

Nutrient-rich Milk is the Beverage of Choice for School Breakfast

by Mitch Smith

Director of Marketing Resources, United Dairy Industry of Michigan

Research shows that children who eat breakfast perform better academically and have fewer behavioral problems. In addition, eating breakfast can improve a child's overall diet quality and can reduce the risk of being overweight. While over 80 percent of Michigan schools offer school breakfast, participation has remained low. In an effort to increase breakfast participation, State Superintendent, Mike Flanagan, issued a challenge in his March 2008 podcast to Michigan school superintendents to increase school breakfast participation in their districts by 50 percent.

Milk and Breakfast go Hand-in-Hand

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) asked the United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) for assistance with a marketing program for a school breakfast challenge to increase school breakfast participation. UDIM recognizes that milk is one of the most commonly consumed foods by children at breakfast and encouraging breakfast at school would serve at least two purposes—improve overall health in school children and encourage current and future milk consumption.

UDIM developed a customized mailing that resembled a breakfast cereal box to encourage schools to take the challenge. The breakfast “cereal” box shipped to Michigan school district superintendents and school food service directors. Accompanying this mailing was a grant opportunity offering assistance to start, enhance or expand breakfast programs. The UDIM funded resource grants provided schools with materials needed for promotion of breakfast including brochures, posters, breakfast bags, “got milk?” t-shirt, student prizes and “got breakfast?” hats and aprons for foodservice staff. To assist schools with implementation of breakfast in the classroom, UDIM also provided schools with up to 15 insulated “got milk?” rolling



Since its rollout, 675 school buildings have taken advantage of UDIM's offer to promote school breakfast.

cooler bags to ensure that milk served in the classrooms is ice-cold.

Breakfast Success Stories Roll in

Since its rollout, 675 school buildings have taken advantage of this offer to promote school breakfast. After learning about the *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge* Resource Grants, Susan Engstrom, Food Service Director at Cheboygan Area Schools, approached the Superintendent, Dan Bauer and the entire Cheboygan Area Schools Administrative Team, about free breakfast for all students. Cheboygan Area Schools began offering Universal Free Breakfast for all students in every building at the start of the 2008-2009 school year.

“To meet the *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge*,” Susan stated, “We implemented ‘Breakfast in the Classroom’ at our high school and participation

soared to 80 percent. Each day a student from every homeroom comes to the cafeteria where he/she picks up a 'got milk?' cooler filled with an assortment of breakfast items such as milk, cereal, fresh fruit, juice and granola bars. Staff members are excited about breakfast and comment on positive behavioral changes; homeroom teachers report a lower incidence of tardiness and third hour teachers report more attentive students with fewer complaints of hunger."

Martha Powelson, Food Service Director at Alma Public Schools, also jumped on board with the Challenge. According to Martha, a year ago, very few Alma high school students took advantage of school breakfast before the school day. With a 10-minute break between the first and second classes of the day, she decided to move breakfast into the hallway at 9:30 and serve it from breakfast carts.

"Since the inception of the breakfast carts we have gone from about 20 breakfasts served per day to over 110 breakfasts served per day," Martha says. "Our healthy breakfasts have become so popular with students that they avoid vending machine snacks and choose a nutritious breakfast."

These are only two examples of how schools have taken the *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge* and creatively adapted them to work for their students. As more schools take part and the word gets out, school breakfast programs are likely to continue to creatively expand here in Michigan.

UDIM is continuing to work with MDE to promote breakfast. A *Breakfast Challenge Awards* program will recognize top participants at the Michigan Association of School Administrators conference in September of 2009. All districts that meet the challenge will be listed on the Michigan School Breakfast Challenge Honor Roll.

UDIM continues to promote the *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge* at school conferences and meetings throughout the year, using this platform as an effective means to promote nutrient-rich dairy foods and continue to build demand for Michigan dairy farmer products.

For more information, contact UDIM at 1-800-241-MILK (6455) or visit our Web site at www.udim.org. *The United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) is the umbrella organization for the American Dairy Association of Michigan and Dairy Council of Michigan. These non-profit organizations provide dairy product promotion and nutrition education services on behalf of funding members.*



UDIM developed a customized mailing that resembled a breakfast cereal box to encourage schools to take the challenge. The breakfast "cereal" box was shipped to Michigan school district superintendents and school food service directors.



Since its rollout, 675 school buildings have taken advantage of UDIM's offer to promote school breakfast.