

Charles County meets the school breakfast challenge

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CCPS Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kimberly Hill, center, joins Maryland Delegate Sally Jameson, left, for breakfast today with J.P. Ryon Elementary School students as part of the kickoff of the state's 2014 Maryland School Breakfast Challenge.

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) is meeting the challenge to end childhood hunger through its school breakfast program. Celebrating a more than 150 percent increase in breakfasts served over the past four years, Charles County officials joined students to share pancakes, cereal and conversation about the importance of starting each day with a healthy meal.

This morning, CCPS touted its breakfast participation success at J.P. Ryon Elementary School and Henry E. Lackey High School as students and officials kicked off the state's 2014 Maryland School Breakfast Challenge. CCPS increased by 157 percent the number of student breakfasts served from slightly more than a half a million in 2010 to 1.4 million last school year.

The aim of the state's breakfast challenge is to increase participation in the school breakfast program and to ensure all children who need a healthy school breakfast get one. CCPS has already earned state recognition as a 2014 Hall of Fame school system for its success at increasing the numbers of students eating breakfast at school. The state also named 17 CCPS schools and centers, including Lackey and Ryon, as members of the 2014 Maryland School Breakfast Hall of Fame.

"Skipping breakfast is never a good idea," Hill said. "Eating a healthy breakfast provides the fuel your brain needs to get you through the day. Children can't learn well if they are hungry," Hill said.

Ryon Principal Robert Opiekun talked with officials about the importance of school breakfasts and the program at Ryon, which has increased the number of breakfasts served by 66 percent since 2010. Ryon, a Title I school, has 59.2 percent of its students eligible to receive free or reduced-priced meals (FARMS). Since 2012, Ryon has participated in Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA), a successful state program that provides breakfast in the classroom for all students, not just those qualifying as FARMS. Since 2010, Ryon has increased the number of breakfasts served from 19,200 to 31,945 in 2014. There are 12 CCPS schools participating in MMFA.

Lackey tripled the number of breakfasts served when it started a second-chance breakfast during the 2011 school year. Principal James Short, looking for ways to entice high schoolers to eat breakfast, developed the second-chance breakfast that allows students to purchase breakfast after their first period class and eat their food in the classroom at the start of second period. Kiosks dot the hallways, allowing students to quickly navigate lines, select breakfast and get to class on time. "We have five locations for students to grab breakfast – three kiosks set up in different locations in the school, and two cafeteria serving lines. Our food service workers do a great job at serving kids quickly. The second-chance breakfast is a privilege for students and is all about the kids. It works for us here at Lackey. It makes the kids happy, and building services staff happy because the kids do a great job cleaning up after themselves," Short said.

Lackey's breakfast participation jumped 336 percent since 2010; it increased from 12,500 to 54,500 breakfasts served last school year.

All CCPS schools have worked to make breakfast more available to students. Schools offer breakfast at kiosks in the halls or at the front door, move students through service lines quickly, offer second-chance breakfasts and offer in-class breakfast.

"We understand the importance breakfast has on a student's ability to listen, learn and participate. Our principals and food services staffs have done an outstanding job by thinking of ways to make breakfast more attractive and available to students. Our numbers show great success, but we aren't finished. We are

accepting the state's challenge to make healthy breakfasts even more enticing and accessible to our students," Hill said.

About the Maryland Breakfast Challenge

The Maryland Breakfast Challenge seeks to expand the state's school breakfast program to 10,000 additional students through challenge prizes and incentives and by emphasizing the importance of starting the day with a healthy breakfast, which can raise academic performance and reduce absenteeism. Principals can enroll their schools in the challenge – and interested parties can find more information about the program – at www.MarylandBreakfastChallenge.org.

The 2014 Maryland School Breakfast Challenge Partners include the No Kid Hungry campaign, the Maryland State Department of Education, Action for Healthy Kids, Family League of Baltimore, Maryland Hunger Solutions, Maryland State Education Association and the Mid Atlantic Dairy Association.

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