

**EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL BREAKFAST  
PROGRAMS IN MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
2006-2007**



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February 2007





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although 61 schools are currently participating in the Universal Free Breakfast initiative put forth by Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), not a single high school qualified for the program. In order to inform efforts to improve and expand on this initiative, Hunger Task Force collaborated with MPS to conduct an assessment of school breakfast programs in the district's high schools.

For this assessment, Hunger Task Force gathered perspectives of high school principals, students and parents from 11 selected MPS high schools around the district on the following five areas: (1) the importance of breakfast availability; (2) barriers to breakfast participation and how to overcome them; (3) barriers to returning meal applications and how to overcome them; (4) stigma as a particular barrier to participation and returning meal applications; and (5) support for universal free breakfast.

The major findings in this report are as follows:

1. **Importance of Breakfast Availability:** Despite low breakfast participation rates, all principals, students and parents thought that the availability of breakfast in high schools is very important.
2. **School Breakfast Participation:** Like most MPS high schools, all 11 of the studied high schools have low breakfast participation. Lack of time in the morning before classes begin was the participation barrier most frequently cited by principals, students and parents. Others identified include bus schedules, older children's responsibilities, dislike of food at school, and not feeling hungry in the morning before classes begin.
3. **Meal Applications:** Raising awareness about the importance of meal applications is crucial to increasing persistently low application return rates. Students, principals and parents agreed that offering incentives and raising awareness about applications and benefits of free and reduced-price eligibility would increase the number of meal applications returned.
4. **Stigma as a Barrier:** Principals, students and parents all recognized that stigma has an impact on school breakfast participation and on meal application return rates.
5. **Support for Universal Free Breakfast:** Principals, students and parents expressed wide-spread support for Universal Free Breakfast programming in high schools. Almost all students and a majority of principals and parents preferred the Breakfast-in-the-Classroom model over Grab 'n Go as the more desired serving method for Universal Free Breakfast in MPS high schools.

Given these findings, Hunger Task Force recommends that the school district consider implementing a Universal Free Breakfast pilot program in one or more MPS high schools, and establishing an outreach strategy around the importance of meal applications with substantial collaboration from Hunger Task Force and other community-based organizations.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

The bulk of research and funding for universal free meals has focused on its positive effects on either all children or exclusively on elementary school students. While evidence shows that breakfast consumption has declined for all children, the same research also shows that this decline has been greatest among adolescents in particular. Studies have also confirmed that this trend is more pronounced among low-income and minority high school age students. Moreover, the rising incidence of childhood and adolescent obesity poses significant health risks for this country's future workforce. Given these reasons, the level of intervention at the high school level is a policy debate that must be explored. Though learning, behavioral and health effects of eating breakfast and the numerous benefits of school breakfast programs have been well-documented, there has been little research done on the causes of low breakfast participation among high school students.

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has not only publicly recognized the negative impacts of poverty on children's ability to learn and its role in mitigating them (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2006, p. 3), but also has a strong tradition of raising student achievement through innovation and educational reform. Poverty profoundly disadvantages low-income families from accessing and affording nutritionally adequate food, and has a particularly devastating effect on classroom performance and long-term educational achievement of children from these families.

If community stakeholders are to take this issue seriously, a greater effort must be made to understand the current and potential role of school breakfast programs in high schools. Expanding on the research it has already conducted in Milwaukee elementary schools, Hunger Task Force decided to conduct an exploratory study of school breakfast programming at the secondary school level. The goal of this research is to identify barriers to this programming faced by high school students in MPS. This research assesses the varying perspectives of high school principals, students and parents on the following areas as they relate to high schools: (1) importance of breakfast availability; (2) low breakfast participation; (3) low meal application return rates; (4) stigma as a barrier to participation and meal application return; and (5) support for universal free breakfast programs.

## II. BACKGROUND

### A. Poverty and Hunger in Milwaukee

Millions of children in the United States live in families that lack the resources to prepare nutritious meals on a daily basis. According to 2005 U.S. Census data, the national poverty rate for children under 18 was 17.6 percent, or about 13 million children (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2006). In Milwaukee, the scope of poverty is even more striking. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *2005 American Community Survey*,<sup>1</sup> one in four Milwaukee residents lives below the poverty line. With 41.3 percent of those under 18 years living below poverty in 2004, Milwaukee also had the fourth highest child poverty rate in the country<sup>2</sup> (U.S. Census, 2005).

As one of the most clear and present symptoms of poverty, hunger is likewise a persistent condition for many families in this country. Families with children and low-income families are especially hard-hit by hunger. The prevalence of food insecurity<sup>3</sup> in low-income households<sup>4</sup> with children under 18 is even more pronounced at 40.6 percent (Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2006). Milwaukee County is more likely to have a higher food insecurity rate than the rest of the state<sup>5</sup> given that it has greater concentrations than the rest of the state of food insecure populations such as families served by WIC (Wisconsin Food Security Survey, 2002), residents of inner cities, low-income families, African-American families, and families with children (Barfield & David, 2003).

### B. Review of the School Breakfast Program

One way schools are able to mitigate the effects of poverty and promote the effects of breakfast on classroom performance is through school meal programs. At the national level, federal child nutrition programs compose the most comprehensive safety net that provides low-income families with an adequate and safe supply of nutritious food. Of these is the School Breakfast Program (SBP), made permanent by Congress in 1975. All public and non-profit private schools and childcare institutions are eligible to receive per-meal cash reimbursements for free, reduced price and paid meals through the SBP. Students are eligible for free school meals if their family income is less than or equal to 130 percent of the federal poverty line, and are eligible for reduced price meals if their family income is between 130 and 185 percent of poverty.

Since Congress authorized the USDA in 1998 to implement and evaluate pilot universal free breakfast (UFB) programs, the idea of providing free breakfast to all school children regardless of income has become increasingly popular and promising at the state and local level. Although UFB generally works better in schools with a high percentage of free and reduced-price eligible students, it has been successful in schools with much lower rates as well.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the latest American Community Survey.

<sup>2</sup> This is the latest American Community Survey for which poverty status rankings by city are available.

<sup>3</sup> In 2005, the USDA changed the terms "food insecurity" and "food insecurity with hunger" to "low food security" and "very low food security" respectively.

<sup>4</sup> These are households with an income below 130 percent of the poverty line. These households are eligible for free meals through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin's food insecurity rate for 2005 was 9.5 percent (Nord et al., 2006).

Most UFB programs serve food in one of three ways: (1) *Breakfast-in-the-Classroom*, (2) *Grab 'n Go*, or (3) cafeteria breakfast. *Breakfast-in-the-classroom* is the most tested and proven model to improve breakfast participation. Breakfast is served in the classroom after the bell rings during the first period or hour of the day. Breakfasts may be pre-packaged or served regular trays from the cafeteria, and are either brought to the classroom or a student is sent to retrieve them during morning announcements, attendance checks or while homework is being collected. *Grab 'n Go* consists of a pre-packaged bag breakfast that students get from either carts, kiosks or the cafeteria during pre-determined times and eat wherever they are permitted to in the building.<sup>6</sup> The third way of serving breakfast is in the traditional cafeteria setting, with students arriving and eating prior to the first bell.

### **C. Recent MPS Breakfast Initiatives**

Since three in four students in MPS are already eligible for free or reduced-price meals (Wisconsin DPI, n.d.), the school district decided to seriously consider universal free breakfast programming. During the 2005-06 academic year, MPS approved a pilot program to offer a free breakfast, and in some cases free lunch, to all students at six elementary schools. An evaluation of that program by Hunger Task Force showed that it had an overall positive impact on student learning, behavior and health, and was highly praised by school staff and parents (Wong, 2006).

MPS followed up on the success of its six Provision 2 schools in serving breakfast by passing a \$1 million district-wide Universal Free Breakfast initiative in its 2006-07 school budget. To qualify for the program and obtain free breakfasts for all their students, MPS schools were required to achieve a 95 percent return rate on school meal applications by a certain date, agree to serve school breakfast in the classroom, and work with Hunger Task Force on outreach and evaluation of the program. As a result, 61 Milwaukee public schools are serving a free breakfast to their students every school morning during the 2006-2007 school year.

