

# School Breakfast at Half Century

A LOOK BACK TO MOVE AHEAD  
JANET POPPENDIECK

## Executive Summary

Janet Poppendieck, activist, author, professor emerita at Hunter College and WhyHunger Board Member, reflects on her decades of research and advocacy to promote the School Breakfast Program in light of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Poppendieck examines the history, challenges, policy gains and role of advocacy in shaping the program. She lifts up this critical program, which provided 2.3 billion nutritious meals to America's children last year, and its steady growth as possibly the best example of effective advocacy and productive cooperation between national anti-hunger organizations and state and local groups. Poppendieck reviews the program's achievements, assesses the forces that have shaped it and identifies its promising innovations in a detailed analysis of the many policy shifts and leadership and advocacy efforts at state, local and national level. Through this analysis, Poppendieck identifies and highlights the lessons learned from decades of successfully building a robust, impactful program to offer a road map for next generation of activists tasked with keeping the health and nutrition of America's children at the forefront of our Federal nutrition policy.

---

## Reflections

A little over 40 years ago, I took a break from writing my doctoral dissertation and assumed a temporary job at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) as the interim Director of the National School Breakfast Campaign. Congress had clarified that the School Breakfast Program (SBP), originally started as a pilot program targeted to schools in areas with poor economic conditions and schools to which children travelled long distances, was available to all public and private non-profit schools in the nation. FRAC had surveyed teachers, principals and others involved with the new program to assess its impact and to identify the barriers to its expansion. The job of the School Breakfast Campaign was to get the word out to parents, community organizations, and school officials that any school could have the program, and to advertise the benefits of adding the morning meal. I thought of myself as the National School Breakfast Lady, a cross between a cafeteria worker and a minor pageant winner like Miss Subways.

---

I thought of myself as the National School Breakfast Lady, a cross between a cafeteria worker and a minor pageant winner like Miss Subways.

---

It was a great job. The School Breakfast Program provided a powerful tool to reduce hunger and help low-income families stretch their resources. Furthermore, in the context of the big changes in American life then in progress—more mothers in the work force, more single parent households, more children travelling to school by bus as a result of school consolidation—school breakfast just made sense. It ensured that children would be fueled for learning in the crucial morning hours of instruction. There was not then the mountain of research that now demonstrates that children who eat school breakfast are more likely to have diets adequate in vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, and phosphorous, more likely to consume fruit and milk at breakfast, less likely to be overweight or obese, and less likely to suffer from anxiety or depression and to exhibit behavioral problems.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there yet statistical evidence that participation in



school breakfast was associated with improved grades in mathematics and better attendance and punctuality.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the survey of educators and administrators in schools that had implemented the program had reached conclusions that prefigured these later, more scientific findings: “The same story was told and retold: the children were more enthusiastic about learning, more attentive and alert, less disruptive, happier and more relaxed, noticeably improved in their physical condition, less likely to be absent or tardy.”<sup>3</sup> I embarked on my campaign well equipped with arguments that would sound familiar to anyone involved with the current program.

The fifty-year effort to make school breakfast more available, accessible, acceptable and nutritious is an outstanding example of effective advocacy and possibly the best example of productive cooperation between national anti-hunger organizations and state and local groups.

The School Breakfast Program was established by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. It will celebrate its fiftieth birthday in October, so this seems like an appropriate time to review its achievements, assess the forces that have shaped it, identify promising innovations and dream about its future. Perhaps because I was introduced to School Breakfast in an advocacy context, I have watched it through an advocacy lens. In my view, the fifty-year effort to make school breakfast more available, accessible, acceptable and nutritious is an outstanding example of effective advocacy and possibly the best example of productive cooperation between national anti-hunger organizations and state and local groups.

