

Ohio School Breakfast Challenge

2021 Breakfast & Beyond “Super Stars”

Ohio districts recognized for their resiliency and collaboration in the important work of feeding students.



Beginning in March, 2020 school meal programs faced a new reality with the closure of schools across Ohio. School Nutrition and administrators were flexible and inventive as they partnered to rework operations and successfully feed students during the pandemic. The mantra of most school nutrition professionals was to remain flexible, punt where needed and get support from district and building administration. Support is valuable as everyone banded together to make school meals a priority for all students whether attending school virtually, hybrid or on campus.

This article, spotlights Ohio schools using innovative ideas and solutions to ensure students had access to the nutrition they need throughout the year. These schools/districts are examples of the many “Super Stars” serving “Breakfast and Beyond.

Feeding Students Virtually

Districts started the 2020-21 school year with students attending school in person, virtual, or a virtual/hybrid combination of learning. In some instances, 40% of the district’s students were attending school either virtual or hybrid. School nutrition stepped up to provide multiple feeding options for students. For virtual and hybrid students, breakfast and lunch meals were pre-packaged as 5-day packs for virtual and 3-day packs for hybrid learning. Administration, school building principals, teachers and transportation all contributed to help make all meal distribution options a reality.

Midview Local, Lorain County- Child nutrition department worked with transportation to deliver meals to all school buildings for families to pick up meals. Teachers help with the distribution of meals.



Woodridge Local, Summit County—Child nutrition department offers Hybrid students a 3 day meal pack and Virtual learners a 5 day meal pack, both have a breakfast and lunch for each day. District transportation delivers meals to centrally located bus stops throughout the district. Two bus drivers and food service deliver bags each week. Each bag includes a small plastic lunch box that can be used for other things. Staff have received great feedback for giving students this “extra special lunch box”.

← Special Lunch Box

Elgin Local Schools, Marion County- Most students attend school on-campus 4 days a week. Friday is a virtual learning day districtwide; all families pick up student meal packs every Thursday right after school. If there is no family transportation, the nutrition department delivers the meal packs directly to the family home.

Garfield City, Cuyahoga County-Breakfast and lunch meals are prepared and bagged for curbside delivery Monday thru Friday. Despite the severe need of the district, students did not take advantage of curbside meal delivery service. To help families, the district started a meal delivery service for families that lived more than 2 miles from the school building. Although meal participation decreased, staff had more time to prepare scratch-made items that students enjoy.

Turkey Wrap →



Feeding Students at School

The 2020-2021 school year brought about many unique challenges for feeding students at school. Gone were the days of traditional school meal programs where all students ate in the cafeteria, salad bars were in every building and the like. School nutrition professionals strategized to ensure students had meals in a safe environment and many schools now serve breakfast and lunch in the classroom. Preparing more meals from scratch and offering breakfast and lunch in new and innovative ways. Students that eat in the cafeteria are socially distanced and have protocol in place to help decrease exposure. Many Champions of School Breakfast Award winners, like Garfield Heights, Paulding Exempted Village and Bright Local had already implemented Breakfast in the Classroom so they chose to transition all meals in the classroom. Although many schools were feeding less meals at school, more students were participating than ever in the school breakfast and lunch program.

Northwest Local, Hamilton County- Elementary and middle school students eat Breakfast and Lunch in the classroom. At the high school, students can get a second chance breakfast mid-morning from kiosks in the hallway and eat in their classroom. By offering the mid-morning breakfast, participation at the high school increased 10 fold from approximately 70 breakfast/day (prior to 2nd chance breakfast) to over 700 breakfast/day after implementation of 2nd chance breakfast.

West Clermont Local, Clermont County- All seven elementary school buildings implemented BIC. The district streamlined communication to families with email blasts, infographics and quick links and updates on their website where families access digital menus, sign up for meals and ask questions. Between September and December 2020, a total of 102,344 breakfast meals were served - an increase of 27,889 meals or 27.2% increase when compared to data from the same time frame last school year.

West Clermont BIC →



Woodridge Local, Summit County- At the elementary, teachers agreed to breakfast in the classroom with one condition, that students wouldn't receive sticky syrup. To increase speed of service, color coded grab n go bags that match breakfast menu offerings for the day are placed in the cafeteria for students to pick up and bring to the classroom. Breakfast in the Classroom has increased participation for breakfast to almost the same as lunch.



Fairview Park Meal Bags

Fairview Park, Cuyahoga County- Students pick up a breakfast as they enter school building and eat in the classroom. This worked so well that the district plans to continue it next school year. At lunch, grades 1-5 eat in the cafeteria with staggered lunch times and four students assigned to a table. Middle and high school students pick up a bagged lunch in the cafeteria to eat in the classroom. The food and nutrition department also started a "take 3-pack" for students that may bring something from home. These "pack lunch" students can pick 3 other foods, like a fruit, veggie and milk, to round out their packed lunch – and these 3 items count as a reimbursable meal.

School Nutrition Service-Meeting Community Needs

Food brings families and communities together on many different levels. School nutrition programs became a “hub” during the pandemic that brought food and nourishment to students and families while meeting the needs of the community in many new ways. Food banks, family markets, local churches, weekend bags, and even clothes and other household donations were all distributed through the school nutrition department.



Bright Local, Highland County-Local churches donated heating and cooling units to help with transportation and distribution of hot and cold food. The transportation department and many volunteers help distribute breakfast and lunch meals to every school building and to two family markets where families can pick up meals. The district also provides 250 evening meals per week to mostly virtual learning students. Freestone Food Bank provides fresh produce to families picking up evening meals. The nutrition department also started the Wildcat Closet to provide clothes and other household donations for families in need. The food service director, Debbie Robertson, received the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS) “Heroes Award” for her superior service to her district and community.

Garfield Heights City, Cuyahoga County- Cleveland Food Bank worked with the district to provide weekend meal bags for families in need. Using an “overwrap” machine, the school nutrition department prepared entrées to freeze for the weekend meal bags and includes instructions for safe reheating when distributed to families. In the future, the district may continue to service families in need with weekend meal packs with frozen entrées.



Groveport Madison, Franklin County - For students learning virtually, the school nutrition department received support from the local food bank, Groveport Human Needs, to add 8 feeding sites. Additional sites help to reach all students throughout the district’s 40 square miles. Districtwide meal participation increased by 360 meals per day. Volunteers from Groveport Human Needs also helped to prep food for the summer feeding program. The plan for Summer of 2021, is to collaborate with Groveport Human Needs to expand summer feeding sites and add volunteers to reach students throughout the district.

For more Breakfast & Beyond stories visit OhioSchoolBreakfastChallenge.com

About the Ohio School Breakfast Challenge

The Ohio School Breakfast Challenge is a statewide challenge to increase access and participation in the School Breakfast & School Meal Programs, ensuring Ohio students start each day ready to learn. The Ohio Department of Education, American Dairy Association Mideast, Children’s Hunger Alliance and Ohio School Nutrition Association are proud sponsors of the Ohio School Breakfast Challenge. To learn more, visit www.OhioSchoolBreakfastChallenge.com.