Yet not a single MPS high school is among the 61 MPS schools that is serving universal free breakfasts in the classroom. There is one middle school participating in the UFB and the other 60 are all elementary schools. The fact that no high schools in MPS qualified for the program necessitates a closer look at research trends in adolescent nutrition.

### **D. Benefits of School Breakfast for Adolescents**

Research on benefits of school breakfast can be divided into two kinds: (1) studies that assesses its impact on dietary and/or nutrient intake; and (2) studies that evaluate its impact on academic performance and other related measures, such as attendance, tardiness and other behavioral outcomes. Studies verify that these benefits do not diminish in adolescents.

For teenagers, eating breakfast on a regular basis is predictive of a better overall nutritional profile (Rampersaud, Pereira, Girard, Adams, & Metz, 2005) and lower BMI (Niemeier, Raynor, Lloyd-Richardson, Rogers, & Wing, 2006; Affenito et al., 2005). Regarding behavioral

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<sup>6</sup> This could be the cafeteria, hall and/or classroom. This option is sometimes combined with the Breakfast-in-the-Classroom or with mid-morning nutrition breaks.

outcomes, one national study found that food-insufficient teenagers were much more likely than food-sufficient teenagers to miss school days, repeat grades, and be suspended. The study also found that food-insufficient teenagers were more likely to have difficulty getting along with others and to have seen a psychologist (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001).

As an added caveat, UFB programs also have the important effect of decreasing stigma associated with free and reduced-price meals. A USDA-sponsored study found that stigma manifests itself more profoundly as a barrier at the secondary school level, a conclusion that is particularly relevant to the purposes of this report (Fox, Hamilton, & Lin, 2004).

### **E. Trends in Breakfast Consumption Among Adolescents**

Nationally representative studies show that adolescents have significantly lower breakfast consumption rates than both younger children and adults. Between 1965 and 1991, breakfast consumption among school-aged (5-18 year-old) children declined 5-20 percent, with older adolescents aged 15-18 years showing the greatest declines (Siega-Riz, Popkin, & Carson, 1998). The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (or Add Health), a nationally representative school-based study of adolescents in grades 7 through 12, found that almost one in five adolescents report skipping breakfast the previous day (Videon & Manning, 2003). According to another national, longitudinal study that surveyed adolescent girls, frequency of breakfast eating clearly declined with age (Affenito et al., 2005).

Another study of public high school adolescents determined that 42 percent reported not eating breakfast within the past 5 days, and concluded that “adolescents may be skipping breakfast as part of a patterned lifestyle of unhealthy weight management” (Zullig, Ubbes, Pyle, & Valois, 2006). A very recent study showed that teenagers are much more likely to skip breakfast as they enter adulthood (Niemeier et al., 2006). The authors of that study note that this trend is likely due to greater independence and responsibility for food preparation that adolescents face during this transition period. The lead author also stress that “[as] adolescents enter the workforce or college, breakfast may be looked at as an unnecessary hassle and easily skipped,” and warn that “skipping breakfast can lead to greater levels of hunger later in the day, causing overeating, or the choosing of heavy foods that fill you up faster, but may not be very nutritious” (No Breakfast, 2007). This research validates the need for targeting the eating behavior of high school students for intervention.

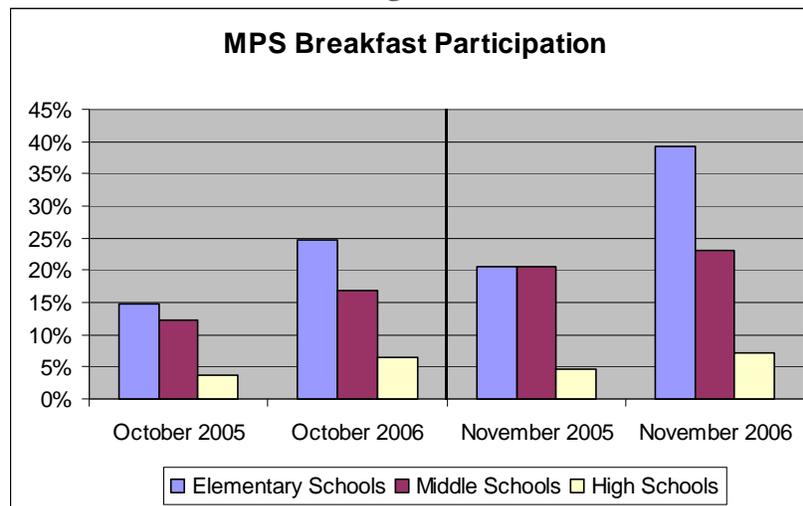
Finally, studies have also found that breakfast consumption is correlated with income and race among adolescents. According to a national study of low-income populations by the USDA, only 14 percent of children aged 12-19 years eat breakfast every day, compared to a whopping 85 percent of 6-11 year-olds (Frazao, 2005). Another nationwide study, confirmed by other research (Videon & Manning, 2003; Affenito et al., 2005), indicates that black adolescents, especially those aged 15-18 years, were much less likely to consume breakfast by the end of the 25 year study (Siega-Riz et al., 1998). A separate study conducted locally found that up to 24 percent of black students and 28 percent of Hispanic/Latino students in Wisconsin reported not eating breakfast at all during the week, compared to 12.3 percent of white high school students (2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey). These findings have particular relevance to Milwaukee, a

majority-minority city, and MPS, a school district with very large numbers of African-American and Latino students.

### F. MPS High School Breakfast Participation

At the local level, high schools have significantly lower breakfast participation rates than elementary schools in the district. As **Figure 1** shows, breakfast participation in MPS high schools for the months of October and November in 2005 and 2006, although they are rising, have remained low compared to both elementary and middle schools. The dramatic increases seen below in elementary schools are likely a result of UFB programs that began operation in these two months.

**Figure 1**

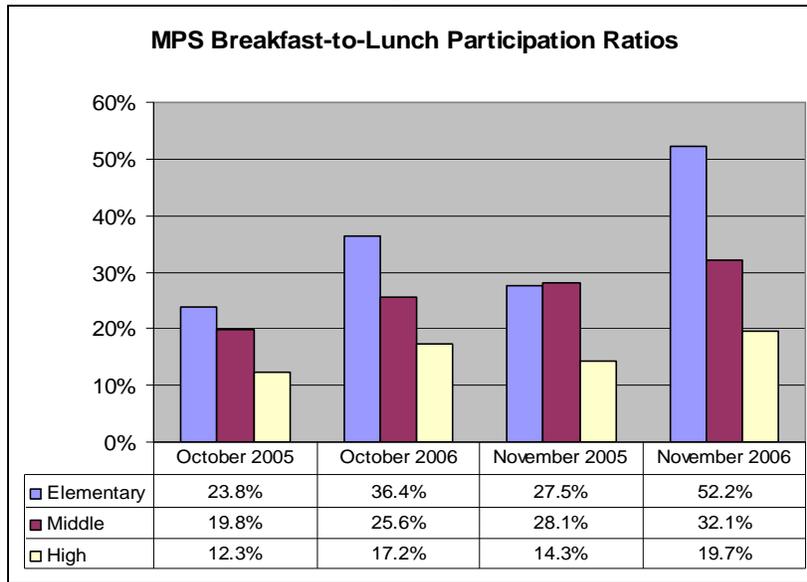


*Source: MPS School Nutrition Services*

A more telling statistic, however, is the change from 2005 to 2006 in the ratio of breakfast-to-lunch participation for those months. From October 2005 to October 2006, the breakfast-to-lunch participation ratio in MPS elementary schools rose from 24 percent to 36 percent.<sup>7</sup> This ratio indicates that for every 100 lunches served in elementary schools, there were 36 breakfasts served in October of 2006. For the same time period in high schools, however, this statistic rose from 12 percent to only 17 percent (see **Figure 2**).