---

**In the five decades since the School Breakfast Program (SBP) was established, Average Daily Participation has grown from about 80,000 in the first year of operation to 14,900,000 last year.**

---

## A Look at the Numbers

In the world of school food, participation measured as Average Daily Participation during the school year (ADP) is the crucial metric. As a Food Service Director said to me when I began my study of school lunch, “If they don’t eat it, it doesn’t do them any good.” In the five decades since the School Breakfast Program (SBP) was established, ADP has grown from about 80,000 in the first year of operation to 14,900,000 last year. The total number of meals served annually in the program has climbed from just under 40 million in 1969 to more than 2.3 billion in 2015.<sup>4</sup> This is both the good news and the bad news: good news because of the record of growth, bad news because some children in need still do not have access to the program. The fundamental goal of SBP advocacy, since the program’s inception, has been to remove the barriers to participation, in short, the reasons why students “don’t eat it”.

## Expanding Availability

For most of the program's history, the major reason for its limited availability was the failure of schools to offer the program. In 1971, five years after the program's creation, there were only 6,600 schools participating, as compared with nearly 80,000 in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Twenty years later, just under half the schools that offered the NSLP also offered SBP, and by last year, more than 90 % of the nation's 98,413 NSLP schools offered school breakfast.

The process of expanding the availability of the SBP began with two crucial actions at the federal level: **achieving permanent status** and **securing adequate funding**.

### *Making the Program Permanent*

The first task for advocates was to secure permanent status for the SBP. "Pilot Program" was not just a name; it implied that Congress might discontinue the program at any moment. Research has played a crucial role in school breakfast advocacy over the years, and the program's slow start was no exception. FRAC's study of the SBP, released in 1972, documented the chief reasons schools were reluctant to apply for the program. The study found that many schools and school districts were unwilling to invest resources in starting a breakfast program without an ongoing federal commitment. They feared that the federal government would discontinue the SBP, leaving them with a choice between cancelling the program or running it with local funds they did not have. As FRAC reported, the "political onus of terminating a popular program...is considerably greater than that of not initiating one."<sup>5</sup> The designation of School Breakfast as a permanent program in 1975 was an essential step.

### *Securing Adequate Funding*

Even with permanent status, many schools would not offer the program unless adequate funding was assured. The most important step that Congress took was the transformation of SBP funding from modest appropriations to entitlement status and "performance funding."

The legislation that accomplished this transformation was largely a by-product of long-overdue reforms in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In the late 1960s, hunger became a major public issue in the United States, when field hearings, investigations, studies and exposés brought the shortcomings of federal food assistance to public attention. In

---

**The most important step that Congress took was the transformation of SBP funding from modest appropriations to entitlement status and "performance funding."**

---

In 1968 only about 2 million of the nation's 50 million school aged children were receiving free or reduced price lunches, even though at least 6 million lived in desperately poor households with incomes below the federal government's very stringent poverty line. Some of those not served attended "lunchless schools": schools in older buildings in inner city neighborhoods that lacked the kitchen and cafeteria facilities to prepare and serve meals and did not offer NSLP at all. Many more poor children; however, attended schools that had the NSLP but lacked the funds to provide free meals to poor students, despite the federal requirement that they do so.<sup>11</sup> Politicians and citizens alike greeted these revelations with

outrage. Poor people marched on Washington and sat in at the Department of Agriculture to demand full funding of programs to end hunger. The Black Panther Party began serving free breakfasts to schoolchildren in large cities across the nation. Activists established national, state, and local anti-hunger organizations dedicated to expanding federal food assistance. The United State Senate created a Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs.

Fueled in part by the first (and only) White House Conference on Nutrition and Health, Congress acted decisively in the early 1970s to place school food on a true entitlement basis. Any child in a school that had the NSLP or SBP was entitled to participate, and any public or non-profit private school that chose to do so could offer the program(s). The federal government would pick up the tab for free meals and most of the cost for reduced price meals. Both the charge to the student—Free, Reduced Price or Full Price—and the federal reimbursement to the school would depend upon the student’s family income, with uniform national eligibility standards replacing the local discretion that had characterized the NSLP since its creation in 1946. In the school cafeteria, poor children were transformed overnight from a burden absorbing the school’s limited resources to an asset bringing in the full federal reimbursement. Participation in school lunch by free and reduced price eligible children soared, and participation in breakfast grew rapidly and steadily throughout the 1970s as more and more schools offered the program. The income levels themselves have been adjusted several times; in the current iteration, children are eligible for free meals if their household incomes are at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (currently that would be \$26,208 annually for a mom and two children), and for reduced price meals up to 185% of that line (\$37,296 for a household of three.)

