Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

National Food Service Management Institute
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Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

PURPOSE
The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

MISSION
The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

VISION
The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOODSERVICE DIRECTORS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS REGARDING THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1966, the federally sponsored School Breakfast Program (SBP) has been operating in public and nonprofit private schools, providing nutritious and healthy morning meals for school-aged children. Even though the benefits of the SBP are well documented, many of America's neediest children are not participating. During the 2003-2004 school year, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) served 28.4 million children daily with 16.5 million receiving free or reduced price lunch. During the same school year, the SBP served 8.4 million children daily with 6.9 receiving free or reduced price breakfasts. Far fewer students are taking advantage of the SBP as compared to the NSLP. Previously conducted research has provided some insights into the many issues of why so many children are not taking advantage of the SBP. However, for programmatic changes to be effectively undertaken so that more children participate, a thorough understanding of stakeholders' (foodservice directors, teachers, and parents) perceptions of the SBP must be obtained. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of school foodservice directors, teachers, and parents of elementary school students in Utah, New Jersey, and Illinois as to advantages, disadvantages, and barriers to children participating in the SBP.

Focus group discussions were conducted with three separate groups of participants: school foodservice directors who were responsible for foodservice in elementary schools,
elementary school teachers, and parents of elementary school children. Participants were recruited from three elementary schools, one in each of the states of Utah, New Jersey, and Illinois. These three states were selected from a list of 10 states identified in the *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) 2004 School Breakfast Scorecard* as reaching 34 or fewer low-income students with school breakfast per 100 students reached with school lunch.

In addition to focus group discussions, a short questionnaire was developed for each of the groups (directors, teachers, parents) to obtain their opinions regarding the SBP and demographic information. The questionnaires were completed by participants prior to beginning focus group discussions.

**Questionnaire Results**

Directors (n=24) were asked, "**What would you say is the number one barrier to student participation in your school’s breakfast program?**" Answers were classified into four main barriers. Tied for the number one barrier was lack of time given for students to eat (29%) and lack of parental support for/or understanding of the breakfast program (29%). Tied for the number two barrier was the busing schedule (21%) and lack of support from school administration (21%).

Of the teachers (n=31) who completed the questionnaire, ninety percent had never participated in the SBP. Eighty-four percent of teachers rated the breakfast program as fair to good. Forty-two percent rated the food as 'okay,' 29% rated the food as good, and 16% stated they didn’t know. The majority of teachers (77%) rated the location and atmosphere of the breakfast program as good to very good with 81% stating the school foodservice staff is nice and very friendly. According to 55% of teachers, adequate time is allowed for students to complete
their meal and 19% stated that too much time was given. Sixty-eight percent of teachers, seldom to never, encourage their students to eat the school breakfast.

A total of 16 (94%) of the 17 parents who participated in the discussion groups completed the questionnaire. Seventy-five percent of parents reported that their child never eats breakfast at school. The majority of parents (63%) affirmed that it is very important to have a school breakfast program with 25% stating it was somewhat important. Sixty-eight percent of parents responded that they never encourage their child to participate in the breakfast program. Parents rated the breakfast program as great (6%), good (25%), fair (13%), poor (13%), and I don’t know (43%). A large percentage of parents also indicated that they could not evaluate the food (43%) or the location and atmosphere (44%) in which the breakfast program was offered.

**Results of Focus Group Discussions**

During focus group discussions, participants were asked, *“What are the advantages to students participating in their school’s breakfast program?”* Parents believe the greatest advantage is that the SBP simply provides breakfast to those students who need it. This is reflected in statements such as *“I think another advantage too, kind of goes in what’s better than nothing”* and *“It puts food in their stomachs.”*

Directors and teachers were very positive regarding the eating environment and made statements such as *“It gives a chance for the kids to see a warm heart and happy face with those lunch personnel,”* *“Socializing. They get to sit down and talk a little bit before school. You know it’s not an academic situation, they can just sit and socialize,”* and *“It provides a calmer atmosphere when they’re at school.”*

Participants were asked, *“What are the disadvantages to students participating in their school’s breakfast program?”* The majority of discussion from teachers and parents referred to
poor meal quality and nutritional content of breakfast foods offered in the SBP. They identified high sugar content of cereals and fruit juices, high carbohydrate and fat content of breakfast foods in general, and the low quality of food items used for the breakfast meal as disadvantages to participating in the SBP. Foodservice directors identified concern with meal quality due to their inability to offer a wide variety of food items on the breakfast menu, due to limited budgets.

Participants were asked, “What are the barriers to students participating in their school’s breakfast program?” Teachers and parents believe the low socioeconomic stigma of the program that is attached to students who participate in the SBP is a barrier to the SBP. Foodservice directors did not identify stigma as a barrier, but identified stigma as a disadvantage. The primary barrier discussed by foodservice directors was lack of school staff support for the SBP. Directors are faced with the challenge of implementing and/or operating a SBP with opposition from school principals, school administration, teachers, and custodians. Statements such as “Until the mandate came, there was no way I was going to push a breakfast program without the cooperation from the principal and the staff,” “I would say an active discouragement (to participation in the SBP) of pay children in two of my elementary schools” were viewed as a barriers by FSD.

Foodservice directors were asked what resources would assist and support their efforts in operating an SBP. All three director groups identified the need for legislative support in mandating breakfast programs, assistance from food manufacturers in supplying nutritious breakfast food items that meet breakfast program food based meal patterns, and access to “In-Class-Breakfast” program material such as that developed by the National Dairy Council.

Results reported here from focused discussions with foodservice directors, teachers, and parents confirm many previous findings from research involving the SBP, and provide some new
insights. All groups were well aware of research showing that children perform better academically and on tests when they eat breakfast. However, only teachers discussed in-depth other benefits for children eating breakfast such as decreased risks of childhood obesity, improved nutritional intake, and better physical health.

Many parents stated that they did not realize their child could participate in the SBP since he/she did not qualify for free or reduced-price meals. SBP marketing materials should emphasize that the SBP is available to all students regardless of socioeconomic status. Parents should be viewed as one of the SBP’s primary customers. Positive aspects of the SBP need to be marketed directly to parents with efforts made to have parents occasionally observe and/or participate with their child in the SBP. Talking points about the positive aspects of the SBP should be developed and distributed to teachers and other school staff to assist them in promoting the SBP to students and parents for the purpose of improving participation.

Other aspects of the SBP that need to be addressed are disadvantages identified by teachers and parents that foods offered in the SBP are of low quality and poor nutritional value. Involving teachers, parents, and students in menu planning and product taste tests are approaches to help address this issue. Also, directors need to capitalize on opportunities to communicate and demonstrate to teachers and parents how school breakfast menus comply with nutritional guidelines mandated by the federal government. Providing samples of breakfast food items to students and teachers and offering food samples to parents at school open houses or parent-teacher conferences are other avenues to expose them to different breakfast food items that are served.

A barrier to the SBP is its reputation for being a program that services only the low-income and disadvantaged students. If participation from all socioeconomic groups is going to
improve, efforts must be made to promote the SBP as a program that benefits and welcomes all students. In addressing concerns of the breakfast meal period being scheduled too early and before school starts, some schools have begun offering breakfast as a packaged ready-to-go meal to be eaten in the classroom.

Finally, in order for SBPs to reach their full potential, support from school administrators, local and state officials, and federal decision makers is important. Support must also be garnered from food manufacturers to produce healthy, convenient, and packaged breakfast foods that students enjoy.
INTRODUCTION

As reported by the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP), there are children in the United States who are not getting the proper nutrition to sustain a healthy and active lifestyle. CCHIP estimates that eight percent of American children, under the age of 12 years, experience persistent episodes of food insufficiency and hunger each year. Research shows that bouts with hunger affect the cognitive and emotional development of these school age children (Murphy et al., 1998).