<sup>7</sup> Calculations for breakfast-to-lunch participation ratios were made by Hunger Task Force based on data from MPS School Nutrition Services.

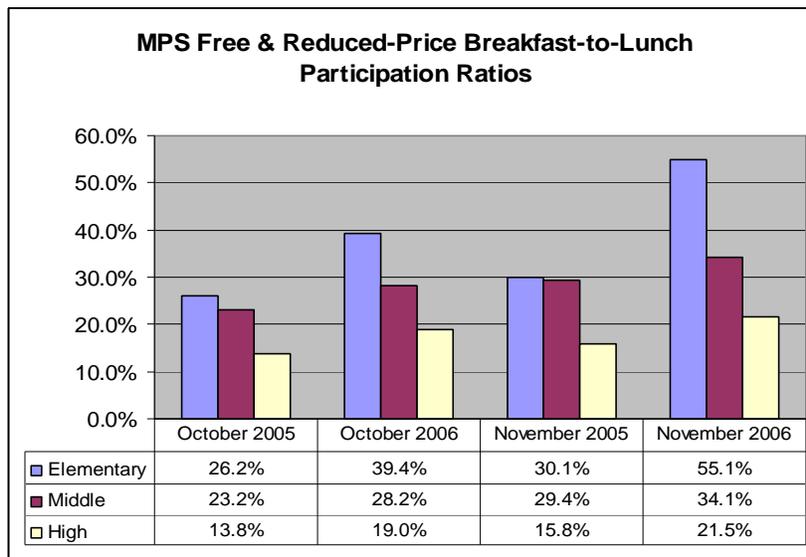
**Figure 2**



*Source: MPS School Nutrition Services<sup>8</sup>*

As **Figure 3** shows, the trend of lower breakfast-to-lunch participation ratios in high schools for the same months for low-income (i.e., free and reduced-price eligible) students is no different.

**Figure 3**



*Source: MPS School Nutrition Services<sup>9</sup>*

### **G. Meal Applications and Free & Reduced-Price Eligibility**

Since eligibility for the UFB program in MPS this year was based on school meal application return rates, high schools cannot reap the well-documented benefits of breakfast participation

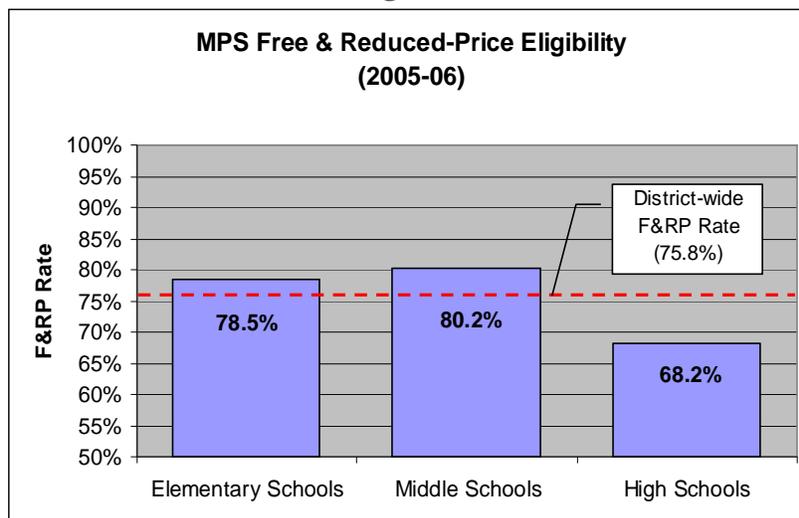
<sup>8</sup> Calculations made by Hunger Task Force.

<sup>9</sup> Calculations made by Hunger Task Force.

without higher application return rates. Lower application return rates prevented any high schools from participating in the UFB program this year. It is unclear whether these low return rates were the result of a lack of knowledge about the program, insufficient outreach, an unrealistic target return rate of 95 percent, or a combination of these factors.

As **Figure 4** shows, the free and reduced-price eligibility rate for MPS high schools in 2005-06 was only 68.2 percent, substantially lower than the rates found in elementary and middle schools. Yet high school students are coming from the very same households and communities as elementary and middle school students, suggesting that large number of low-income families are not taking advantage of free and reduced-price eligibility benefits and confirming data on low breakfast participation rates in MPS high schools.

**Figure 4**



*Source: Wisconsin DPI*

Beyond the opportunity to expand the UFB program into high schools, increasing the number of meal applications returned offers other advantages for low-income families. Since *all* parents asked to fill out a meal application this year as part of the UFB initiative, there is at least the possibility that low-income families did not feel the full force of stigma attached to applying for free and reduced-price meals. Free and reduced-price eligibility also automatically qualifies students for waivers or discounts on the following:<sup>10</sup> student fees, sports and recreation fees, SAT and A.P. exam fees, and college application fees (College Board, 2007).<sup>11</sup>

Increasing free and reduced-price eligibility rates offers financial rewards to the school district as well. Most notably, free and reduced-price eligibility data are used as criteria for federal funding from the Department of Education’s Title I grants to support low-income students in public schools (Wisconsin Title I, 2006), and from the Federal Communications Commission’s E-Rate program to provide discounts for telecommunications, Internet access, and network equipment to public schools (Wisconsin E-Rate, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> These fees can amount to \$150 or more per year for MPS high school students who participate in sports, take the SAT Reasoning and Subject tests and apply to at least two colleges.

<sup>11</sup> The College Board identifies fee reductions based on financial need on AP exams for low-income students. Free and reduced-price eligibility is assumed to meet the criteria for “financial need” and for “low-income.”

### III. METHODOLOGY

To gauge participation barriers and levels of support for breakfast in high schools, this study was designed to get perspectives from principals, students and parents to inform the long-term goal of increasing school breakfast participation in high schools. The survey components of this research study were designed by Hunger Task Force staff and approved by the MPS Division of Assessment and Accountability. Data on MPS schools used in this report were obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and MPS School Nutrition Services, and calculations were made by Hunger Task Force staff.

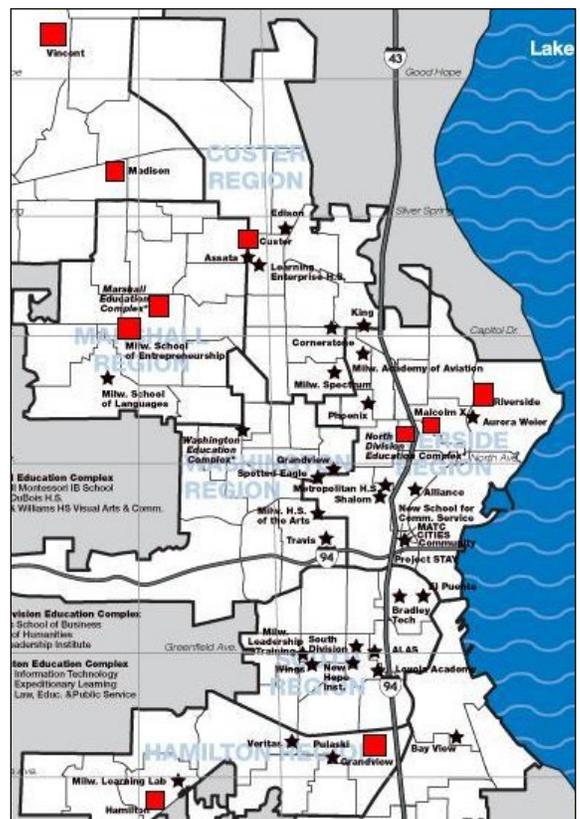
In preparation, Hunger Task Force and MPS created a target list of high schools that had expressed an interest in the UFB initiative. Over the course of the study, this list was modified based on Hunger Task Force’s success in contacting principals. Only those who responded to our requests to conduct research were included in this study. The final 11 MPS high schools included in this study vary in both size and geography.