Of course, the funding battle is never won forever. The maintenance of performance funding has required steady vigilance and effort. Nonetheless, once it was established, performance funding set the stage for a major shift of attention to the local level. The locus of advocacy shifted from Washington to the nation’s thousands of school districts.

## Persuading Schools to Adopt the Program

The decision to offer the SBP in a particular school is usually made by what USDA calls the “Local Educational Authority,” generally the school board, with substantial and often decisive input from superintendents and principals and varying degrees of influence by the food service director. Travelling around the country on behalf of the School Breakfast Campaign, I heard the whole range of rationales and excuses: it would be too difficult to change bus schedules; the school would have to pay custodians overtime for the extra hours needed to open the schools in time for the program. In cold climates, heating bills would rise if the school opened earlier. Somehow, schools where principals and school boards wanted the program found ways to solve these problems. But many decision-makers were simply against the idea in principle. Some believed that serving breakfast at school would undermine family values; some felt it was an unreasonable imposition on schools. In a more recent twist, some worry that the program will contribute to obesity by encouraging children to “double dip,” that is, eat breakfast at home and then again at school.

---

**Activists have taken three basic approaches to expanding the number of schools offering the School Breakfast Program: information, persuasion, and mandates.**

---

School Breakfast activists have taken three basic approaches to expanding the number

of schools offering the SBP: information, persuasion, and mandates. Some of these efforts were successful, but when local school boards and individual principals resisted, activists in some communities turned to their state governments for assistance.

### *School Breakfast Mandates*

In 1974, I joined the newly formed New York City School Breakfast Committee, and by 1976, we had cajoled, pestered or threatened enough principals and district superintendents that about 440 of the system's nearly 1,000 schools were offering the breakfast program, fewer than half.<sup>6</sup> Frustrated by the slow pace at which the program was expanding, the Committee convinced the legislature of the State of New York in 1976 to pass a law requiring schools in cities with populations of 125,000 or more to offer breakfast in all schools where at least one third of pupils qualified for free or reduced price meals by the Fall of 1976, and in all of their schools by the start of the 1977-78 school year.<sup>7</sup> The state mandate idea spread gradually, shared at national gatherings of anti-hunger activists, and through various hunger newsletters and other publications. By 1991, 15 states mandated breakfast in at least some schools, most commonly specifying schools with a certain percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price meals. At present, 28 states have some form of School Breakfast Mandate including seven states that mandate the SBP in all public schools.<sup>8</sup> Further, some states with mandates and some that resisted the mandate have passed other legislation promoting the SBP: incentives, funds for start-up costs, and supplemental subsidies are among the most common.

### *Fostering Student Participation*

As advocates looked more closely at the factors determining student participation once a school decides to offer the SBP, they identified four major barriers.

#### **1) Application and certification**

Typically, paper applications have been sent home with children, to be filled out by parents and returned to the school. There are innumerable possible slipups. Problems with the application and certification process have led to the development of two important innovations. USDA developed and tested procedures for "Direct Certification" of eligibility for children from households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [Food Stamps], Public Assistance, or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. Eventually, this approach was expanded to include all "categorically eligible" children, including children in foster care, homeless children, runaway children, and migrant children. In Direct Certification, the parental application and verification and processing by schools are eliminated, and public agencies that administer means-tested programs provide the schools with lists of eligible children. Advocates at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) have taken the lead in pushing for Direct Certification, explaining it to Congress and urging its adoption, and in 2004, Congress required Direct Certification for all school districts participating in the NSLP.