Research conducted at Tufts University's Center on Hunger and Poverty supports the connection between children's nutrition and cognitive development. They found that environmental factors connected to living in poverty, combined with malnutrition, can contribute to long-term cognitive deficiencies (Black, 2000). Much of the research on nutrition and brain development has focused on children age two and younger. However, recent research shows that malnutrition in childhood and adolescents continues to affect the developing brain. Without proper nutrition, ongoing cognitive development can be stunted. (Bryan et al., 2004).

Breakfast consumption, in particular, can affect the cognitive abilities of children. Vaisman, Voet, Akivis, and Vakil, (1996) found that students who consumed breakfast scored better on tests related to auditory learning, logical memory, and visual retention than those who did not eat breakfast.

Children from low-income families have been shown to be at greater risk for experiencing periods of hunger. These children may not have access to a nutritious breakfast and as a result may arrive at school tired and hungry (Lindeman & Clancy, 1990). Since 1966, the School Breakfast Program (SBP) has attempted to address these concerns by providing a nutritious and healthy morning meal for children in the school setting.
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

Through research, the benefits of eating school breakfast have been well documented. A relationship between participation in the SBP and individual improvements in academic performance was shown by Murphy et al. (1998). In this study, children fed regularly through the SBP earned higher grades in math, showed better attendance, and decreased tardiness. Another study showed that students who ate breakfast through the SBP tended to eat a more nutritionally sound breakfast than those who ate breakfast at home (Worobey & Worobey, 1999).

Even though the benefits of the SBP have been documented, many of America's neediest children are not participating. During the 2003-2004 school year, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) served 28.4 million children daily with 16.5 million receiving free or reduced price lunch (USDA, September 2005a). During the same school year, the SBP served 8.4 million children daily with 6.9 receiving free or reduced price breakfast. Far fewer students are taking advantage of the SBP as compared to the NSLP (USDA, September 2005b). Published in 2004, The Fourteenth Annual Status Report on the School Breakfast Program, which provides state-to-state data on school breakfast participation, shows that while SBP participation is low across the nation, it is critically low in New Hampshire, Nebraska, Alaska, Illinois, Utah, New Jersey, and Wisconsin (Rosso et al., 2004). The report indicates that in these seven states, fewer than one in three children eating lunch through the NSLP are being served by the SBP. Perspectives from students, teachers, parents, administrators, and foodservice directors from existing research literature, offers insights on why so many children are not taking advantage of the SBP. Much can be learned from the varied perspectives of these stakeholders.

Reddan, Wahlstrom, and Reicks (2002) found that many students say they do not have enough time in the morning to eat breakfast. Other students indicated that eating breakfast in the morning leaves them with no appetite for lunch. Research conducted by Dixit, Houser, and
Sampson (1999) found that these same barriers along with feelings of sickness after breakfast consumption prevented students from eating breakfast at school.

Students are not the only group to identify barriers to the SBP. Teachers have their own perceptions and opinions of the SBP. Ragno (1994) reported that in general teachers feel the SBP has a significant positive influence on their students' behavior and academic performance. These teachers are happy with the program, but feel time constraints, poor food choices, a poor social stigma associated with participation, and a lack of awareness of the SBP by parents are preventing many students from participating in the program.

The issue of time is a barrier that is frequently mentioned by teachers. One middle school in Pennsylvania piloted a "Grab 'n Go" breakfast program where students ate breakfast in the classroom. By allowing breakfast consumption in the classroom, students were not rushed to eat in the cafeteria. Conklin and Bordi (2003) surveyed the teachers at this school and found that most supported the program and were willing to give up the necessary class time. During the “Grab ‘n Go” breakfast program, some teachers reported they took the opportunity to use breakfast time to talk with their students about healthy eating habits.

When it comes to parents, Sampson, Meyers, Rogers, and Weitzman (1991) found that those whose children participated in the SBP in Massachusetts were satisfied with the program. However, parents whose children did not participate stated several contributing factors that caused them not to participate. These parents criticized the high sugar content of the school breakfast and felt the portions were too small to satisfy their children. They stated that the breakfast was offered prior to most students arriving to school. Therefore, many students missed the opportunity to participate in the SBP. These same parents expressed concern over not
knowing what their children were eating for breakfast. For these reasons they preferred their children eat at home.

Students, teachers, and parents are not the only stakeholders when it comes to participation in the SBP. School administrators and foodservice directors play a vital role in the success of any SBP. Research has shown that school administrators find scheduling, timing, and the cost of establishing and implementing a breakfast program to be barriers to their school’s participation in the SBP (McDonnell et al., 2004). Administrators were especially concerned that busing schedules complicated the distribution of breakfast and as a result, the SBP interfered with instructional time. This same study showed that foodservice directors also felt scheduling conflicts were barriers to the implementation of a successful breakfast program. They expressed that it is difficult to maintain student participation during the breakfast meal period when other events or activities were scheduled at the same time. Foodservice directors also identified cafeteria staff attitudes as a major factor in whether or not a SBP was successful. They felt that positive relationships between cafeteria staff and students contributed to higher participation rates (McDonnell et al., 2004).

For programmatic changes to be effectively undertaken, a thorough understanding of stakeholders' perceptions must be established. Only by identifying perceived barriers (which become, after all, real barriers) can proposals be formulated into successful solutions. The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of school foodservice directors, teachers, and parents of elementary school students in Utah, New Jersey, and Illinois as to advantages, disadvantages, and barriers to participating in the SBP.
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

METHOD

Research Plan

Focus group discussions are a qualitative research tool that can yield rich insight and discovery into attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of a target audience (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Focus groups are useful in exploratory, formative, and/or process evaluation research and may be used to gather preliminary information for program development and evaluation (Betts, Baranowski, & Hoerr, 1996; Krueger, 1998).

For this study, researchers conducted focus group discussions using questions developed for previous focus group discussions on SBPs conducted in Idaho (Safaii, Raidl, & Lambert, 2002). To improve clarity, minor revisions were made to some of the questions. Seven questions were presented to school foodservice directors and nine questions were presented to teachers and parents (Appendix A). All participants signed a standard consent form to participate in the research which had been approved by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board. Each focus group discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Participants

Foodservice Directors

Focus group discussions included three groups of participants, school foodservice directors who were responsible for foodservice in elementary schools, elementary school teachers, and parents of elementary school children. Participants were recruited from three elementary schools, one in each of the states of Utah, New Jersey, and Illinois. These three states were selected from a list of the top 10 states identified in the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) 2004 School Breakfast Scorecard (Rosso et al., 2004) as having reached 34 or fewer low-income students with school breakfast per 100 reached with school lunch.
Foodservice directors were recruited based on the recommendations of the state agency director who oversees school nutrition programs. Directors who were within driving distance (less than 100 miles) of the selected meeting place were called and asked to participate. If directors agreed to participate, they were sent a confirmation letter (Appendix B). The confirmation letter provided details of the meeting and explained that directors would be reimbursed for travel, receive a $25.00 honorarium, continuing education credits from the School Nutrition Association (Appendix C), and a copy of the discussion group findings upon completion of the study. Directors with and without breakfast programs were asked to participate.

**Teachers**

One foodservice director from each of the three focus groups was recruited to assist with obtaining approval from a principal of one of their elementary schools (that had low breakfast participation) to allow researchers to recruit teachers and parents for participation in focus group discussions. Once the director found a potential school participant, the researchers contacted the school principal to describe the details of the study. If the principal was still willing to assist with the study, a letter with research details and a request for participation, a description of what would be required of the school principal, and an agreement to participate form were sent to the principal (Appendix D). Once the researchers received the signed agreement form, a packet of research materials was sent to the foodservice director for distribution.

