



DISTRICT:

Providence Rhode Island School District,
Providence, R.I.

GENERAL MANAGER:

Mark Jeffrey, Sodexho

ALTERNATE BREAKFAST SERVICE:

Universal Breakfast; Grab 'n' Go Breakfast

★ BACKGROUND

"Our customers are the students of Providence schools," explains Mark Jeffrey of Sodexho, "Whether we are self-operated or a management company we have the same goal and obligation and that is to serve them well." Responsible for 69 feeding sites and 50,000 students Jeffrey continuously monitors what's happening throughout the district and one method is conducting focus groups with all age levels.

Noting a breakfast participation drop from elementary to middle school, feedback in focus groups revealed the kids felt "it's not cool to eat breakfast in school," and "only the free kids eat." Jeffrey decided to take steps to make it "cooler."

★ IMPLEMENTATION

Program development was driven by making breakfast accessible, enticing, and indistinguishable as to type of payment. In the spring of 2001, Jeffrey began by piloting a universal breakfast program and the Grab 'n' Go serving option.

Placing coolers at school entrances, he offered Grab 'n' Go Breakfasts, which couldn't have been easier for students to grab! With Point of Sale computer systems right by the door, students just punched in their ID numbers, took a bag and a milk and juice, and headed to the cafeteria to eat and socialize with friends. Items in the bag were usually individually wrapped, including bowl pack cereal, Nutri Grain® Bars, muffins and Pop Tarts®. While the beauty of the system was having meals right in front of the students and eliminating standing in line, students could opt to go through the line for a traditional breakfast. However now, the stigma previously associated with that line was erased.

★ IMPACT

Overall, participation in the four pilot schools increased 19 percent one month into the test, at a time when participation typically drops off. Based on the pilot's success, the Providence School Board approved a system-wide universal breakfast test for school year 2002-2003. The Grab 'n' Go Breakfasts were so popular they are now being piloted in all nine middle schools in the district.

Teacher reaction has been positive, and teacher focus groups are planned to document their feedback and use to plan future improvements. "There's no question," concludes Jeffrey. "Taking the service to the kids makes a difference."

★ WORDS OF ADVICE

"Think out of the box," urges Jeffrey. "The days of traditional service are gone. You need to find new ways to entice children to eat healthy." When it comes to Expanding Breakfast, Jeffrey recommends, "Start with a pilot program, which works best, to solve any problems before rolling out to everyone."