1. Custer High School
2. Genesis High School (North Division complex)
3. Alexander Hamilton High School
4. Madison University High School
5. Malcolm X Academy
6. Marshall Montessori IB High School (Marshall complex)
7. Milwaukee School of Entrepreneurship (MSE)
8. Casimir Pulaski High School
9. Riverside University High School
10. Truth Institute for Leadership and Service (North Division complex)
11. Harold S. Vincent High School

Three independent survey components were used in this study: in-person interviews, focus groups discussions, and written surveys. This survey research was conducted between September 2006 and January 2007 by Hunger Task Force staff.

#### A. Principal Interviews

Face-to-face interviews with principals were conducted at all 11 high schools. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and took place at the principals’ respective high schools. Additional responses were sometimes obtained from assistant principals or secretaries if the principal was unable to respond himself or herself. These interviews were not conducted in any



■ Studied MPS high schools ★ Other MPS high schools

particular order but instead scheduled as and when principals were available. The script used as a basis for these interviews can be found in Appendix A on page 22.

## **B. Student Focus Groups**

Facilitated focus group discussions with high school students were conducted at the following seven high schools: Custer, Hamilton, Madison, Malcolm X, MSE, Pulaski, and Vincent. A total of 12 focus groups with 77 students were conducted at these schools. Between one and three focus groups per school with 4 to 12 in each group took place in empty classrooms during the school-day. Sessions lasted anywhere between 30 and 45 minutes depending on the number of students and the nature of the discussion. The students in these focus groups were not selected by random sample, but instead were pooled together by teachers, assistant principals, or other school staff with whom Hunger Task Force made contact at the respective schools. They ranged from students who specifically did not return a meal application to students who were part of a specific school organization or students selected at random from the hallway. As a result, the views and opinions expressed by these students are not to be understood as representative of the entire student body at each of the high schools. The script used as a basis for student focus groups can be found in Appendix B on page 24.

## **C. Parent Focus Groups and Surveys**

Initially, the goal was to conduct facilitated focus group discussions with parents of MPS high school students, following the same format used in the student focus groups. As a result, two focus groups with parents of Genesis High School students took place. After realizing the difficulty of organizing these at other schools, a written survey was created as a means to more easily obtain parent input. These surveys were then distributed and collected both via email and in person at school governance councils and parent association meetings. In sum, the findings discussed in this report regarding parents' views are based on responses from a total of 21 parents of students in eight different MPS high schools that were obtained from both in-person focus groups and written surveys. Both the script used for the parent focus groups and a copy of the written survey can be found in Appendices C and D on pages 27 and 30 respectively.

## IV. FINDINGS

### A. IMPORTANCE OF BREAKFAST AVAILABILITY

*“[Having breakfast at school is] very important. I’ve always felt it was important, especially for high school students. People forget that they’re children, too.”*

*– Principal*

*“How can you learn when you are hungry?”*

*– Student*

*“A lot of kids don’t know what’s good for them because they’re not given it [at home].”*

*– Parent*

Comments	
<b>Principals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All 11 principals</b> said it is “very important” or “highly important” that their students get breakfast at school.</li> <li>• <b>All but one principal</b> believes that students are coming into their school hungry.</li> <li>• <b>All 11 principals</b> feel that breakfast has a positive impact on improving their students’ ability to learn.</li> <li>• Some <b>principals</b> pointed to the following positive health effects of breakfast:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ healthy alternative to junk food</li> <li>○ promotes a healthier lifestyle</li> <li>○ decreases the chances of diabetes and cavities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All students</b> thought low school breakfast participation by low-income students in Milwaukee is important.</li> <li>• When <b>students</b> were asked why having breakfast available at school is important, they most often talked about its value for low-income students who do not have any food at home or who cannot afford to pay for food on their own.</li> <li>• Some <b>students</b> mentioned that eating food in the morning helps them pay attention and stay awake, while others said that not eating breakfast often causes headaches and stomachaches.</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>About four of every five surveyed parents</b> thought that low school breakfast participation in high schools is an “important” to “extremely important” issue.</li> <li>• <b>All parents</b> in focus groups emphasized the health benefits of eating breakfast as well as the “socialization” benefits of eating with peers and adults in a family-like environment.</li> </ul>

### B. SCHOOL BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION

*“Older kids have other responsibilities sometimes, like getting their younger siblings fed and to school or daycare in the morning.”*

*– Principal*

*“We just eat when we are hungry. We don’t have meals.”*  
 – Student

*“My bus gets here 5 minutes before the bell. It would take me 5 minutes just to walk to the cafeteria for breakfast.”*  
 – Student

	<b>Perceived Barriers</b>	<b>Suggested Solutions</b>
<b>Principals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no time in the morning</li> <li>• do not like food at school</li> <li>• stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve bus schedules</li> <li>• more nutrition education</li> <li>• provide or make available breakfast bags after classes start</li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no time in the morning</li> <li>• do not like food at school</li> <li>• not hungry in the morning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better quality food</li> <li>• greater variety of breakfast items at school</li> <li>• more rooms or space to eat in</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no time in the morning</li> <li>• not hungry in the morning</li> <li>• do not like food at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better quality food</li> <li>• greater variety of breakfast items at school (“buffet style”)</li> </ul>

- **Many principals, students and parents** expressed that Universal Free Breakfast programming would definitely increase school breakfast participation in high schools.

### C. MEAL APPLICATIONS

*“Parents don’t think they have to fill out an application because they’re not eligible or because they filled one out last year.”*  
 – Principal

*“We watch TV and listen to the radio like 24/7. If they’d make some ads, we’d probably know about [why the applications are important].”*  
 – Student

*“I don’t think it’s their business on some questions. They ask too many questions.”*  
 – Parent

	<b>Perceived Barriers</b>	<b>Suggested Solutions</b>
<b>Principals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stigma</li> <li>• application too intrusive, complicated or confusing</li> <li>• do not understand its importance or do not care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better outreach</li> <li>• offer incentives</li> <li>• make applications more user-friendly and available earlier</li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• do not understand its importance or do not care</li> <li>• had never seen one before</li> <li>• application too confusing or too much work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer incentives (e.g. high school basketball tickets, school dance tickets, and gift certificates)</li> <li>• increase awareness and publicity of UFB</li> <li>• increase awareness and publicity of free and reduced-price eligibility benefits</li> </ul>

	Perceived Barriers	Suggested Solutions
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>do not understand its importance or do not care</li> <li>application too intrusive, complicated or confusing</li> <li>stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>offer incentives</li> <li>increase awareness and publicity of UFB</li> <li>increase awareness and publicity of free and reduced-price eligibility benefits</li> </ul>

#### D. STIGMA AS A BARRIER

*“Students have this pride thing. If they’re hungry, they’re not going to talk about it.”*  
*– Principal*

*“Why would it be embarrassing? I wouldn’t even think about that. If you’re hungry and need to get a free lunch, you’re going to turn it in.”*  
*– Student*

Stigma refers both to the embarrassment attached both to eating a subsidized school meal and to any embarrassment felt by low-income families when revealing income and related information (such as participation in the Food Stamp program) on the meal application form in order to receive free and reduced-price eligibility benefits. Principals, students and parents were asked about the effect of both of these forces on reducing school breakfast participation and meal application return rates in high schools.

	Comments
<b>Principals</b>	When asked if their students ever voiced complaints of hunger, principals who responded that students <i>did not</i> felt they were silent out of pride, while those who responded that students <i>did</i> felt it happened only in certain settings, like before or after class or to a social worker (i.e., never in front of peers).
<b>Students</b>	About half were confused and did not see why it would be embarrassing to eat a free meal at school if a person qualifies, while the other half often gave specific examples and instances of low-income students who were hungry at school but would not try to get qualified for free or reduced-price meals.
<b>Parents</b>	All parents in focus groups recognized the effect of stigma on preventing low-income families from turning in meal applications. Surveyed parents split evenly on the whether it had an effect.