CBPP was also instrumental in convincing Congress to adopt the second innovation, school year-long eligibility for children that replaced a requirement that families report changes in their income during the school year.

#### **2) Price**

The reduced price category generally offers breakfast for \$.30. Some states or districts charge less, but the federal reimbursement for reduced price breakfasts is thirty cents below the free rate, so most schools charge thirty cents. As pressure for accurate accounting mounted, and especially after schools began using computerized "point-of-sale" software to identify children assigned to the full price and reduced price categories, cashiers began reporting substantial numbers of children who simply didn't have the \$.30.

Ten states now absorb the 30 cent charge, and several others offer smaller subsidies to keep the prices low. As research showing the importance of breakfast for health and learning mounted, some school districts, including the nation's largest, New York City, opted to make breakfast free for all children: universal free breakfast. Universal free breakfast addresses not only the price barrier, but also the stigma problem.

### 3) Stigma

Because school breakfast was originally targeted to poor children, and has been promoted as an anti-hunger measure, some children have been reluctant to be seen eating breakfast at school for fear of being labeled as "poor." The welfare stigma has often deterred their participation, and as students enter the socially aware middle school years, it deters participation by many poor students as well. Universal free school breakfasts offer a solution to multiple problems.

A provision of the 2010 Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA), established another option for schools: the Community Eligibility Program or CEP. In CEP, the school's reimbursement is based on the number of children who are direct-certified for free meals, called "identified students." Any school, cluster of schools, or entire school district in which at least 40% of students are thus identified can establish the proportion of direct certified children, multiply that figure by a factor of 1.6, and then obtain the full federal free meal reimbursement for the resulting percentage of meals served. Thus a district in which 50 % of students are "identified" would receive the full federal free meal reimbursement for  $.50 \times 1.6 = 80\%$  of meals served. This eliminates the need for any parental applications, reduces paper work, takes away opportunities for error, and allows schools to develop inclusive meal programs. Community Eligibility began gradually in just three states and was not available to all states until 2014-15. School districts that have used CEP have shown significant increases in overall participation in breakfast and lunch. It eliminates the price barrier, and sharply reduces the stigma barrier, especially when combined with another innovation: breakfast after the bell.

### 4) Timing

In many schools, especially those to which students travel by bus, even students who want to eat the school breakfast may not be able to get to school in time to do so. This is the reasoning behind "Breakfast After the Bell" or "Alternative Breakfast" which may be accomplished through Breakfast in the Classroom, by means of "Grab and Go" bagged breakfasts, or by a breakfast break, usually after first period, known as "Second Chance Breakfast." As communities and schools have experimented with these innovations, Breakfast in the Classroom has become more common in elementary grades while Grab and Go and Second Chance work better in middle and high schools. The spread of these innovations is due in part to the efforts of WhyHunger, Share Our Strength, especially its No Kid Hungry Campaign, and the Alliance Against Hunger, especially its Hunger Free Communities initiative. All of these organizations have joined FRAC in promoting school breakfast, engaging local and state level partners, and sharing best practices. School by school, district by district, state by state, Breakfast after the Bell and Universal Free Breakfast are reaching a tipping point and becoming mainstream.

### *Healthy Competition*

Beginning in 1991, FRAC started publishing an annual review, known as the "School Breakfast Scorecard", which tracks increases in schools participating in the SBP, shares success stories and best practices, and measures the number of low-income students who participate in comparison to the number eating a free or reduced price school lunch. The scorecard reports a ratio—how many students eating free or reduced price breakfast for

every 100 free and reduced price lunches – for the nation as a whole, and for every state. The Scorecard establishes a goal based on the performance of the states that have achieved the highest ratio. By the most recent Scorecard, the goal had risen to 70 low-income students eating breakfast for every hundred free and reduced price lunches served, a goal that was met by only three states, West Virginia, New Mexico and the District of Columbia. Further, the scorecard calculates the amount of additional federal dollars each state would have received if it had met the goal. Last year California, with a participation ratio of 54.6, was the “biggest loser,” leaving \$107.9 million on the federal table, while the State of New York was missing out on \$76.5 million in federal breakfast funding. Every year when the Scorecard comes out, my inbox is flooded with messages from a Google alert on School Breakfast, linking me to stories of advocates addressing State legislatures, Governors, and School Boards around the country, seeking measures to improve their state’s ranking and capture the available federal investment. By equipping state and local activists with persuasive arguments, The School Breakfast Scorecard has been a key driver of change.