Included in the research materials were letters addressed to teachers that explained the study, requested their participation, stated the provision of a $25.00 honorarium, and included a ‘Consent to be Contacted’ form (Appendix E). This material was to be distributed to all elementary school teachers in an attempt to recruit between six to ten teachers at each school.
Morgan (1997) suggests a typical discussion group size to be six to ten participants. Teachers who agreed to participate in the focus groups signed and returned the ‘Consent to be Contacted’ form on which they provided their name, telephone number, and grade level they taught. Teachers wanting to participate completed their consent form and delivered it to the principal’s office where it was then mailed back to the researchers. Once the researchers received the teachers' signed consent forms, teachers were called to confirm their participation.

Parents

Included also in the research materials sent to the principal were letters to parents that explained the study, requested their participation, stated the provision of a $25.00 honorarium, and included a ‘Consent to be Contacted’ form (Appendix F) on which they were to provide their name, telephone number, and grade level of their child. In an effort to recruit six to ten parents, 200 to 300 letters and “Consent to be Contacted” forms were distributed to teachers who passed them out to their students to take home to their parents. Parents who agreed to participate in the focus group signed and returned the consent form by their children who returned the form to their teachers. Teachers then delivered all consent forms to the principal’s office who in turn mailed them to the researchers. Once researchers received the parents' signed consent forms, they were telephoned to confirm their participation.

Questionnaire

A short questionnaire was developed for each of the groups (directors, teachers, parents) to obtain their opinions regarding the school breakfast program and demographic information (Appendix G). Questionnaires were pilot tested with the various groups to assess clarity and conciseness of questions and minor revisions were made where needed. Each questionnaire contained ten questions asking participants to rate by choosing one of several possible ratings on
various aspects of the school breakfast program. An open-ended question asking for additional comments was placed on the questionnaire to allow participants an opportunity to write comments about the SBP. Questionnaires were completed by each participant prior to beginning the focus group discussion.

**Data Collection and Analyses**

**Focus Group Discussions**

The same researcher moderated all nine focus group discussions. Each discussion was tape recorded and an assistant moderator (researcher) took notes. A professional transcriber provided a typed transcript of each audiotape. For verification of data, a four step, systematic process was used (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997). To complete step one, researchers met at the end of each focus group discussion to identify emerging themes (similar statements from different participants) resulting from each question asked. This allowed comparisons, consensus, and discussion of emerging themes obtained from each group.

In step two, the lead researcher reviewed each typed transcript, identified statements to be coded, and assigned them to an appropriate theme. Statements in each theme were then counted for each discussion group from each state to allow quantification of the discussions. Duplicate statements by participants were only counted once. For example, if two participants from the same discussion group stated that the school breakfast program provided a healthy meal, this statement was counted only once. Reporting of the number of statements identified for each theme was used for the analysis providing a measure of prevalence or depth of the various issues discussed among the participants.

In step three, the software program Ethnograph v5.0 (designed to assist in the analysis of qualitative data) was used to organize identified themes. Coded statements from the transcripts
were entered into the Ethnograph software where it was systematically sorted by question and then by code in order of frequency. Themes that contributed less than 5% to the question are not discussed in this report due to their low contribution to conclusions.

In step four, the lead researcher and second researcher independently coded the three foodservice directors’ group transcripts using the identified themes for advantages, disadvantages, and barriers to participating in the SBP. This process was implemented to account for possible subjectivity and/or research bias in coding. Inter-rater agreement was established by having the inter-rater reliability coefficient calculated using the Holsti formula (Neuendork, 2002 p.149). A declared 70% agreement or higher is considered to be reliable (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2002).

**Questionnaire**

Questionnaires were analyzed using the statistical package SPSS Version 12.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics included frequencies of total responses for the multiple choice questions. All comments obtained from the open-ended questions were transcribed verbatim and saved as a Microsoft Word document.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participating Schools

For the purpose of confidentiality, the three schools will be referred to in this report by their state designation of Utah, New Jersey, or Illinois. All three schools were elementary schools with Utah including grades kindergarten through sixth, New Jersey including grades kindergarten through second, and Illinois including grades first through sixth.

School meal participation data for all three states were obtained from the school foodservice director and represent the month of October, 2004 (Table 1). New Jersey had the lowest percentage (2%) of breakfast meal participation per average daily attendance (ADA) with Utah having the highest percentage (10%) of breakfast meal participation per ADA. Student ethnic distribution was obtained through the website www.greatschool.net (My School Stats, 2005) which identified the ethnicity of the Utah school as 88% White, 6% Hispanic, and 6% Other. The New Jersey school ethnic distribution is 49% White, 45% African American, and 6% Other. The Illinois school ethnic distribution is 71% White, 18% Hispanic, and 11% Other. All three schools are considered suburban schools.

Questionnaires

Directors

Of 27 directors invited to participate, 24 (89%) attended. All 24 directors completed the questionnaire. Directors classified their school district as urban (42%), suburban (42%), and rural (16%). Fifty-four percent of directors had worked in school foodservice for more than 10 years. Fifty-eight percent of directors had a college degree with 54% certified by the School Nutrition Association. In answering the questionnaire, 79% agreed it is very important to have a school

breakfast program with 17% stating it is somewhat important. Eighty-eight percent reported that less than 10% of teachers participated in the school breakfast program.

Table 1

\textit{Participation Data for October, 2004}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Utah</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of student enrollment</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average daily student attendance</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of days meals were served</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total breakfast meals served</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent breakfast meal participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total lunch meals served</td>
<td>4260</td>
<td>5012</td>
<td>5056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent lunch meal participation</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
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Directors were asked, \textit{“What would you say is the number one barrier to student participation in your school’s breakfast program?”} Twenty-three of the twenty-four directors responded. Answers were classified into four main barriers. Tied for the number one barrier was lack of time given to students to eat (29%) and lack of parental support for/or understanding of the breakfast program (29%). Tied for the number two barrier was busing schedules (21%) and lack of support from school administration (21%).

\textit{Teachers}

All teachers (n = 69) were invited to complete a “Consent to be Contacted” form (Appendix E). A total of five (7%) completed the form, which is less than the six to ten preferred. The researcher then contacted each principal and foodservice director of the three schools recruited for the study. It was agreed that a $50.00 honorarium would be provided to
each teacher in return for his/her participation. The researchers were then able to recruit a total of 31 teachers for participation in the focus group discussions.

Thirty-one teachers (100%) completed the questionnaire. Seventy-one percent of teachers participating in the discussions had more than ten years of elementary school experience with the highest percentage (25%) teaching first or second grade. Seventy-four percent stated it is very important to have a breakfast program with 23% stating it is somewhat important. Ninety percent of teachers had never participated in the SBP, which is consistent with teacher participation percentage as identified by the directors. Eighty-four percent of teachers rated the breakfast program as fair to good with 42% percent rating the food as 'okay,' 29% rating the food as good, and 16% stated they did not know. The majority of teachers (77%) rated the location and atmosphere of the breakfast program as good to very good and 81% stated that the school foodservice staff is nice and very friendly. According to 55% of teachers, adequate time is allowed for students to complete their meal and 19% stated that too much time was given. Sixty-eight percent of teachers seldom to never encourage their students to eat the school breakfast. Teachers were asked if they wanted to keep the breakfast program the same (make no changes in the SBP providing free, reduced-price, and full price breakfast meals to students) or change the process of allowing students, who are eligible, to receive free and reduced-price meals. Fifty-six percent wanted to keep the program the same, 19% wanted the program to be free to everyone or Universal (free to all students) and 16% stated the program should be only for those students who qualified for free and reduced-price meals.
**Parents**

Of the two hundred consent forms (Appendix F) sent home to parents in Utah, a total of 11 consent forms were returned. All 11 of the consenting parents were invited and nine participated. A total of 250 and 300 consent forms respectively were sent home to New Jersey and Illinois. A total of four consent forms were returned. Due to the low return, the researchers contacted each principal and foodservice director of the schools in New Jersey and Illinois. The foodservice directors agreed to assist with recruitment of parents. With this additional recruitment effort, a total of five parents participated in New Jersey and three parents participated in Illinois for a three school total of 17 parents.

