



# 2006 Fact Sheet *Universal Free Meals*

## What are Universal Free Meals?

“Universal free meals” refers to any school program that offers breakfast and/or lunch at no charge to all students, regardless of income. The program is used most frequently to offer free school breakfast. Universal free breakfast offered *in the classroom* has been found to drastically increase student breakfast participation, while bringing valuable federal dollars into the district. School districts such as Columbus, Ohio and Washington, D.C., which like Milwaukee have large percentages of low-income students, have found they can break even when they serve free breakfast because of higher participation rates.

## What is Provision 2?

Provision 2 is a federal program offered to school districts through the USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Program. It may be used in conjunction with universal free meals or as a standalone option. Provision 2 is used with greatest frequency in high-poverty districts to help reduce paperwork and other administrative burdens.

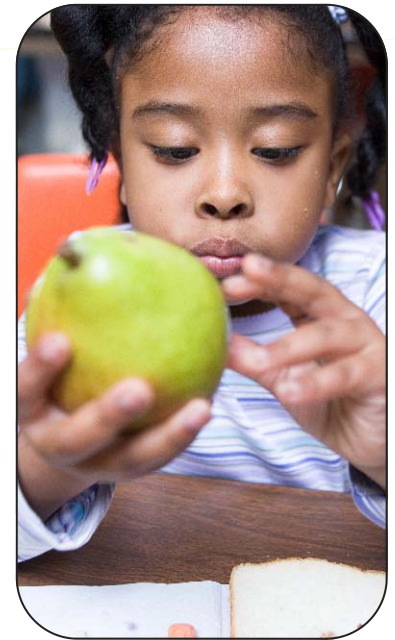
Under Provision 2, all students eat for free, regardless of income. Participating schools only need to collect meal applications once every four years. Provision 2 can be done with breakfast and/or lunch, by school or by district. Experience has shown that schools save more in administrative and time costs if Provision 2 is used for both breakfast and lunch. Family outreach is critical to maximizing the return of all school meal applications. A low application return rate compromises the financial benefits of Provision 2.

## Why does Hunger Task Force care about Provision 2?

Since its founding in 1974, Hunger Task Force has been concerned about low student participation in school breakfast and lunch programs in Milwaukee. School meals are one of the best ways to ensure that children eat nutritious food and that hunger is reduced in high poverty areas. With over 70 percent of Milwaukee public school children qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, schools are the most sensible place to feed hungry children and prepare them for academic success. Provision 2 offers the means to reduce administrative costs, increase school meal participation, and positively impact the academic achievement of 100,000 children.

## Has Provision 2 been tried in Milwaukee?

In 2005, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors approved implementation of the Provision 2 program at six pilot schools (see right). All schools had high rates of free and reduced-price eligibility. Two pilot schools, Carver and Wheatley, offer breakfast in the classroom, which resulted in more than doubling the number of children eating breakfast. Sixty percent of surveyed staff members noted a decrease in hunger in their schools. Overwhelmingly, 92 percent of staff and 98 percent of parents at the pilot schools highly supported expansion of Provision 2 to the entire district. More than 60 percent of parents indicated that the program reduced time, stress, and financial burdens.



## MPS Provision 2 2005-2006 Pilot Sites

- ▶ Allen-Field School
- ▶ Bethune Academy
- ▶ Carver Academy
- ▶ Longfellow School
- ▶ 38th Street School
- ▶ Wheatley Elementary

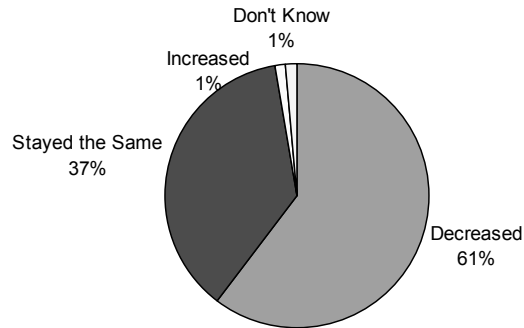
“Some kids only have chocolate milk before coming to school. At 9 a.m., kids are already asking if it’s lunchtime.”

—MPS Teacher

## Advantages of Provision 2

1. Provision 2 is highly effective in school districts such as Milwaukee where a high percentage of children qualify for free and reduced-priced meals.
2. Offering free meals is a great way to make your school an attractive choice to parents as they decide where to send their children for school.
3. After the base year, Provision 2 results in faster serving lines as cash registers and card scanners are eliminated. Children spend less time in line and more time eating.
4. Increased participation means more revenue generated by food service operations. In four out of the six Milwaukee pilot programs, breakfast participation increased, especially at sites where breakfast was served in the classroom.
5. Provision 2 can be easily combined with non-traditional serving methods (such as breakfast in the classroom) since everyone eats the meal regardless of whether they pay.
6. Provision 2 would mean a huge savings to parents. If parents paying the reduced-price of 40 cents for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast had three children in school, they would save approximately \$378 dollars per school year. This is particularly important for reduced-priced parents.
7. School meal stigma is virtually erased – all children eat free regardless of their financial status.
8. Money is no longer collected in the meal line. Nor do teachers and food service staff call parents to remind them to submit their child's meal money or pay overdue meal bills.

*At Provision 2 pilot sites, the number of hunger complaints:*



*Source: Provision 2 pilot school staff (teachers, principals, social workers, nurses, food service managers, food service employees)*

## What Do People Say About the Provision 2 Pilot



“Sometimes we don’t have enough money to buy groceries so it is a relief to know that my child’s school provides food to the students.”

—Parent

“I’m in full support of it. It’s great. It’s a strong, positive thing about our school.”

—Teacher

“I think the government is wasting money to accommodate everyone that pays. I’d spend two hours a day inputting kids money and following up with parents– the system is not working as well as it could with universal free lunch. We use a lot of time to collect. If 80 percent or more are free/reduced price, then go district wide. Not doing so is not cost effective.”

— Food Service Manager

*“I know for a fact that it’s the only meals some kids get... both from what kids say and home visits.”*

—MPS Teacher

## Provision 2 Impacts in Milwaukee

Research at the six Milwaukee Provision 2 pilot schools shows:

- 78% of school staff report school breakfast positively affects behavior of students at school
- 95% report a moderate to huge impact on student ability to learn at school
- 93% report a moderate impact to huge impact on student health
- 63% report a large positive effect on student interactions