## Making the Food Healthy and Appealing

Since its inception, the SBP has been required to provide meals intended to supply one quarter of the child’s RDA.<sup>9</sup> RDA requirements vary by age, however, and the original USDA designed school breakfast “meal pattern” was inadequate to provide many components of the RDA for many children. There have been many changes in what is considered a healthy breakfast over the years.

In the early years of the new millennium, concerns about diet-related disease, especially childhood obesity, environmental sustainability, food safety and quality, animal welfare, working conditions throughout the food chain, the preservations of small and mid- sized farms, and the taste and palatability of our food gave rise to a full- fledged food movement. Slow Food, food policy councils, food justice organizations, food sovereignty demands, organic producers and consumers, farm to table restaurants, buy local campaigns, all converged to shine a new spotlight on school meals. Concern for its nutritional profile was joined by a critical look at its procurement policies and a renewed interest in its role as “food education.” First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move campaign raised the visibility of these issues.

In the 2010 Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, new nutrition standards limiting

## Breakfast for All

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey summarized the importance of the SBP and the many reasons, beyond income, that make it challenging for kids to eat a healthy breakfast at home for a USDA symposium in 1999:

*School breakfast programs are too often categorized as just another form of welfare, but we know that, in this society, if a person is lucky enough to have two parents, both of them are usually working.*

*That is the norm these days. That means that breakfast programs are vitally important because working families are commuting. They are leaving the house. They might have food available for their children, but the children don’t always sit down and eat it. They want to get on to school.*

*I’ve talked to more professional people than you can imagine who say to me, “You know, I would be so glad if I knew my child had had breakfast this morning. It’s there, but I don’t think they ate it.” So we need to look at breakfast programs as a learning tool just as we look at a book, or a pencil or a computer...Breakfast ensures that all our children are ready to learn.<sup>8</sup>*

calories and sodium and stressing whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables were mandated. Under the new standards for School Breakfast, at least five cups of fruit and or vegetables must be offered each week, all grains must be whole-grain-rich, no meat or meat alternative is required, but if offered, it may substitute for part of the grain requirement. Meals selected by students must contain a fruit (or vegetable).

The new requirements have occasioned complaints from school food providers that the reimbursement is not high enough to cover the full fruit and vegetable requirement, and that students do not like the whole grain products, but in general there has been less complaint about breakfast than about lunch. Innovators have developed smoothies and parfaits and wraps and breakfast tacos and numerous other items that both meet the requirements and appeal to children. The challenge now is to integrate these new menu items with the Breakfast After the Bell approach.

Action on the federal level has been supplemented by action at the state and local levels to make meals both healthier and more appealing. One of the benefits of Breakfast in the Classroom and various forms of universal free breakfast is the engagement of a wider segment of parents and community organizations in monitoring food quality and working for fresher, healthier food, prepared onsite when possible. Throughout the country, advocates of Farm to Cafeteria—purchasing school food from local and regional farmers—have worked to get fresh local produce, dairy and meat into both breakfast and lunch programs. Fundamentally, however, school food improves when children and their parents are brought into the menu planning process, when parents monitor food quality, and when food service professionals care. One of the most encouraging effects of the food movement has been the recruitment of a new generation of skilled, creative and highly motivated people into school food service.