Sixteen (94%) parents complete the questionnaire. Twenty-five percent of parents stated that their child qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Fifty-six percent stated that their child paid full price and 18% stated they did not know. Eighty-seven percent stated that their child eats breakfast every day with 75% stating that their child never eats breakfast at school. Parents were asked if they wanted to keep the breakfast program the same or change the process of allowing students, who were eligible, to receive free and reduced-price meals. Fifty-six percent wanted the program to stay the same, 25% wanted the program to be Universal (free to all students), and 13% wanted the program to only serve students eligible for free and reduced-price meals. The majority of parents (63%) stated that it is very important to have a school breakfast program, with 25% stating it was somewhat important. Sixty-eight percent of parents never encouraged their child to participate in the breakfast program. Parents rated the breakfast program as great (6%), good (25%), fair (13%), poor (13%), and I do not know (43%). A large percentage of parents also indicated that they could not evaluate the food (43%) or the location and atmosphere (44%) in which the breakfast program was offered.
Focus Group Discussion

Inter-rater Agreement

Inter-rater reliability agreement between the lead researcher and the second researcher for coding statements into the themes developed for advantages, disadvantages, and barriers to participating in the SBP was 91%, 79%, and 75% respectively. Thus, agreement for coding is considered reliable.

Benefits of Eating Breakfast

As a general warm-up question, each discussion group was asked “What are the benefits to children who eat breakfast?” Four themes emerged and are listed in Table 2 in descending order of importance, along with the number of coded statements.

Improved Performance in School was the dominant theme for each group and overall contributed 42% to the discussion with statements such as “Students have better concentration” and “Improved test scores.” There have been many studies to support improved academic performance and test scores as a result of eating breakfast (Kleinman et al., 2002; Murphy et al., 1998; Simpson, 2001). Much discussion contributed to themes titled Improved Physical Health (25%) and Better Social Behavior (23%). Although statements were coded to these themes from all groups, teachers provided the majority of statements (69%) to the discussions. This perhaps reflects the fact that teachers have the greatest amount of contact time with students and are possibly more strongly impacted when a child does not eat breakfast.
Table 2

Themes and Number of Statements Contributing to Each Theme on the Benefits of Eating Breakfast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Statement Contribution Percentage</th>
<th>Directors Total</th>
<th>Teachers Total</th>
<th>Parents Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved Performance in School</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Physical Health</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Social/Behavior</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Nutrition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aTotal. Represents the total number of statements in descending order identified from each group

One teacher stated “they feel better, their stomachs are full, they’re not feeling sick, usually they come and they say I have a stomachache and your first question is did you have breakfast?”

The theme that garnered the fewest statements (11%) was Better Nutrition. Many studies have been published on the results of improved nutritional intake in children who eat breakfast (Kleinman et al., 2002; Nicklas et al., 1993; Nicklas et al., 2000). The paucity of statements on nutrition leads researchers to conclude that more needs to be done to communicate to the public and school personnel the nutritional benefits to children who eat breakfast.

Implications for Education and Training

Directors, teachers, and parents are well aware of the improved school performance associated with children eating breakfast. This may be due to the emphasis placed on students eating breakfast prior to standardized testing in the schools. However, other benefits such as improved weight control and overall health should be communicated and brought to the
It is recommended that school administrators embrace a policy which supports providing school breakfast to children on a daily basis throughout the school year.

**Advantages of Participating in the School Breakfast Program**

Participants were asked “What are the advantages to students participating in their school’s breakfast program?” Seven themes emerged (Table 3). Overall, parents provided little to the discussions related to advantages of participating in the school breakfast program. Parent statements contributed as few as 16 of the 93 coded statements (17%) to the entire discussion on SBP advantages. The theme in which parents contributed the largest number of statements (5) was **Feeds Them.** This is reflected in statements such as “I think another advantage, too, is... it’s better than nothing” and “It puts food in their stomachs.”

Looking at the overall discussion among the groups, providing positive eating **Environments** and **Social Interactions** were the most prevalent themes contributing 33% to the general discussion. Among the three different groups, directors and teachers contributed 90% of the statements to the **Environment/Social** theme and parent statements contributed 10%.

Directors and teachers were very positive regarding the eating environment and made statements such as “It gives a chance for the kids to see a warm heart and happy face with those lunch personnel,” “Socializing. They get to sit down and talk a little bit before school. You know it’s not an academic situation-They can just sit and socialize,” and “It provides a calmer atmosphere when they’re at school.” Shemilt et al. (2002) reported on the positive social aspects of children eating breakfast at school and the safe and secure environment in which breakfast is served.
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

Table 3

*Themes and Number of Statements Contributing to Each Theme on the Advantages of Students Participating in the SBP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Totala</th>
<th>Statement Contribution Percentage</th>
<th>Directors Total</th>
<th>Teachers Total</th>
<th>Parents Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Social Interaction</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Nutrition</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeds Them</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's Preference</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aTotal. Represents the total number of statements in descending order identified from each group

Unless parents eat the school breakfast with their child, it is unlikely that they observe the eating environment. Inviting parents to eat occasionally with their children would be one way directors could expose parents to the positive social environment offered by the SBP and the advantages it has to students who participate.

The second theme was **Better Nutrition.** Again, the majority (80%) of contributing statements came from directors and teachers. Statements such as “…they have a balanced nutritional breakfast (at school) where at home they may not,” and “…the nutritional advantage to kids. I am absolutely certain that it’s school meals that present milk.” The third theme was
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

Parents contributing 16% to the overall discussion. A large percentage (80%) of statements came from teachers who identified advantages for parents as: less stress in the morning, it is easy and convenient, parents have more time in the morning if they don’t have to prepare breakfast, and they know their child will be in a safe environment. Other research has shown that parents whose children participate in the SBP identified saving time in the morning and decreasing morning stress as benefits (Sampson et al., 1991; Wahlstrom & Begalle, 1999).

The last three themes, Child’s Preferences, School Performance, and Finances contributed 8%, 8%, and 6% respectively to the discussion. Students choosing to participate in the SBP, improving students’ punctuality, and the low cost of the meals were some of the statements contributing to these themes.

Implications for Education and Training

Directors and teachers are much more familiar with advantages of the SBP than parents. This is understandable since many parents have children who have never participated in the SBP. Emphasis should be placed on communicating to parents the advantages of the SBP and showcasing the SBP through newsletters, parents/teachers organizations, parent/teacher school conferences, and open houses. Knowing how to involve parents in the SBP may be the key to improving their children’s participation. In a survey conducted with foodservice staff in Indiana, a majority of respondents reported the need for training on how to involve parents in their programs (Birch, Torabi, & Hallock, 1998). Directors would benefit from resources that would guide their efforts to involve parents and view them as potential customers of the SBP. In elementary school lunch programs, higher participation occurs among students whose parents are happy with the NSLP (Lambert, Conklin, & Johnson, 2002). The same correlation could occur with the SBP, but parents must first know about and have experience with the SBP.
Disadvantages of Participating in the School Breakfast Program

Seven themes emerged from the discussion related to disadvantages of participating in the SBP (Table 4). Statements included in themes Meal Quality and Not Nutritious contributed to 41% of the discussion with the majority of discussion (87%) coming from teachers and parents. Teachers and parents identified high sugar content of cereals and fruit juices, high carbohydrate and fat content of breakfast foods in general, and the low quality of foods used for the breakfast meal as disadvantages to participating in the SBP. These same concerns have been voiced by parents and teachers in other studies (McDonnell et al., 2004; Ragno, 1994, Sampson et al., 1991).