#### E. SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSAL FREE BREAKFAST

*“Schools are not only in a unique position practically to prevent kids from going hungry, but also have a moral responsibility to do so.”*  
*– Principal*

*“GCFE should be our motto – good, clean, free food!”*  
– Student

*“There are kids who don’t get anything at home and this would be their one meal of the day.”*  
– Student

	<b>Questions Asked</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Principals</b>	Would you like to see the MPS Universal Free Breakfast Program at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All but one</b> wanted to see a UFB program implemented at his or her school.</li> </ul>
	Should the District provide free breakfast to all students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Seven of ten</b> who were asked believed that breakfast should be provided free-of-charge to all public students in the district.</li> <li>• <b>Three</b> said free breakfast AND lunch should be provided to all students.</li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	Would you eat breakfast if it were free at the start of the school day?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All</b> said they would like to see school breakfast offered free-of-charge for every student during the school day.</li> <li>• <b>Almost all</b> said they would eat it, including those who had previously said they are not hungry in the morning.</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	Do you think the MPS Universal Free Breakfast program is a good idea?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All</b> thought the current UFB initiative was a good idea, including those who had no previous knowledge of the program.</li> </ul>

	<b>Breakfast-in-the-Classroom</b>		<b>Grab 'n Go</b>	
	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<b>Principals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater breakfast participation</li> <li>• promotes social bonding between students and teachers</li> <li>• improved academic performance</li> <li>• improved attendance</li> <li>• fits in with existing schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• messiness and clean-up problems</li> <li>• requires more labor and other resources</li> <li>• disrupts class time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more “mature” way to serve breakfast</li> <li>• eliminates stigma of school breakfast more effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater messiness and clean-up problems</li> <li>• conflicts and food fights in hallway</li> <li>• not enough time to eat in between classes</li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• made school day more manageable</li> <li>• more comfortable than eating in hallways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• messiness and clean-up problems</li> </ul>	(none mentioned)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater messiness and clean-up problems</li> <li>• conflicts and food fights in hallway</li> <li>• not enough time to eat in between classes</li> </ul>

	<b>Breakfast-in-the-Classroom</b>		<b>Grab 'n Go</b>	
	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family-like setting of classrooms</li> <li>• intangible “socialization” effects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• messiness and clean-up problems</li> <li>• limits food choices</li> </ul>	(none mentioned)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater messiness and clean-up problems</li> <li>• not enough time to eat in between classes</li> </ul>

- **Eight of eleven principals** preferred the Breakfast-in-the-Classroom model of serving free breakfast to the Grab 'n Go model.
- **A majority of students** in all but one focus group preferred Breakfast-in-the-Classroom to Grab 'n Go.
- **All parents** in focus groups preferred Breakfast-in-the-Classroom, while surveyed parents split evenly in their preference.
- **One principal** and **a couple surveyed parents** preferred serving free breakfast in the traditional cafeteria setting.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The most important conclusions to be drawn from the findings on principals, students and parents presented in this paper are twofold: (1) all three groups expressed wide-spread support for Universal Free Breakfast; and (2) all three groups believe that raising awareness of the importance of meal applications is an effective way to increase return rates in high schools. Here is a more comprehensive summary of the findings presented:

- All principals, students and parents thought breakfast availability is important.
- All principals thought breakfast has a positive impact on learning for their students.
- All three groups emphasized lack of time in the morning as a barrier to breakfast consumption for high school students.
- All students as well as many principals and parents agreed that incentives would increase the number of meal applications returned.
- Almost all students felt that awareness of free and reduced-price eligibility benefits would increase the number of applications returned.
- All principals had heard mostly positive comments about universal free breakfast.
- All but one principal wanted to see a UFB program implemented at their school.
- All students thought offering a UFB at the start of the school day was a good idea.
- All parents thought the current UFB initiative is a good idea.
- Almost all students and all but one principal preferred Breakfast-in-the-Classroom.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that as students move from elementary schools—where explaining the importance of meal applications is unnecessary as long as parents understand them—to middle and high schools, there must be a change in the way schools communicate with them about meal applications. Adolescents cannot be treated simply as carriers or middlepersons when given a meal application, but instead must be brought into the process and be educated about the application so they understand its significance, especially with regard to free and reduced-price eligibility benefits and the new UFB initiative.

### **Limitations of the Research**

1. One significant limitation of this research design is that it relies on a small, non-representative sample of parents and their perceptions on school breakfast.
2. Without a broader range of student perspectives, the findings are also hindered by selection bias. While this study incorporates responses from almost 80 MPS high school students, the subjects were not randomly selected to participate but rather ranged from students involved in an academic leadership organization to students who did not return a meal application.
3. Another form of possible bias in the student and parent focus groups relates to the responses on questions concerning stigma. There is no reason to believe the subjects were necessarily forthright or completely honest about their responses to an especially sensitive topic in front of a stranger.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The school district should implement a universal free breakfast (UFB) pilot program in one or more strategically-chosen MPS high schools.
  - If more than one, UFB pilot high schools should be of varied size and geography in order to test the distinct barriers or best practices in each setting.
  - UFB pilot high schools should use a Breakfast-in-the-Classroom model that has flexibility in when and how to serve breakfast during the regular school schedule.

⇒ Hunger Task Force could research and evaluate the relevant academic, behavioral and health outcomes, both perceived and actual, in the UFB pilot high schools.
  
2. The school district should establish an outreach strategy targeted towards students and parents around the importance of returning meal applications. This strategy should include the following components:
  - Explicitly publicize all the potential benefits of free and reduced-price eligibility.
  - Publicize the current UFB initiative.
  - Utilize existing partners in the community, and create new and build on existing public-private partnerships to provide incentives for students and schools.

⇒ Hunger Task Force and other community-based organizations could enlist sponsors to donate items for prizes for students, and jointly seek grant opportunities with MPS for incentive funding for schools.
  
3. Individual high schools should conduct outreach activities around the importance of meal applications at the beginning of school year by:

Role of Schools	Role of Hunger Task Force
• Making home phone calls	⇒ Phone-banking to assist with calls
• Sending home letters	⇒ Creating draft letters to send home
• Making PA announcements	⇒ Creating PA announcement script
• Organizing a school assembly	⇒ Speaking at school assemblies
• Raising issue at school governance council meetings	⇒ Speaking at school governance council meetings
• Broadcasting announcements on school TV stations, school newspaper and other in-house media	⇒ Creating a short film for high school students explaining importance of meal applications
• Holding individual/homeroom contests for prizes	⇒ Enlisting community sponsors to donate prizes for homeroom contests

## Recommendations for Future Research

1. The first and most pressing area of further inquiry is in assessing the support for Universal Free Breakfast among *all* MPS high school principals. In determining support, principals should rate their support on a graduate scale and rank school breakfast in a list of predetermined priorities. Such a study would be more representative than one that relies only on those with whom a pre-existing relationship was cultured and of whom degree of support was not determined.
2. Since adequate data on the perspectives of parents of MPS high school students was unable to be obtained, future research should incorporate a more expansive pool of these respondents so that more conclusive findings can be drawn. While focus groups are ideal, written surveys would allow for a greater number of responses. The same focus group script and written survey used in this study can be utilized again.
3. A final area of inquiry worth pursuing is a thorough analysis of quantitative measures of school breakfast participation in MPS high schools. A study could evaluate these either by tracking academic and behavioral outcomes of students who regularly eat a school breakfast and comparing to those who do not over the course of a semester or academic year. Similarly, this study of quantitative measures can also be done at the school level by comparing academic and behavioral outcomes in MPS high schools with high and low breakfast participation rates.

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## VIII. APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SCRIPT

*The Hunger Task Force, together with the Milwaukee Public Schools, is interested in your input regarding the new Universal Free Breakfast Program, and your thoughts generally on school breakfast implementation and participation. This interview is intended to inform MPS leadership about the impact of the program on high schools, and your input will help evaluate this initiative so it can be improved in future years.*

### HUNGER AT SCHOOL

1. Are students coming into your school hungry?
2. In your experience, have your students complained about being hungry during school?
3. How important is it for your students to get breakfast at school?
4. Should the District provide free breakfast to all students? Why or why not?
5. What barriers decrease breakfast participation at your school? (Probe: bus schedules, students eat at home, conflict with before-school activities.) What else could be done to increase breakfast participation?

