



## Tactics for Successful Marketing

### **Celebrate National School Breakfast Week**

One of the easiest ways to promote your breakfast program is to celebrate National School Breakfast Week, held annually during the month of March. Events such as a Breakfast Dress-up Day, special nutrition education sessions, or a School Breakfast poster contest can be simple or elaborate. Be creative and choose events that are suitable for your school environment and the age of the students you are serving!

Providing free breakfasts or sponsoring demos/taste tests during National School Breakfast Week may further generate awareness of breakfast as a healthy option at school, as well as provide students with the opportunity to sample breakfast menu choices. Remember to estimate costs based on the additional participation that day or week. You may wish to promote this special event by giving out coupons to students for a free breakfast when they get off the bus, or send coupons home with them in a newsletter. This idea can be expanded to include the first day of school or the first week of school to generate awareness.

During National School Breakfast Week, enlist the support of homeroom, health, science, and/or physical education teachers and coaches so they will act as positive role models. Encourage teachers to eat breakfast with their students or discuss the importance of breakfast in class. Distribute menus to teachers so they have an opportunity to talk the foods being served in school. Collaborate with health and physical education teachers to highlight the importance of energizing your day with a healthy school breakfast. Offer coaches a decorated table specifically for their teams to eat breakfast together the morning of a big game.

### **Invite Parents to Breakfast**

Since many parents understand the importance of breakfast and the impact it has on a child's ability to learn, why not invite them for a parents' breakfast? Offer samples of the same breakfast items that are regularly served to students so that parents can taste the food their children enjoy at school. Give a tour of the food service department and provide family-sized recipes for parents to take home (if possible, include nutritional information to show how the meals contribute to their children's daily nutritional needs). Include a coupon for "One Free Breakfast" as part of your promotion materials that parents may redeem at any time that is convenient for them.

### **Contests**

Contests can build awareness of your products and services, as well as generate excitement about giveaways or prizes. Consider details such as how you would like students to enter the

contests you are sponsoring, how staff will evaluate entries, and the types of prizes available. Will there be prizes for everyone, just a few prizes, or one grand prize? Create entry forms and an eye catching collection box for the completed forms. Advertise with flyers and banners and include messaging about the contest in your newsletters or announcements. After the contest, announce the winners and create publicity by taking pictures. Be sure to check school policies on contests and prizes. Some examples of contests that you might host include:

- **Poster Contest**

Students enjoy being creative and expressing themselves through various channels other than writing. Create an opportunity for students to design a menu for the month or a poster promoting breakfast at school. Create your own criteria regarding paper size, message, and theme. You could also offer different grades separate prizes so that each class has an opportunity to win. Display the winning posters in the cafeteria.

Choose a theme, such as designing a health or academics related message supporting school breakfast. Posters can also be used to create a new image for breakfast at your school. For example, let students design names for certain menu items and apply the winner's idea to the items after the contest.

- **Milk Contest**

Have students create a milk mustache photo gallery. Give each student the opportunity to have his or her picture taken with a milk moustache and display each grade's results in hallways or the cafeteria. Each grade could vote on its favorite theme or costume. Select judges to choose which grade level's pictures are the silliest, which grade had the most participants, etc.

- **Cereal Box Design Contest**

Have students create a cereal box for their favorite cereal and have celebrities, teachers, or local high school art students judge the boxes. Similarly, Food Service Staff can offer a new breakfast dish and have students create advertising and promotional materials for the item. Students can have their artwork published in the school newspaper or used in promotional materials to send home to parents.

- **Breakfast Participation Challenge**

Organize this contest for individual classes, homerooms, or grades. Students are challenged to participate in the School Breakfast Program every day. Designate a period of time, such as a week, month, or semester over which the contest will run, and during that time, track participation for each group of students. At the end of the contest period, the group with the highest overall participation rate (this can be tallied by proportion or # of breakfasts served, whichever works best) is named the winner. You can build excitement for this contest by tracking progress on large posters in the school cafeteria, or by providing regular updates during the morning or afternoon announcements.

## **Celebrity Day**

Host an event at which local celebrities join your students for breakfast. These local celebrities are role models for students of any age. They can be mascots from sports teams, members from a university (or even professional) sports team, news reporters, a familiar local face, the mayor, or a city councilperson. Seek out people who are familiar to the children and bring about a positive image. Students listen not only to their peers, but to adults that they look up to.

## **Theme Days**

Theme days spark interest in “checking out what's new” and provide the opportunity to serve new types of foods. Choose different themes for the cafeteria and serve food that supports that theme. Turn the cafeteria into a tropical paradise with a Hawaiian Day Celebration using cut out palm trees and grass skirts to decorate the serving counter, and have staff wear Hawaiian shirts and leis. Serve Hawaiian bagel pizza (pizza with ham and pineapple) or luau muffins or serve pineapple as the fruit of the day. You can also showcase menus based on a holiday, culture or sports team to make school meals fun. Keep in mind the ethnic or cultural backgrounds that make up your school's population---these can serve as platforms for promoting diversity and inclusion, while contributing exciting new menu items and themes to your breakfast promotion efforts.

## **Serve Breakfast at Lunch**

Create interest in the breakfast program by occasionally offering popular breakfast choices at lunch! Serve nutritious meals that meet the Dietary Guidelines and nutrition standards for lunch with foods such as whole grain-rich waffles or pancakes, egg sandwiches, breakfast burritos, smoothies, or other student favorites.

## **Menu Ideas**

Even menus themselves are powerful tools that can help you to market school meal programs. Not only do they provide information for students, parents and faculty, but they also help to entice students to enjoy eating school meals.