Foodservice directors’ statements identified concerns with Meal Quality as their inability to place a wide variety of food items on the breakfast menu due to limited budgets. In this study, each school’s breakfast program is surveyed by their state’s Child Nutrition Department to ensure compliance with federal nutrition regulations. All breakfast menus must meet the applicable recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines state that no more than 30 percent of an individual’s calories come from fat and less than 10 percent from saturated fat. In addition, breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein, calcium, iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and total daily calories. School foodservice directors are allowed the autonomy to decide what specific food to serve at breakfast and how they are prepared (USDA, September 2005b). The researchers believe that
Table 4

*Themes and Number of Statements Contributing to Each Theme on the Disadvantages of Students Participating in the SBP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Statement Contribution Percentage</th>
<th>Directors Total</th>
<th>Teachers Total</th>
<th>Parents Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meal Quality</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Nutritious</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Issues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Social</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting Events</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Total. Represents the total number of statements in descending order identified from each group.

issues of meal quality and nutritional content of breakfast foods must be addressed through teacher and parent involvement.

**Time Issues** theme contributed 16% to the discussions and included statements related to the time of morning the breakfast period was scheduled and the short time period allowed for students to eat. Presently, the majority of schools participating in the SBP schedule the breakfast meal before the school day starts. This early meal period requires students desiring to participate in the SBP to arrive at school earlier than they would if they did not participate. Students often cite not being hungry early in the morning, preferring to substitute more sleep for breakfast, and
not being able to arrive early enough to eat school breakfast (Dwyer et al., 2001; Kennedy & Davis, 1998; Reddan, Wahlstrom, & Reicks, 2002).

Another concern about the breakfast meal period being scheduled prior to the school day starting is lack of coordination with school bus transportation. Many students can not participate because school buses are often scheduled to arrive shortly before the school day begins. Many schools lack the funds to provide supervision of students prior to the school day starting. Students who don’t participate in the SBP usually must stay outside on the school grounds until the school opens their doors to begin the day.

The Stigma theme included 14% of statements. Most of the statements referred to the SBP as being primarily for low income and disadvantaged children. One teacher stated “Most of the participants of the breakfast program are bilingual children, so it’s another way for them to be differentiated, you know, between the kids.” A foodservice director stated “I would think, they think, it’s not cool (to participate) because all the, you know, like poor kids (participate).” The SBP is viewed by many potential participants as a program meant only for low-income students. Students don’t want others to see them eat in the cafeteria because of the perceived social stigma (Kennedy & Davis, 1998; Reddan, Wahlstrom, & Reicks, 2002).

Even though SBPs are open to anyone who would like to participate and every school that participates in the SBP must have policies in place to maintain strict confidentiality of a student’s family income, there continues to be a social stigma attached to participating in the SBP. Implementing a Universal SBP has been reported to assist in diminishing social stigma (Wahlstrom & Begalle, 1999).

The last three themes Parents, Environment/Social, and Conflicting Events contributed 14%, 9%, and 7% respectively to the discussion. Typical statements that contributed to these
themes were “people will think that I am poor and don’t take care of my kids,” “they’re rushed to eat,” and “… there’s a conflict between playing outside with that kick ball (or eating breakfast inside).”

Implications for Education and Training

If teachers, parents, and students are to support the SBP, the perceptions of poor meal quality and low nutritional value of the food items offered at breakfast must be addressed. Involving teachers, parents, and students in menu development through school committees is one avenue directors may pursue. Providing breakfast food samples at various school events should improve the perceptions of potential customers. Directors, as individuals or through their state offices or national professional associations, need to encourage food manufacturers to develop high quality breakfast items that fulfill the nutritional needs for the federally funded SBP and are acceptable to students, teachers, and parents.

Barriers to Participating in the School Breakfast Program

Eight themes emerged from discussions on barriers to participating in the SBP (Table 5). Discussions were more evenly distributed overall among the various themes. However, among the groups of directors, teachers, and parents there were some clear emphases. Teachers and parents contributed 92% of statements to the Stigma theme, which contributed 17% to the overall discussion. Teachers and parents believe the ‘poor’ stigma of the program that is attached to students who participated was a barrier to the SBP. Foodservice directors did not identify stigma as a barrier but did identify stigma as a disadvantage. Poor stigma continues to be identified as a major barrier to SBP participation (Hall, 2003).
Another leading barrier identified was the theme **Child’s Preference** contributing 17% to the discussion. Students preferred not to eat breakfast early in the morning, they didn’t like the food items offered, or their friends didn’t eat in the SBP. Other barriers were: parents not knowing about the SBP, parents wanting their child to eat breakfast at home so they would know what their child eats, bus schedules, time of morning the breakfast meal period is scheduled, the quality of meals, and the cost to participants. Guinn et al., (2002) found that parents wanted to
know what their child ate for breakfast and were, at times, unaware that their child ate breakfast at school.

**School staff support** theme contributed 16% to the discussion with 100% of statements coming from foodservice directors. Directors are faced with the challenge to implement and/or operate a SBP with opposition from school principals, school administration, teachers, and custodians. Statements such as “*Until the mandate came, there was no way I was going to push a breakfast program without the cooperation from the principal and the staff,*” and “*I would say an active discouragement (to participate in the SBP) of pay children in two of my elementary schools (would be a barrier).*” Along with managerial skills needed to run a school breakfast program, it would be advantageous for directors to develop strong marketing and negotiation skills to “sell” the breakfast program to school staff.

**Implications for Education and Training**

The SBP, for various reasons, has a reputation for being a program that services only the low-income and disadvantaged students. If participation from all socioeconomic groups is going to improve, efforts must be made to promote the SBP as a program that benefits and welcomes all students.

**Promoting the School Breakfast Program**

All groups were asked possible ways to promote the SBP. Results from the discussions were consolidated and placed into three categories: **General Program Promotions**, **Breakfast Promotion Targeting Parents**, and **Breakfast Promotions Targeting School Staff** (Appendix H). The groups provided many creative ideas for promoting the SBP such as “*Have a drive through window where parents can pick up breakfast for them and their child.*” Many suggestions were geared toward communicating to participants and program supporters
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

(students, parents, teachers, school administration) the benefits each gains when children eat breakfast.

**Directors Identify Influencing Factors on School Breakfast Program**

Only the directors’ groups were asked what or who has the greatest influence on the success of the SBP. Four themes emerge (Table 6) with **School Administration** and **Outside Groups** themes, each accounting for 38% of the discussions. Directors were very clear that the school principal held the key to whether or not the SBP was supported at the local level. Some directors were able to open the door by offering the SBP as a “pilot” program. Others were successful at gaining grassroots support from teachers, school nurses, and foodservice staff having them to document the number of hungry children to whom they provided snacks prior to lunch time. Directors also turned to their professional associations who in turn approached state legislators in efforts to gain support and funding for SBPs. Private and non-profit groups such as the National Dairy Council and Hunger Coalitions also provided support for SBPs.