### IMPACT ON STUDENTS

6. Does school breakfast impact the learning ability, behavior and/or health of students in your school? If so, what are some examples?
7. What are your thoughts on providing food during test weeks? Have you seen the impact it can have on test scores and performance?

### BREAKFAST PROCESS

8. How is breakfast served at your school?
9. During what time is breakfast served at your school?
10. What types of meals are served? (Probe: pre-boxed, hot, cold, brow bag.)

### UNIVERSAL FREE BREAKFAST/BREAKFAST-IN-THE-CLASSROOM

11. Would you like to see the MPS Universal Free Breakfast program at your school?
12. What comments have you heard regarding Universal Free Breakfast?

13. What are your thoughts on breakfast-in-the-classroom, grab-n-go or other ways to increase school breakfast participation?
14. Does your school have an elevator?
15. What challenges would you expect to face by serving breakfast-in-the-classroom?
16. What benefits would you expect from serving breakfast-in-the-classroom?

#### **SCHOOL MEAL APPLICATIONS**

17. Who is responsible for collecting school meal applications in your school?
18. What is the most significant barrier for parents and/or students to complete and return meal applications? What other barriers exist at your school? (Probe: language, undocumented status, students lose things, parents too proud, parent literacy, application too complex, parents don't understand importance)
19. Please tell me about all activities done by your school this year to increase the return rate for meal applications. What was successful? What didn't work?
20. What else can be done to increase the rate of meal application returns at your school?
21. Would you and your staff appreciate or benefit from a training on how to complete school meal applications (i.e., knowing what information is necessary and what is not for students in different income and living situations)?
22. What suggestions would you make to central administration for how to improve school meal application distribution, collection, and processing tasks?

#### **OTHER COMMENTS**

Date and Time of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed By \_\_\_\_\_

## **IX. APPENDIX B: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT**

**INTRODUCTION:** Thank you for coming. The reason we are here today is to talk about the school meal program at your school. We'll talk about the breakfast program and about school meal applications. In short, we need your ideas for making school meals better. The Milwaukee Public Schools want to learn from you about two things: the low number of kids who eat breakfasts at this school and how to get students to return school meal applications.

I have some questions I'll ask you as a group. I hope that everyone will feel comfortable sharing your ideas and concerns. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. I am just interested in what you think. The questions I have will guide our discussion, but I want you to also feel free to discuss things that I don't ask about as long as it relates to school breakfast or meal applications. I also ask that you not judge the answers of the other students. Everyone here needs to feel comfortable to give their opinions.

To begin with, I'm going to go a little bit off the topic and talk about school lunch, since more students have experience with school meals through the lunch program:

1. How many of you eat lunch at school? Tell me about your experience with school lunch? Where do you eat, how do you get your food, what kinds of food do you eat for lunch? Who provides the food? Who cleans up?
2. How many of you eat breakfast at school? Tell me about your experience with school breakfast? Where do you eat? What kinds of food do you eat for breakfast? Who provides the food? Who cleans up?
3. If you don't eat breakfast at school do you eat breakfast? If so where? What food do you eat? Why don't you eat breakfast at school?
4. If you don't eat breakfast at all, why not? What would encourage you to eat breakfast?
5. Why do you think more high school students don't eat breakfast at school? (Probes: they don't like to eat breakfast, they don't think it is cool to eat breakfast at school, nobody else eats breakfast at school, they would rather spend the time talking to friends, they don't like the food that is served? etc.)
6. What could be done to make more students eat breakfast at school? (Probes: serve breakfast in the classroom at the start of the day? Make it free for all students? Have a grab and go breakfast where students can get a bag breakfast on their way to class? What other ideas do you have?)

Now I want to talk about school meal applications. Can anyone tell me what a school meal application is? It looks like this. Do you know what it is used for? When are they given out and when are they supposed to be turned in?

School meal applications are very important for two reasons:

- First, all students who show by their meal application that they are eligible may receive free or reduced price meals. We believe that having enough to eat and having the proper foods to eat is very important to a student's ability to learn in school.
- Second, meal applications are used as the criteria for many funding sources for the schools. In other words, if each of you turned in your meal application, the schools may be able too receive increased funding. In order to provide you with the best education possible, the Milwaukee Schools need to receive adequate funding.

Elementary school students are usually pretty good about turning in their meal applications. As kids get older fewer students turn them in. Because meal applications are so important as a way to provide food to hungry kids and to bring in money for the schools, we want to understand why high school students don't turn in meal applications.

1. Would each of you tell me about your own experience with school meal applications? Do you remember getting them at your home? Did you fill them out and return them? How did you do this?
2. Why do you think families or students don't turn them in?
3. Do you think it is embarrassing to some students to turn applications in?
4. What other reasons would explain students not turning applications in? (Probes: they don't think they qualify, the application is too difficult to complete, it takes too long to fill out the forms, they forget, they are afraid to fill them out, they don't want to get free meals, they don't speak English, the parents can't read well enough)
5. How could the school district be more successful in educating people about the importance of school meal applications?
6. What could be done to increase the number of applications that are turned in?
7. If you are not graduating this year, do you think you will turn in your school meal application next year?  
  
Why or why not?
8. Did you know that students who turn in school meal applications and who are eligible for free or reduced price meals don't have to pay recreation fees, or fees for sports, or application fees to take the SATs?
9. Do you think students realize this? If not, would it make a difference in whether or not they turn in applications? How can we get the word out to more students?
10. Are there other things the schools could do to encourage students to turn in their applications?

11. This year, the MPS School Board included money in the budget to provide free breakfasts to all students in any school that received 95% of their school meal applications and that agree to serve breakfast in the classroom.

What do you think about this program? Is it a good idea? Why do you think that high schools did not meet the standards to allow them to participate? What could we do next year to try to get schools to take advantage of the program? What could we do to get students to participate?

## X. APPENDIX C: PARENT FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

INTRODUCTION: Thank you for coming. The reason we are here today is to talk about the school meal program at your child's school. We'll talk about the breakfast program and about school meal applications. In short, we need your ideas for making school meals better. The Milwaukee Public Schools want to learn from you about two things: the low number of middle school/high school students who eat breakfasts at school and how to get parents and students to return school meal applications.

I have some questions I'll ask you as a group. I hope that everyone will feel comfortable sharing your ideas and concerns. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. I am just interested in what you think. The questions I have will guide our discussion, but I want you to also feel free to discuss things that I don't ask about as long as it relates to school breakfast or meal applications. I also ask that you not judge the answers of the other parents. Everyone here needs to feel comfortable to give their opinions.

To begin with I'm going to go a little bit off the topic and talk about school lunch, since more students have experience with school meals through the lunch program:

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2. How many of your kids eat breakfast at school? What do they tell you about their experience with school breakfast? Where do they eat, how do they get their food and what kinds of food do they eat for breakfast? Who provides the food? Who cleans up?
3. If your kids don't eat breakfast at school do they eat breakfast? If so where? What food do they eat? Why don't your kids eat breakfast at school?
4. If your kids don't eat breakfast at all, why not? What would encourage them to eat breakfast?
5. Why do you think more high school students don't eat breakfast at school? (Probes: they don't like to eat breakfast, they don't think it is cool to eat breakfast at school, nobody else eats breakfast at school, they would rather spend the time talking to friends, they don't like the food that is served? etc.)
6. What could be done to make more students eat breakfast at school? (Probes: serve breakfast in the classroom at the start of the day? Make it free for all students? Have a grab and go breakfast where students can get a bag breakfast on their way to class? What other ideas do you have?)

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2. Why do you think families or students don't turn them in?
3. Do you think it is embarrassing to some students or families to turn applications in?
4. What other reasons would explain students not turning applications in? (Probes: they don't think they qualify, the application is too difficult to complete, it takes too long to fill out the forms, they forget, they are afraid to fill them out, they don't want to get free meals, they don't speak English, the parents can't read well enough)
5. How could the school district be more successful in educating people about the importance of school meal applications?
6. What could be done to increase the number of applications that are turned in?
7. If your child is not graduating, do you think you will turn in your school meal application next year?  
  