Plan menus that offer a wide variety of popular, healthy choices and display the information in a creative way. Encourage students to read the menu every day and keep it in a convenient place at home. Reading the menus provides students with the information they need to make better food choices. When students have an opportunity to read an appealing menu, they will follow through with increased interest and participation.

Take advantage of online software that includes pre-designed menu calendars to add interest to your menus. Make the menus fun and reinforce that school meals are important for every

student's health. Choose descriptive terms that make foods interesting and enticing. Keep the descriptions fresh, new and accurate. Borrow ideas from restaurant menus to describe various foods and how they are prepared. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>) also offers tips and suggestions for appealing and creative names for foods.

Be proud of your menus! Display them in the cafeteria or where meals are served. Advertise your menus in locations throughout the school. Encourage teachers to post menus in class. Furthermore, make sure your menus attract students' attention. Consider using an easel or menu board with large letters to help remind students about the day's choices. Or, merchandise your meals by displaying a sample plate so that students can see what's offered that day. Identify the types of foods students want to eat. Adjust the menu to reflect their suggestions or occasionally serve special meals that contain favorite food items. Publicize that the menu has been altered to accommodate students' preferences whenever you do so.

### **Online Promotion**

Post menus on your school's website or intranet. Parents and children can check every day to see if they want to participate in school breakfast. If there is an email listserv that the school uses to communicate with households and the community, see if you can use it to advertise menus, contests, and special events. Make sure that you include prices and even nutrition information, if available, when advertising in this fashion. Compare the nutrition information for your meals with popular alternatives which may be less healthy. Promote the benefits of the School Breakfast Program specifically.

### **Flyers**

You can focus attention on the School Breakfast Program by delivering the message with flyers. Here are some suggestions:

- Display eye-catching flyers in school hallways.
- Include flyers in school newsletters or at Parents' Night or Orientation.
- Use bold lettering that is easy to read from a distance.
- Describe the convenience and nutritional value of the School Breakfast Program.
- Include a cost comparison between school breakfast and breakfast at a local fast food restaurant or convenience store. Hours of operation, cost, location and breakfast options should be included in the flyer.
- Let all students and parents know that they can have both breakfast and lunch at school every day.
- If it's within your budget, utilize colorful pictures and graphics to accentuate the message.

## **Announcements**

Promote School Breakfast every day over the school intercom or on the school radio station. Remind students that eating school breakfast every day gives them energy for activities, a chance to socialize, and will help them do better in school.

## **Student Advisory Group**

What better way to address the needs of students than by asking them? Ask students to volunteer to test new menu items, flyer designs and marketing ideas. Students from the class councils, Student Government Association, Honor Society or other organizations may want to participate, too. Find out what they think of school meals and ask them how school breakfast can be more appealing. What kinds of foods would they like to eat? Have them help you design or create a menu for their age group. Student will provide a quick response and will generate ideas to increase participation. These students can also help develop or choose new items to add to the menus depending upon their own personal tastes. Furthermore, these students will generate interest and help market the program to their peers.

## **Taste Tests**

When creating new recipes or menu items or deciding which ones to keep, hold a taste test with students before changing the menu. Serve small, sample-sized portions to students during breakfast or lunch and advertise the results of the taste test when offering the new food item on the menu.

## **Breakfast Giveaways and Prizes**

Provide free breakfast to all school staff on the first day of school to build support for the program. Teachers and staff will set an example for students to start their day off right! Offer breakfasts at a discount for teachers who continue to eat with their students, or a free breakfast for every certain number of times they eat school breakfast.

If you are using an alternative serving method that requires teacher cooperation, provide breakfasts to them at no charge every day to thank them for their support.

Also consider employing similar tactics for students, such as a small prize for those who eat more frequently during the month, or give them a “frequent user” card. Provide free breakfast to students who “bring a friend” to breakfast with them for the first time. Consider placing a sticker on the bottom of a few random trays. The student who receives that tray wins a prize.

## **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**

Public service announcements can be an effective way to deliver your message about breakfast or school meals. If you have a successful sports team with a large following that fits your target

audience (e.g. parents of students in elementary, middle and high schools), ask the organization to make an announcement as part of its community service. Sample PSAs, both in written and video form, are included in this toolkit.

Students can create their own PSAs, too. If a school has a TV production class, this class could create a short commercial about the School Breakfast Program which could then be aired on local and/or school television.

### **Automated Messages**

Record a message about school breakfast that plays while parents are “on hold” waiting to speak with school administrative staff. Also, many schools have automated message systems to call parents at home. If a student is absent, and the phone system will call home with a generated message for parents, why not use the same system to call home with a message about the benefits of school breakfast?

### **Press Releases**

Send press releases to local newspapers, television stations, or community newsletters before the start of the school year to notify parents that the School Breakfast Program is available to all students. Include information about the convenience, cost and nutritional value of school breakfast. Communicate with the media on a regular basis and use it to promote special events.

### **Existing Forums**

Provide information about school breakfast at Parent Teacher Association meetings, staff meetings, parent-teacher conferences, school and community events, and more. Take advantage of these existing forums to publicize the benefits of school breakfast.

### **Involve Advocates**

Collaborate with community partners such as anti-hunger advocates who can support and publicize school breakfast initiatives. Many of these organizations even provide additional resources similar to this toolkit to aid you in your efforts to establish, promote, or expand your breakfast program. Take advantage of these partners to help you create a marketing campaign.

### **Ask for Input**

Are there schools in your area which have implemented and promoted an especially successful breakfast program? Talk with them about their experience and ask them to share any insight on how to raise participation rates for your program.