## Looking Forward

At 50 years of age, the School Breakfast Program appears on the verge of coming into its own. When innovations in the delivery of breakfast are combined with the Community Eligibility Program or other approaches to universal provision, as West Virginia has done through its “Feed to Achieve” legislation, great strides can be made. Looking forward, it is possible to envision a time when eating breakfast at school will be part of a comprehensive school nutrition approach, integrated with the school curriculum. Already one school district in California uses the ten or so minutes allocated to breakfast in the classroom for food education, showing videos that introduce children to local farmers and the products that will be featured on the school’s salad bars at lunchtime.

There is still urgent work to be done to make the program truly available and inviting to children in need, but as the SBP comes of age, it is finally escaping from the assumption that only poor children come to school without breakfast. In fact, many Americans of all ages leave home in the morning without eating, for reasons ranging from complex morning household schedules to simple disinclination. Regardless of the reason, children get hungry, and if healthy options are not readily available, they are very likely to snack on unhealthy items—the proverbial soft drink and bag of chips that school nurses and teachers report with despair. As a healthy breakfast at school becomes widely and conveniently available, we can anticipate continued improvement in our children’s health and readiness to learn.

## Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

The 1966 Child Nutrition Act that first created the SBP is subject to reauthorization roughly every five years. The 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act was due for Reauthorization in 2015; technically, it has expired but Child Nutrition Programs continue to operate under its provisions. With a presidential election on the near horizon, and a third of the Senate and all of the House of Representatives up for reelection, further work on CNR seems unlikely, meaning that the process would begin again in the new Congress. Nevertheless, advocates are watching with concern due to four provisions that threaten the progress made in recent years.

1. A change in the household income verification requirements that would require some school district to verify a significantly increased percentage of family applications for free and reduced price school meals. This change would increase the burden on schools and may deter some families from applying. Studies in the past have shown that increased verification requirements exclude eligible children.
2. A proposal to pilot a block grant approach to school meals in three states. Advocates are alarmed because a block grant would end the crucial “performance funding” aspect of school meals, effectively destroying a child’s entitlement, and states that opted for the pilot would be exempted from the federal nutrition regulations.
3. The House bill provides for raising the threshold of eligibility for CEP from the current 40% to 60%. If this were enacted, some 18,000 schools would lose eligibility, including 7,000 that have already implemented the Community Eligibility Option.
4. The House Bill further delays the implementation of the sodium standard, weakens the whole grain requirement, and reduces the autonomy of USDA to establish nutrition standards based on the best available science.

*[As of late 2016]*

Advocates need to be aware of what the congress is proposing and let their members know how they feel about these negative measures that will increase childhood hunger in America. You can stay informed with [FRAC’s CNR news and action](#) online center.

## Lessons Learned

**Patience; incrementalism works.** The SBP story shows just how much can be accomplished by a persistent and steady incrementalism. In short, advocates have pressed for significant gains from Congress when they had the votes, and then worked to bring these changes to fruition at the state and local level. This has been a story of slow but steady expansion of access and participation.

**Listen to the people who experience the programs first hand.** The federal government contracts for extensive and very useful research on food assistance programs, but almost all of it is conducted through large scale

surveys. Research independently undertaken by advocates, and especially research that asks people on the front lines—teachers and principals and food service workers and parents and students—what they are seeing and experiencing is a crucial step toward improving program performance. When I was conducting research for my book on school food, it was school cafeteria cashiers who most frequently and vociferously pointed out that many children simply didn't have the modest sums needed to purchase reduced price meals. States that have decided to absorb these charges and school systems that have decided to forego them have improved public policy by listening to the people who carry it out on a daily basis.

**Keep an eye on the administering agency; pay attention to proposed regulations.** USDA during the Obama years has been a proactive friend of food assistance, but this has not always been the case. When the White House is hostile or indifferent, it is particularly important to monitor proposed implementing regulations.

**Digest, translate and disseminate the science.** The national advocacy groups have done the anti-hunger movement a great service by collecting relevant academic research and keeping the scientific arguments up to date, a task that would be beyond the resources of many local groups.<sup>10</sup>

**Measure performance on a state by state and city by city basis.** The FRAC School Breakfast Scorecard, allows advocates to calculate the amount of federal dollars being “left on the table” due to local choices. The gradual spread of awareness of the “multiplier effect” of such federal expenditures in the local economy has made allies of mayors and governors in many jurisdictions. States have proven to be a crucial locus of intervention.