Why or why not?
8. Did you know that students who turn in school meal applications and who are eligible for free or reduced price meals don't have to pay recreation fees, or fees for sports, or application fees to take the SATs?
9. Do you think students realize this? If not, would it make a difference in whether or not they turn in applications? How can we get the word out to more students?

10. Are there other things the schools could do to encourage students to turn in their applications?
11. This year, the MPS School Board included money in the budget to provide free breakfasts to all students in any school that received 95% of their school meal applications and that agree to serve breakfast in the classroom.

What do you think about this program? Is it a good idea? Why do you think that high schools did not meet the standards to allow them to participate? What could we do next year to try to get schools to take advantage of the program? What could we do to get students to participate?

# XI. APPENDIX D: PARENT WRITTEN SURVEY

The MPS District has begun offering a Universal Free Breakfast program to its schools. This year, 63 schools qualified for the program. Since all of them were elementary schools, this survey is intended to inform MPS leadership about the barriers to eating breakfast in high schools, and your input will help evaluate this initiative so it can be improved in future years.

PLEASE CHECK OR CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES WHAT YOU FEEL IS CORRECT.

## SCHOOL BREAKFAST

1. On school days, my high school children eat breakfast: (Check all that apply)

- At school
- At home
- At a fast food restaurant
- At other restaurant
- Not at all
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. If they do not eat at school, what do they eat? (Check all that apply)

- Cereal
- Egg
- Toast
- Milk
- Juice
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. If they do not eat at all, why not?

- Do not have time in the morning
- Are not hungry in the morning
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Why don't more high school students eat breakfast at school?

- Do not get to school on time
- Do not like the food at school
- Are not hungry in the morning
- Cannot afford it
- Embarrassing to eat at school
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Should the District provide free meals to ALL students?

- Yes, if the cost is small or moderate
- Yes, no matter what the cost
- No

Why or why not?

6. If high schools had a free breakfast program, which would you prefer and why?

- Breakfast in the Classroom* (pre-packed breakfast that is delivered to classroom or picked up by students)
- Grab 'n Go* (pre-packed bag breakfast on carts in hallway that students eat during breaks)
- Other* (please explain)

7. How important is it that so few high school students are eating breakfast at school?

- |                      |                    |           |                 |                     |           |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1                    | 2                  | 3         | 4               | 5                   | 6         |
| Not at All Important | Somewhat Important | Important | Quite Important | Extremely Important | Undecided |

**MEAL APPLICATIONS**

8. Milwaukee Public Schools just began offering a Universal Free Breakfast program in the District. To get the program this year, a school had to get 95 percent or more of all its students to return meal applications, regardless of income eligibility.

Did you know about this program?

- Yes
- No

Do you think this program is a good idea?

- Yes
- No

Why or why not?

9. What are some reasons why families do not turn in meal applications?

- Application is too confusing
- Application is too intrusive (i.e., income information)
- Don't care
- Students lose things
- Don't understand the importance
- Language barrier
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you think it is embarrassing to some families to turn in an application?

- Yes
- No

Why or why not?

11. What could be done to increase the number of applications that are turned in?

- Offer prizes and free items as incentives
- Increase awareness of Universal Free Breakfast program
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. Did you know that students who turn in applications and are eligible for Free or Reduced Price meals don't have to pay recreation fees, sports fees or SAT application fees?

- Yes, most people know this
- Yes, but most people don't know
- No

Do you think if families realized this, they would turn in their applications?

- Yes
- No

Why or why not?

13. If you have children not graduating this year, do you think you will turn in an application next year?

- Yes
- No

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Completed By	How many children do you have attending an MPS high school?
<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	None    1    2    3    4    5    6    More

## XII. APPENDIX E: FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR SURVEY FINDINGS

In preparation for this study, Hunger Task Force conducted a phone survey with eight Food Service Directors during the fall of 2006. Responses were gathered from the Akron (Ohio), Cincinnati (Ohio), Des Moines (Iowa), Indianapolis (IN), Kansas City (Missouri), Omaha (Nebraska), Portland (Oregon) and St. Paul (Minnesota) public school districts, all of which implement either Provision 2 or Universal Free Meals breakfast programming.

Here is a summary of our findings:

- **AKRON, OHIO**

Akron uses Provision 2 for breakfast and lunch in elementary schools, and for breakfast in middle and high schools. Participation in meal programs has increased from 47% to 65% since 1987.

**Morning bus schedules** are still a persistent barrier to participation.

They use an automated point-of-sale biometric imaging system (i.e., **fingerprint scanning**) system called iMeal in middle schools, and are expanding to high schools in an effort to **decrease stigma**.

Only staff conducts outreach activities, but they **hire the International Institute to translate application forms** in Spanish and provide information on their website in Spanish.

To reduce processing time and backlog, they use **pre-printed applications** and **screen for Directly Cert students**. Staff is **trained using video** made by in-house media specialists.

*Turn-around time for processing: 24 hours*

- **CINCINNATI, OHIO**

Cincinnati launched a Universal Free Breakfast in all of their elementary schools this year, and one school has Provision 2. In most schools the breakfast is still being served in the cafeteria, but a few have it in the classroom. Approximately 66% of this districts' students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

The biggest reasons that parents don't fill out the applications are because there are language barriers, and they don't feel that their information will be kept confidential. The meal application is available in **four languages**.

Principals who get 70% of their school's meal applications returned are rewarded with a **\$1,000 stipend**.

The county gives the district office a list of children who are directly certified and do not have to fill out an application. 11,000 students qualified for free meals due to this last year. Use **automated phone messaging** to remind parents to turn in the meal applications, and that their children will have to bring money to school for meals if the application isn't received. Cincinnati has used the **same meal application with almost no changes** for years, and has found that this leads to higher return rates. Meal application return rate is approximately 70%.

Processing is accomplished by clerical overtime and help from additional staff.

*Turn-around time for processing: same-day*

- **DES MOINES, IOWA**

Des Moines has 4 schools that have been providing free breakfast and lunch through Provision 2 for more than 20 years. The average Free & Reduce Price eligibility rate for the district not including the P2 schools is 58%.

To overcome the language barrier in reaching the rising Hispanic population, they have begun using a **bilingual application form**.

Des Moines generally gets high return rates because they **announce school fee waivers** in its newsletters and other literature to parents.

The state is in the process of creating a **downloadable file on Direct Cert students**. Des Moines has developed an **online application form** but is not ready to implement its use as yet.

*Turn-around time for processing: one week (beginning of year); 24 hours otherwise*

- **INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA**

Indianapolis currently provides free breakfast and lunch programs to 63 schools through Universal Free Meals.

Households identified as Spanish-speaking are sent a **Spanish meal application** in the mail.

Once classes begin, schools can print out **applications online**.

**Textbook rental fee exemptions** are tied to Free & Reduced Price eligibility—provides incentives to return applications (district had 88% return rate last year). In UFM schools, however, this complicates the situation since there is an existing disincentive to turn in applications.

Three-tiered outreach: mailing in July, handed out during first week of classes, and then follow-up phone calls with students eligible previous year who have not yet submitted an application.

This is the first year that Indianapolis has conducted **direct certification multiple times a year**. Food service staff mail letters directly to Direct Cert households explaining no application is necessary.

**Separate application form for non-eligible/non-interested** households.

Processing consists of a **combination of software program and manual checking** by 4-6 employees (out of 10-15 total food service staff).

*Turn-around time for processing: 3 days (about 1000 apps processed daily)*

- **KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI**

Kansas City is now serving **Universal Free Breakfasts in all public schools**. The breakfasts are being served in the cafeteria, however this is a problem due to late buses and the amount of time it takes for children to go through the metal detector in the morning. The Food Service Director would like to **try grab n' go breakfasts** at the door next year. Since Universal Free meals began **participation has slowly increased**.

