

Beyond Networking: Superintendent Leadership for School Breakfast Expansion

By Daniel A. Domenech



How can you improve absenteeism and tardy rates in your schools? What can schools do to address hunger and poverty? How can you get your school food services to be self-sustaining?

The answers to these questions may be found in the district's school breakfast program.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, works with school system leaders across the country to enhance leadership that positively impacts students. We believe that the leadership of the superintendent is critical for any school program or policy to be successful. With support from the Walmart Foundation, AASA provides technical and financial assistance to superintendents and their teams in 11 school districts* so they can implement and sustain alternative breakfast strategies like breakfast in the classroom. The reasons to do this are justified in the outcomes districts are seeing in their students, in their budgets, in their communities.

School Breakfast's Impact

- *"This is the card we've been dealt. There are students who do not receive meals at home, and schools offer the only opportunity for them to eat at all. I'm going to feed them because we've been given the opportunity and the resources to provide them with the meals."*—Sharon Contreras, Superintendent, Syracuse City School District (NY)
- *"Serving breakfast in the classroom has really helped with attendance in terms of getting kids in the classroom, building relationships with their teachers, as well as participation*

rates."—Rodney Watson, Superintendent, Spring Independent School District (TX)

- *"Since implementing breakfast in the classroom, 99% of our elementary students attend more than 90% of the time. It really shrunk the number of students who have chronic attendance issues."*—Laurence Spring, Superintendent, Schenectady City School District (NY)
- In Newark Public Schools, the district's budget supplemented the food service budget, taking dollars out of the classroom, while leaving money on the Federal government's table. With their implementation of this initiative, their food service program will become self-sufficient and district's dollars can again be spent where the rubber meets the road – on classroom instruction.
- When asked what difference eating breakfast in the classroom made on their day, one third grader in Syracuse said, "Sometimes you'd get mad at someone and you would fight in the cafeteria. There aren't fights like that in the classroom." What administrator wouldn't want that?

Benefits of Community Learning

Research has shown that serving breakfast outside the cafeteria also has the potential to positively impact students' academic work. AASA is collecting detailed metrics from the districts – including reading and math scores, suspension rates, attendance and tardy rates, and school nurse visits – to determine associations between increased breakfast participation and these important education-level indicators.

A Community of Practice (CoP) has emerged from this work where school administrators can spend time talking with their peers about a single topic that impacts leadership. As a former superintendent, I know the myriad of issues that will be thrown to superintendents to resolve...sometimes in isolation. Today's AASA is about superintendent engagement – engagement that goes way beyond networking. Our members seek and welcome the opportunity to meet with colleagues and discuss problems and solutions. The school breakfast CoP is an excellent example of this.

To be successful, superintendents also collaborate with faculty, staff, students and the community. Each of the AASA districts has formed a district School Breakfast Team comprised of key stakeholders including the superintendent, food service director, custodians, teachers, principals, students, and parents. School Breakfast Teams will help sustain this program long after the grant funding has ended.

Results from AASA's Superintendent Leadership to Expand the School Breakfast Program initiative will be disseminated to all AASA members in 2017.

**Chicago Public Schools (IL); Clayton Public Schools (NJ); Hempstead Union Free School District (NY); Liberty County School System (GA); Meriden Public Schools (CT); Neosho R-5 School District (MO); Newark Public Schools (NJ); Newburgh Enlarged City School District (NY); San Diego Unified School District (CA); Spring Independent School District (TX); Williamsburg County School District (SC)*

For more details on AASA's alternative school breakfast initiative, visit <http://aasa.org/schoolbreakfast.aspx>.

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