**Cooperate.** It is not only cooperation between national and local/state organizations that has lent strength to the school breakfast expansion agenda, but also productive cooperation among national level groups who might easily have engaged in turf wars. Each organization has a primary agenda and respects the contributions of others. Thus when Share Our Strength began its “No Kid Hungry Campaign” in 2010, it focused on expanding summer meals, universal breakfast, and breakfast after the bell at the local level, respecting FRAC's leadership on basic legislation. Similarly, FRAC and CBPP have cooperated extensively to publicize the Community Eligibility Provision.

**Share best practices.** Modern internet technology greatly facilitates the sharing of hard earned expertise about school breakfast but someone still needs to collect it, to create forums and channels for its diffusion. See for example the virtual [Center for Best Practices at No Kid Hungry](#).

**Understand who benefits.** It is not only school children and their families who benefit from robust school breakfast programs, and anyone who benefits is a potential ally. Food service workers and their unions are obvious candidates, but so are cereal manufacturers, dairy farmers and processors, fruit growers, and the makers of trays, plates, cups and straws. The list goes on. Grocers will benefit if families have more resources available to purchase supper. At the national level, many of these potential allies have been recognized and harnessed, but at the local level, there is often more work to do to find and persuade them.

**Defend performance funding.** The entire progress of School Breakfast has depended upon the federal reimbursement guarantee. Protecting it needs to be at the top of every to-do list for people working to end childhood hunger in the US.

**Don't give up.** When I think back to how small and fragile the program was when it began half a century ago, I am amazed at how much of the early agenda for change has actually been accomplished. Our work is not done, but we can surely take heart from our achievements to date to keep on keeping on.

[\\*See a Timeline of Key Milestones in the Life of the School Breakfast Program](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Food Research and Action Center, *Breakfast for Health* brief, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Food Research and Action Center, *Breakfast for Learning* brief, 20

<sup>3</sup> Food Research and Action Center, *If We Had Ham, We Could Have Ham and Eggs, If We Had Eggs: A Study of the National School Breakfast Program*. 1972, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> School Breakfast Participation and Meals Served, Child Nutrition Tables, Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

<sup>5</sup> Food Research and Action Center, *If We Had Ham*, p.73

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Buder, "Few Schools Start Breakfast Programs," *New York Times*, September 16, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the New York State mandate has been updated. The current version provides that all public elementary schools that participate in the NSLP, all public schools where 40 percent or more of the lunches served in the second preceding school year were free or reduced-price, and all school districts in cities with at least 125,000 inhabitants are required to participate in the SBP. Schools and districts may apply for exemptions. FRAC "School Meal Legislation and Funding by State—2014-2015 School Year" available on line at :

<sup>8</sup> School Nutrition Association, *State School Meal Mandates and Reimbursements: School Year 2015-2016.*" Available at: [https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/Legislation and Policy/State and Local Legislation and Regulations/2015-16StateSchoolMealMandatesAndReimbursements.pdf](https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/Legislation%20and%20Policy/State%20and%20Local%20Legislation%20and%20Regulations/2015-16StateSchoolMealMandatesAndReimbursements.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> "Presentation by Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, "The School Breakfast Program," *Proceedings of the Breakfast and Learning in Children Symposium*, April 22, 1999; USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, September 1999. Available at: [www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/OtherProjects/SymposiumBreakfastAndLearning.pdf](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/OtherProjects/SymposiumBreakfastAndLearning.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> USDA no longer uses the term RDA, but has replaced the RDA values with Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), but RDA is still the common parlance.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see FRAC's *Breakfast For Health* and *Breakfast for Learning* briefs.

<sup>11</sup> Committee on School Lunch Participation, *Their Daily Bread: A Study of the National School Lunch Program*. 1968.