**Resources needed by Foodservice directors**

Foodservice directors were asked what resources would assist and support their efforts in operating a SBP. All three director groups voiced three requests: 1) legislative support mandating breakfast programs, 2) assistance from food manufactures in supplying breakfast food items that meet breakfast program food-based meal patterns, and 3) access to “In-Class-Breakfast” program material such as that developed by the National Dairy Council. All resources identified by foodservice directors can be found in Appendix I.
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

Table 6

Themes and Number of Statements from Directors Contributing to Each Theme on Factors Influencing the Implementation of a SBP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Statement Contribution</th>
<th>IL</th>
<th>UT</th>
<th>NJ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administration</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Groups</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\text{Total. Represents the total number of statements in descending order identified from each group}\)

Changes in the School Breakfast Program

The last question for teachers and parents was, “Tell me about any changes you would make to the breakfast program at your school (if at all).” All comments were placed into four categories: Menu Changes, Program Changes, Program Marketing, and Other (Appendix J). Many of the suggested changes reflect issues brought forth in the earlier discussion on SBP disadvantages. Changes such as offering more variety of foods and menu choices and improving nutritional value of the breakfast foods were suggested.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Conclusions

The benefits of eating breakfast have been well documented. The School Breakfast Program (SBP), a federally administered program designed to provide school children an opportunity to eat breakfast, currently feeds 8.4 million school children daily. However, there is still a large population of children who do not eat breakfast and/or do not take advantage of the SBP. The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of school foodservice directors, teachers, and parents of elementary school students in Utah, New Jersey, and Illinois as to barriers to participating in the SBP.

Results reported here of focused discussions with foodservice directors, teachers, and parents have provided new insights as well as confirming many previous findings from research involving the SBP. All three participating groups were well aware of research findings showing that children perform better academically and on tests when they eat breakfast. However, only teachers discussed in-depth the multiple other benefits of eating breakfast such as decreased risks of childhood obesity, improved nutritional intake, and overall better physical health. The level of awareness needs to be raised and marketed among the entire school community regarding all the benefits for children who eat breakfast.

Foodservice directors and teachers provided in-depth discussions on the safe and inviting environment provided to students who eat breakfast at school. The aspects of socializing with friends and interactions with caring foodservice staff also was acknowledged by directors and teachers as advantages for students participating in the SBP. Parents contributed little to discussions on the advantages of participating in the SBP. This was in part because many of the parents were not familiar with the SBP and those who were familiar with the SBP did not see
many advantages. Many parents stated they did not realize that their child could participate in the SBP since he/she did not qualify for free or reduced-price meals. SBP marketing materials should emphasize that the SBP is available to all students regardless of socioeconomic status. Parents should be viewed as one of the SBP’s primary customers. Positive aspects of the SBP need to be marketed directly to parents with efforts made to bring parents in to observe and/or participate with their child in the SBP. Talking points about the positive aspects of the SBP should be developed and distributed to teachers and other school staff to assist them in promoting the SBP and improving participation.

Other aspects of the SBP that need to be addressed are disadvantages identified by the discussion groups, such as teachers’ and parents’ perceptions that foods offered in the SBP are of low quality and poor nutritional value. Involving teachers, parents, and students in menu planning may be one avenue to address this issue. Also, directors need to capitalize on opportunities to communicate and demonstrate to teachers and parents how the different breakfast menus comply with nutritional guidelines mandated by the federal government. Providing samples of breakfast food items to students and teachers, offering food samples to parents at school open houses, or parent/teacher conferences could be other avenues for exposing them to different breakfast food items and the SBP.

As a barrier to SBP participation, the ‘poor’ social stigma in regards to the SBP being only for low-income, disadvantaged children continues to be a dominant issue (Kennedy & Davis, 1998; McDonnell et al., 2004). Some schools have been able to decrease the poor stigma by offering breakfast in the classroom or implementing a Universal breakfast program (Wahlstrom & Begalle, 1999; Bernstein et al., 2002). In addressing concerns of the breakfast meal period being scheduled too early and before school starts, some schools have begun
offering breakfast as a packaged ready-to-go meal (Conklin & Bordi, 2003). Breakfast food items are placed in a paper bag and picked up by students as they enter the school on their way to class. Teachers were supportive of this style of breakfast meal, stating that it did not significantly interrupt instruction time.

Finally, in order for SBPs to reach their full potential, they must have the support of the school community, local, state, and federal officials to initiate policies that promote and recognize the importance of the SBP for advancing the well being of the students served. Support must also be garnered from food manufacturers to increase their efforts to produce and make available healthy, convenient, packaged breakfast foods that not only comply with the federal regulations that govern the SBP, but are also appealing to the students.

**Education and Training Implications**

The following are recommendations for additional education and training:

- Handouts with research supported information regarding all of the benefits to children who eat breakfast should be developed and available for foodservice directors to use as marketing tools. Handouts should be customized and addressed to the different groups such as teachers, parents, and principals.

- Marketing materials should be developed regarding the positive eating environment and/or social interactions of students with friends and peers when they participate in the SBP.

- Training modules should be developed for foodservice staff on how to get parents more involved in the school nutrition program.
• Tool kits for In-Class-Breakfast and “Grab-n-Go” breakfast programs should be
developed to assist foodservice directors in addressing breakfast meal period scheduling
concerns identified in this research.

• Marketing materials should be designed to promote the SBP as a program available to all
students and efforts need to be made to erase the ‘poor’ social stigma.

    Limitations of the Study

    Participants were recruited from three schools in each of three different states. Caution
should be used in applying these findings to other states where SBPs and the school
environments may differ. Focus groups, by design, are a purposeful selection of participants and
individuals willing to participate in discussions and may hold different views than individuals
not willing to participate.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Focus Group Questions
Focus Group Questions - Directors

1) What are the **benefits** for children who eat breakfast (at home or school)?

2) Who or what was the most influential reason behind starting/having the school breakfast program in your school or school district?

3) What are the **advantages** to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

4) What are the **disadvantages** to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

5) What do you see as possible **barriers** to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

6) What would help you in terms of resources, to support your efforts to increase participation in your school’s breakfast program?

7) What is the best way to promote the school breakfast to students, parents, and/or teachers?
Focus Group Questions - Teachers

1) What are the benefits for children who eat breakfast (at home or school)?

2) What is the procedure students follow in order to participate in the breakfast program at your school?

3) What types of foods are used for the school breakfast meal at your school?

4) What are the advantages to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

5) What are the disadvantages to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

6) What do you see as possible barriers to students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

7) What suggestions might you have to increase the number of students eating the school breakfast meal at your school?

8) What is the best way to promote the school breakfast to students, parents, and/or teachers?

9) Tell me about any changes you would make to the breakfast program at your school (if at all)?
Focus Group Questions - Parents

1) What are the benefits for children who eat breakfast (at home or school)?

2) How does a parent ensure their child can participate in their school breakfast program?

3) What types of foods are used for the school breakfast meal at your child’s school?

4) What are the advantages to students eating the school breakfast meal at your child’s school?

5) What are the disadvantages to students eating the school breakfast meal at your child’s school?

6) What do you see as possible barriers to students eating the school breakfast meal at your child’s school?

7) What suggestions might you have to increase the number of students eating the school breakfast meal at your child’s school?

8) What is the best way to promote the school breakfast to parents and/or students?

9) Tell me about any changes you would make to the breakfast program at your school (if at all)?
Appendix B

Focus Group Confirmation Letter
February 2, 2005

Dear School Foodservice Director:

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division is conducting a research study that will explore the issues associated with student participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP). As principal investigator of the study, I plan to collect information through small group discussions with school foodservice directors in three states: Utah, Illinois, and New Jersey. The discussions will focus on the barriers and possible solutions towards student participation in the SBP or the implementation of a SBP. The study findings will assist NFSMI in developing training resources to support foodservice directors in addressing participation and SBP issues. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this small group discussion because your input is essential to the overall outcome of the study.

A meeting with approximately 10 school foodservice directors will take place at the address listed below. Mr. Smith, Director of Food Services at City School District, has graciously agreed to host the meeting which will be held on March 8, 2005, from 10:00am to 12 noon. Light refreshments will be served and a $25.00 honorarium will be given in appreciation for your time and effort contributed to the discussion. All participants will be compensated for mileage based on .375¢ per mile following Mississippi state reimbursement protocol. Additionally, a request for two continuing education hours has been submitted to the School Nutrition Association. All participants will receive a copy of the discussion group findings when the study is completed.

