that are increasing school breakfast participation among students. These media events raise public awareness of the importance of child nutrition and the role school breakfast can play in ending childhood hunger and preparing kids to learn. They encourage School Breakfast Program expansion by letting parents – as well as community leaders, schools, and others – know that the program exists and, potentially, to encourage them to interact with their schools around offering or increasing breakfast programs. Other schools, seeing positive stories of peers that have successfully implemented breakfast strategies, may be more inclined to institute or expand breakfast offerings. Finally, media attention helps secure credibility for Children's Hunger Alliance itself and its approaches to ending childhood hunger. Unlike some anti-hunger agencies, such as food banks, whose missions and activities are more generally understood, CHA must explain its School and Summer Nutrition Program strategies more clearly and more often. Events such as those described below help show its work to the media and therefore the community by using images and stories of children eating at school. One-on-one meetings with the media that CHA conducts help members of the press understand the details of the USDA programs so that they can report more accurately.

The media strategy for School Breakfast Program participation contains two tracks: creating media events with local leaders (and sometimes legislators) and providing regular, credible communication with media around the state (Fig. 8).

Figure 8. 2005–2006 Legislative Meetings and Media Events, with School Breakfast Program Increases



Source: Children’s Hunger Alliance.

Creating Media Events. One recent media event example occurred in Athens, Ohio, (Athens County) where CHA announced a 12% increase in school breakfast participation in the state’s 29-county Appalachian region. For this event, CHA brought together 25 superintendents and food service directors from more than 12 of these counties to participate in the news conference. Several of the superintendents spoke about the needs and progress made by their school districts. Others announced increases in breakfast participation and the addition of new schools to the program for the following year. News stories about the event appeared in the

Athens, Ohio, daily and biweekly paper as well as on the local PBS television and radio station, WOUB, out of Ohio University.

In another example, Speaker of the House Jon Husted (R.), along with assistant minority whip Rep. Fred Strahorn (D.), visited Shilohview Elementary School in Trotwood, Ohio, (just outside Dayton in Montgomery County) in 2005 to promote school breakfast participation as part of a CHA media event. The elementary school had begun a pilot program serving breakfast at no cost. The representatives took turns reading *The Hungry Little Caterpillar* to students and passed out blue ribbons that read "I Start the Day Right with Breakfast" to all students. The Pear Bureau was also involved in the event, and every child in the building received a free pear with breakfast. After this event, the Trotwood-Madison School District extended universal breakfast to all its elementary schools and in January 2006 expanded the program to its junior high school. Not only were more students fed, but legislators from both sides of the aisle had the opportunity to show their commitment to children in their communities. Legislators are always invited to local media events in their districts and sometimes do attend.

In November 2003, CHA also hosted an event in a Stockport, Ohio, (located in Morgan County, another of Ohio's 29 Appalachian counties) elementary school highlighting its school breakfast participation. State Representative Jimmy Stewart (R.) took part in the event, reading *Oliver's Fruit Salad*, by Vivian French, to a kindergarten class as they ate their breakfast. He was also quoted in the news story that appeared in a Zanesville, Ohio, newspaper (approximately 35 miles away) as well as other local papers (Shiple, 2003). Readers received important information about the School Breakfast Program in their communities and saw their state representatives actively participating in community advancement through these media events.

CHA media events draw attention to local school programs. The increase in positive media attention was mentioned by schools surveyed by UCESC as a significant asset of CHA's School and Summer Nutrition Program efforts on their behalf. CHA hosts events in all regions of the state and usually invites one or more state legislators to participate. This participation allows legislators to connect in a positive way with the constituents in their districts and to show their interest in promoting children's health and nutrition. Having policymakers participate in this way also helps garner positive press (see above) as well as get the attention of school leadership about the importance of School Breakfast Programs and other child nutrition programs.

Communicating Regularly with the Media. CHA regularly communicates with media like many nonprofit organizations, through their brochures, reports, and periodic press releases. An additional, highly successful media strategy employed by CHA in August 2005 saw very positive results. CHA staff secured face to face meetings with the editorial boards at every major newspaper in the state of Ohio. These meetings provided the agency with the opportunity to educate key editors and opinion leaders about the important links between breakfast and learning as well as the monetary benefits that schools can realize by tapping USDA funding. Staff members also shared School Breakfast Program participation rates and data with each group of editors for the school systems in their areas. As a result of these efforts, editorials appeared in major newspapers such as the *Columbus Dispatch*, *Toledo Blade*, and the *Youngstown Vindicator* in support of School Breakfast Program participation and expansion. As a highly-read part of any newspaper, the editorial section is a powerful force on public opinion and support for any issue.

These efforts not only garnered editorials in support of CHA programs but also news stories on the importance of school breakfast expansion in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Athens*

News and a broadcast interview on a Toledo-area PBS station. In this appearance, an on-air discussion about the importance of School Breakfast and Summer Food Service Programs, CHA staff members were joined by State Senator Teresa Fedor (D.-Toledo) in support of school breakfast participation.

Consistent communication with the media demonstrates CHA's credibility and establishes CHA staff as experts on childhood hunger, nutrition, and food programs. For example, each January, in conjunction with the release of CHA's anti-hunger policy recommendations, staff members host one-on-one briefings with the state house press corps to ensure that they understand the yearly recommendations and how these recommendations help end childhood hunger. In 2006, CHA secured briefings with almost every member of the corps and received impressive television, radio, and newspaper coverage for its programs.

News media in different parts of the state use CHA data and interviews with local parents, students, and administrators to write about the benefits and value of School Breakfast participation. As a result of CHA press releases and its annual report, many local newspapers also reported on the federal funding that Ohio was leaving on the table in 2004–2005 by not expanding the School Breakfast Program.

Summary

CHA is committed to expanding participation in child nutrition programs, especially School Breakfast, in the state of Ohio. Over the last three years, its results in increasing School Breakfast participation have rested on five primary sets of tested strategies that have been most successful in expanding school breakfast participation – and therefore feeding 63,623 more children – in Ohio: engaging leaders in education, engaging the broader community, overcoming barriers to participation, advocating for public policy change, and promoting the

program through the media. These strategies form a solid framework for other local communities interested in developing plans to increase child nutrition program participation in their schools. Communities gain a fundamental win-win in enacting this goal: their children are fed.

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