The state gives the school district a disk with the names of all students eligible for direct certification, and the company sends **letters to their homes telling parents that they do not have to fill out an application**. However, there is still some duplication.

A privately owned contract company, Chartwells, manages Food Service in this district. This company also handles all of the meal application issues. They are aiming to get 100% of meal applications in this year by having a **community drive for applications**. Media releases, politicians, job fairs, and open houses are all being utilized as opportunities to get meal applications returned. Last year the district had an 85% return rate. Principals receive \$500-1,000 Chartwells vouchers to be used for catering their staff holiday parties as **incentives** for high meal application return rates.

Processing is handled by Chartwells. They hire temporary staff for the beginning of the school year to do this. Next year they would like the individual **food service managers** at each school to be able to enter the information themselves. They would also like to go to a paperless system by having all applications completed **online**. Believes that this will greatly reduce stigma.

*Turn-around time for processing: about 10 days*

- **OMAHA, NEBRASKA**

Omaha has had **Provision 2 for breakfast** in all of its public schools since 1998. They are in their **third renewal** of the program this year. The food service director reports a substantial increase in the number of school meals served since the program began, as well as improved student outcomes. The meals are served in the cafeteria.

The largest barriers to returning meal applications are language and fear that applications will be shown to the government. During the base year the district had a 55% return rate. No special outreach was done to achieve this.

Omaha Public School district does not use the federal meal application; they have created their own that is more user-friendly. Applications are previewed by Food and Nutrition staff and scanned into a computer program for processing. If there are mistakes on the application it is **sent back to the school** or Nutrition staff call the parents. **Scanning has reduced the amount of time** needed for processing. They are reluctant to use downloadable applications because they may not be able to scan them, and online applications would not be able to be signed.

In order to increase school meal participation among high school students Omaha uses a **family meal application**, and encourages parents to send the form back to school with the youngest child to reduce stigma for older children. High school students that qualify for free or reduced meals are also given **wavers for activity fees**.

*Turn-around time for processing: 4 days in the fall*

- **PORTLAND, OREGON**

Portland currently has two schools operating under Provision 2. Provision 2 began in these schools 15 years ago. Approximately 92% of students in the two Provision 2 schools qualify for free or reduced-price meals, while the district average is about 45%.

**Student mobility** is the most significant barrier to meal application returns. Language is not an issue because the applications are available in four languages: English, Spanish, Russian and Chinese; and the district has **welcome centers** where parents can go to get help filling out paperwork. Food and Nutrition Services sends applications along with postage-paid envelopes to every home, but they may not have current addresses.

The district does not do any outreach to increase meal application return rates, but individual schools make phone calls to parents for this reason. This is especially true for schools that receive **Title I funding**. Schools publicize the activity fee waiver available to high school students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Applications can be downloaded online, however very few parents do this. **Schools download and print extra applications** to send home. Applications are **hand processed** with the help of temporary staff who work from mid-August until the end of September. About 25,000 applications are processed every year. The application return rate is approximately 60%.

*Turn-around time for processing: 5 days at the most; 3 days on average*

- **ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

St. Paul provides free breakfast programs through Provision 2 to 53 (of 64) schools in its

district. These schools include both elementary and secondary schools.

**Language** is the most significant barrier to returning meal applications, even though they are available in Spanish, Hmong and Somali.

The St. Paul Nutrition Services department **sends letters to principals and schools**, making it their responsibility to make sure applications are returned. There is a **“compensatory incentive** tied to greater revenue from returned applications.”

Before classes begin, applications are mailed to every household that had students in the system the previous year.

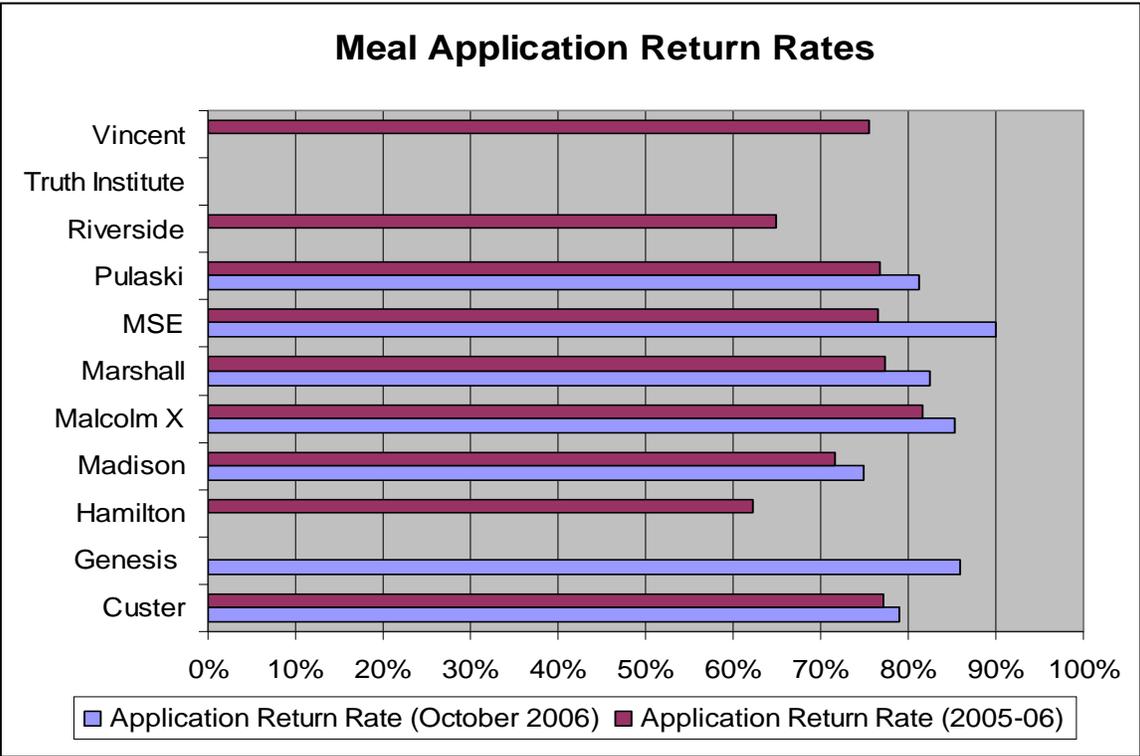
Nutrition Services **downloads a Direct Cert list from the state** and sends a letter to all qualified households informing them of their status. They also include a meal application with the letter in case there are children who are not qualified for Direct Cert.

*Turn-around time for processing: 6 days (beginning of year)*

## XIII. APPENDIX F: HIGH SCHOOL PROFILES

School	MPS District #	2006-07 Enrollment (Third Friday)	2005-06 Free & Reduced-Price Eligibility	Breakfast Service	Breakfast Service Time	Class Start Time
Custer	3	1287	79.7%	Cafeteria	8:10 – 8:35	8:35
Genesis	4	247	77.7%	Cafeteria	8:00 – 8:30	8:35
Hamilton	7	2319	60.6%	Cafeteria	7:50 – 8:35	8:35
Madison	1	1104	72.0%	Cafeteria (except for 5 classrooms)	8:00 – 8:20 (8:35)	8:35
Malcolm X	4	475	86.0%	Classroom	8:35	8:35
Marshall	2	141	73.0%	Cafeteria	8:15 – 8:30	8:35
MSE	2	190	68.8%	Cafeteria	N/A	7:30
Pulaski	7	1621	74.7%	Cafeteria	8:00 – 8:25	8:35
Riverside	5	1588	62.5%	Cafeteria	8:00 – 8:30	8:35
Truth Institute	4	173	75.5%	Cafeteria	8:00 – 8:30	8:35
Vincent	1	1624	74.2%	Cafeteria	8:15 – 8:45	8:35

*Sources: MPS Division of Assessment & Accountability (enrollment data), Wisconsin DPI (F&RP data), and Principal Interviews (breakfast start times)*



*Source: MPS School Nutrition Services*