All information that is gathered during the discussion will be kept confidential and comply with The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. Any questions concerning this study at anytime during or after the discussion may be directed to me at 662-915-7807 or the IRB Director, Tom Lombardo, at 662-915-3929. Please keep this letter for your information.

Meeting Address: Department of Support Services
City School District
123 Main Street
ABC Town, Utah

Thank you,

Laurel Lambert, PhD, RD, LD
Assistant Professor
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
The University of Mississippi
Appendix C

Continuing Education Credits
School Nutrition Association: Request for PRIOR Approval of Continuing Education Units (CEUs)

**Program:** Participation in the School Breakfast Program

**Purpose:** Identify perceptions, practices, and barriers to student participation in the school breakfast program and policies and procedures that may be hindering the operation of a school breakfast program. A two hour guided group discussion will be held with school foodservice directors to elicit and share solutions to overcome perceptions, practices, and barriers to a successful school breakfast program.

**Learning Objectives:**
1) Participants will be able to identify practices and barriers that may be hindering student participation in the school breakfast program.
2) Participants will be able to compare and contrast the various operations of school breakfast programs in school districts around the City Metro area.
3) Participants will be able to collaborate in investigating and analyzing possible solutions to barriers that have been identified in student participation in the school breakfast program.

**Session Time:** April 14, 2005, from 10:00am-12noon

**Subjects:** School Foodservice Directors from school districts in City, New Jersey area

**Speaker Qualification:** Attached short vitae

**Program Evaluation Form:** Attached
Appendix D

Agreement to Participate Form
Agreement to Participate in Focus Groups Discussions.  
(To be placed on school letterhead stationary)

I have reviewed the research proposal and requests for assistance in participating in the focus group discussions regarding the School Breakfast Program. I give my consent to allow the study to be conducted in ABC Town Elementary School and for Laurel Lambert to send home “Request to Participate” letters to the parents of students in first through sixth grade and all first through sixth grade teachers.

________________________________________
School Principal          Date

________________________________________
Foodservice Director      Date

In return, Laurel Lambert agrees to provide Dr. Johnson and Mr. Smith a written report of the study’s results. Laurel Lambert also guarantees that the list of parents’ names and telephone numbers will be kept confidential, and once the study is completed will be destroyed.

________________________________________
Laurel Lambert, PhD, RD, LD         Date

(Copy to be sent back to school after all parties have signed)
Appendix E
Consent to Be Contacted Form-Teacher
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
AUTHORIZATION TO BE CONTACTED TO PARTICIPATE IN
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Teacher’s Name (please print): __________________________________________

Teacher’s telephone number: (_____) ________________________________

Best time to reach you at this number: _________________________________

Consent is given to be contacted as a potential participant in focus group discussions regarding
student participation in the School Breakfast Program.

I understand that Dr. Laurel Lambert from The University of Mississippi may contact me by
telephone and request that I participate in one focus group discussion held at ABC Town
Elementary School. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. If I am contacted
and if I choose to participate in the focus group discussion, I will be compensated with a $25.00
honorarium in appreciation for my time and contribution.

________________________________________________
Teacher’s Signature Date

*Take the completed and signed form to the front office on or before

Friday, February 18, 2005.
Appendix F

Consent to be Contacted Form-Parent
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
AUTHORIZATION TO BE CONTACTED TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AT DILWORTH ELEMENTARY

Parent’s/Guardian’s Name (please print): _______________________________________________________

Parent’s/Guardian’s telephone number: (_____) ____________________________

Best time to reach me at this telephone number: ____________________________________________

My child is in _________ grade

My child’s teacher’s name is: ___________________________________

My address is:

Address      City       Zip Code

Consent is given to be contacted as a potential participant in focus group discussions regarding student participation in the School Breakfast Program at ABC Town Elementary.

I understand that Dr. Laurel Lambert from The University of Mississippi may contact me by telephone and request that I participate in one focus group discussion held at ABC Town Elementary School. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. If I am contacted and I choose to participate in the focus group discussion, I will be compensated with a financial incentive worth $25.00 in appreciation for my time and contribution.

________________________________________________
Parent’s/Guardian’s Signature   Date

*SEND SIGNED CONSENT FORM TO SCHOOL WITH YOUR CHILD TO GIVE TO HIS/HER HOMEROOM TEACHER ON OR BEFORE FEBRUARY 18.

Thank You!
Appendix G
Short Questionnaire
Food Service Director Questionnaire:
Please circle one answer for each multiple choice question. If you have more than one elementary school, select the school with the lowest breakfast participation to base your answers on.

1) How important do you think it is to have a breakfast program in your elementary school?
   a. Very important
   b. Somewhat important
   c. Somewhat unimportant
   d. Very unimportant
   e. I don’t know

2) Concerning your school’s breakfast program, the school principal is:
   a. Very supportive of the program.
   b. Supportive of the program.
   c. Neutral regarding the program.
   d. Not supportive of the program.
   e. Very much not supportive of the program.

3) To your best knowledge, what percentage of teachers, at your elementary school, eat the school breakfast?
   a. Less than 10%
   b. 11%-25%
   c. 26%-50%
   d. 51%-75%
   e. Over 75%

4) What would you say is the number one barrier to student participation in your school’s breakfast program? (Write in)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5) How would you classify your school district?
   a. Urban
   b. Rural
   c. Suburban

6) How long have you worked in school foodservice?
   a. 5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. 11-15 years
   d. 16-20 years
   e. 21 year or more
7) What is your highest educational level?
   a. High school graduate
   b. Some college
   c. Associate degree
   d. Baccalaureate degree
   e. Some graduate study
   f. Graduate degree

8) Please identify any professional certifications you may have. (Please circle all that apply)
   a. Registered Dietitian (RD)
   b. SNA (formerly ASFSA) Certification Level 1, 2, or 3
   c. School Foodservice & Nutrition Specialist (SFNS) (have taken national exam)
   d. Certified Dietary Manager (CDM)
   e. Diet Technician Registered (DTR)
   f. I am not certified at this time.
   g. Other ______________________

9) Additional comments (Write in)
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
Teacher Questionnaire (please circle one answer)

1) Overall, I rate the breakfast program at my school as:
   a. Great
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know

2) Which statement best describes your opinion of how the Federal School Breakfast Program (SBP) should be implemented?
   a. Make no changes in the SBP providing free, reduced-price, and full price breakfast meals to students.
   b. The SBP should offer breakfast meals to all students at no cost (Universal Breakfast).
   c. The SBP should only offer breakfast to students from low income families who qualify for free or reduced-price meals.
   d. The SBP should not be offered in schools.

3) I eat the school breakfast meal:
   a. 5 days/week
   b. 3-4 days/week
   c. 1-2 days/week
   d. Never

4) I encourage my students to eat the school breakfast meal:
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. Sometimes
   d. Never

5) How important do you think it is to have a breakfast program in your school?
   a. Very important
   b. Somewhat important
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat unimportant
   e. Very unimportant

6) The school foodservice staff that serve the breakfast meal to students and staff are:
   a. Very friendly and helpful
   b. Nice
   c. Reserved
   d. Not very friendly
   e. I have no opinion
7) I would rate the food items served in the breakfast program as:
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Okay
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know

8) I would rate the location and atmosphere in which the school breakfast is served as:
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Okay
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know

9) I would rate the time allowed for students to eat breakfast as:
   a. More than adequate time
   b. Adequate time
   c. Not adequate time
   d. I don’t know

10) I have been an elementary school teacher for:
    a. Less than 5 years
    b. 5-10 years
    c. 11-15 years
    d. 16-20 years
    e. Over 20 years

11) Presently I teach the following grade: (If you teach a multi-grade class, circle the lower grade only)
    a. First
    b. Second
    c. Third
    d. Fourth
    e. Fifth
    f. Sixth

12) Additional comments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Parent Questionnaire (please circle one answer)

1) My child eats breakfast either at home or at school:
   a. Every morning
   b. Most mornings (4 times/week or more)
   c. About 3 times/week
   d. Seldom
   e. Never

2) Presently my child eats the breakfast meal offered at his/her school:
   a. Every day
   b. 4 times/week
   c. 2-3 times/week
   d. Seldom
   e. Never

3) Overall, I rate my child’s breakfast program at his/her school as:
   a. Great
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know

4) Which statement best describes your opinion of how the Federal School Breakfast Program (SBP) should be implemented?
   a. Make no changes in the SBP providing free, reduced-price, and full price breakfast meals to students.
   b. The SBP should offer breakfast meals to all students at no cost (Universal Breakfast).
   c. The SBP should only offer breakfast to students from low income families who qualify for free or reduced-price meals.
   d. The SBP should not be offered in schools.

5) I encourage my child to eat the breakfast meal offered at his/her school:
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. Sometimes
   d. Never

6) I would rate the food items served in the breakfast program as:
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Okay
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know
7) I would rate the location and atmosphere in which the school breakfast is served as:
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Okay
   d. Poor
   e. I don’t know

8) I would rate the time allowed for students to eat breakfast as:
   a. More than adequate time
   b. Adequate time
   c. Not adequate time
   d. I don’t know

9) How important do you think it is to have a breakfast program in your school?
   a. Very important
   b. Somewhat important
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat unimportant
   e. Very unimportant

10) Which School Breakfast Program option does your child qualify for?
    a. Free Breakfast
    b. Reduced Price Breakfast
    c. Full Price Breakfast
    d. I don’t know

11) Additional comments:
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
Appendix H

Program Promotions
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the
School Breakfast Program

**General program promotions**

- Provide branded food items on the breakfast menu.
- Have different student contests during the breakfast meal period.
- Place the breakfast promotion on milk cartons.
- Promote the breakfast program using the school reader boards which are outside the school.
- Use the school's website to promote breakfast.
- Recruit volunteers or high school students to help elementary students with their homework during breakfast.
- Make the breakfast program a universal program.
- Make the program interactive, such as having students make their own waffles.
- Incorporate the "Bag to Go" program as an option for breakfast.
- Provide students with a place outside to eat their breakfast.
- Use promotional cards. For example, buy five breakfasts and get one free.
- Have a promotion of "Bring a Friend" to breakfast.
- Have days where you provide free giveaways or collectibles for participants.
- Involve the students with writing the breakfast menu.
- Offer breakfast free to all students and their parents on the first day of school.
- Have the students vote on a breakfast mascot.
- Invite students to breakfast using the School Announcement System or school TV.
- Coordinate promotion of the breakfast program with other school celebrations such as homecoming.
- Use the generic promotions offered by the School Nutrition Association during NSBP.
- Offer one day of free breakfast to each grade.
- Provide more variety and choice of foods offered.
- Allow children to come into the cafeteria at an earlier time.
- Have the "In-Class Breakfast" program.
- Jazz up the cafeteria with music, décor, themes, etc.
- Provide more nutritious foods.
- Ensure that breakfast information and promotional materials are customized for your school with the school's name.
- Make sure the system is user friendly. It can be scary for students to remember pin numbers.
- Make breakfast more of a social event.
- Have breakfast sampling day for all the students.
- Use the breakfast promotion kit developed by the National Dairy Council.
Focus Group Discussions with Elementary School Foodservice Directors, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the School Breakfast Program

Breakfast promotion targeting parents
➢ Send a letter home to parents about the benefits of breakfast (research based) and the benefits to them if their child participates.
➢ Place breakfast promotion on the backs of menus.
➢ Display a sample breakfast meal during open house/conferences.
➢ Have a promotion encouraging parents to eat school breakfast with their child.
➢ Have a drive through window where parents can pick up breakfast for themselves and their child.
➢ Market how it can be convenient to parents if their child participates in the SBP.
➢ Attach breakfast promotion to the eligibility letter/form.
➢ Promote breakfast through the PTA meetings and newsletter.
➢ Have pay on-line service for the breakfast program.
➢ Inform parents that no paper work is needed to participate in the breakfast program.
➢ Invite parents to breakfast the first day of school.
➢ Prepare a handout for parents comparing price and nutrition value of school breakfast to a typical breakfast at home.
➢ Send parents a letter promoting the breakfast program in July when no other school information is being sent home.
➢ Explain all of the breakfast meal options (can buy milk only, a child can participate occasionally, etc.).
➢ Let parents know who the foodservice staff are and what type of training they have had (i.e. food safety and handling training).
➢ Make sure parents know that the breakfast program is not only a free/reduced-price program.
➢ Provide nutrition education in the classroom that incorporates the SBP.

Breakfast promotion targeting school staff
➢ Write a letter to teachers explaining the benefits to them when students participate in the breakfast program.
➢ Allow teachers to eat breakfast for free.
➢ Provide teachers discussion tips and information while students eat breakfast.
➢ Serve coffee free to teachers.
➢ Make homework assignment to eat breakfast.
➢ Allow teacher input into breakfast menu.
➢ Post the breakfast menu in the classroom.
➢ Send a letter to the principal promoting the breakfast program.
➢ Promote the SBP through school board/principal meetings.
➢ Garner the school nurse's support for the breakfast program.
Appendix I

Resources Identified by Food Service Directors
List of resources needed by directors

Resources identified by all director groups
- Legislative support/mandates for the breakfast program (i.e. universal breakfast)
- Food manufacturers support in supplying breakfast items that meet breakfast program food based meal pattern
- Access to the In-Class Breakfast Program developed by the Dairy Council and any other information on how to implement In-class breakfast program

Resources identified by two director groups
- Research based literature on the benefits of breakfast:
  a. Information for parents
  b. Information for school administrators
  c. Information for teachers
  d. Information for students

Resources identified by one director group
- Professional 30-second television/radio ads promoting school breakfast
- Promotional material in several different languages
- Camera ready promotional material
- Support for the program from school staff
- Scheduling breakfast during the school day in the class room
- Start-up grants for the SBP
- Having more time to serve breakfast
- Resource for classroom nutrition curriculum that supports the breakfast program
- Support to reprocess commodities into foods better suited for breakfast
- Nutritional data supporting what is served in the breakfast program
- Support material on how to make breakfast “cool”
Appendix J

Program Changes
Changes to the SBP suggested by teachers and parents.

Menu changes
- Improve the nutrition of the menu.
- Offer a breakfast buffet.
- Provide more variety and menu choices.
- Offer more fresh fruit.
- Provide more protein-rich menu items.
- Offer yogurt on the menu.
- Allow larger portions for 6th grade students.
- Improve the overall meal presentation.
- Provide a pre-packaged breakfast students can take with them to class.

Program changes
- Improve the cafeteria/eating environment.
- Open at an earlier time and for a longer period of time.
- Invite parents to participate with their children.
- Make breakfast free to all students.
- Provide more staff to prepare breakfast.
- Provide breakfast in the classroom.
- Allow a franchise to come in like McDonalds to serve breakfast.
- Allow parents pre-payment for the breakfast meals.
- Make breakfast mandatory like the school lunch program.
- Make sure there is not a cranky lunch lady staffing the breakfast meal.
- Allow students more time to eat.
- Make breakfast more of a social event.

Program marketing
- Advertise that it's cool to eat breakfast.
- Make the program more customized to your school.
- Stop the poor stigma of the breakfast program.
- Inform parents who don't know about SBP.

Other
- Get the buses there earlier so students have time to eat.