

CHILDREN



For nearly 20 years, Project Bread has targeted the most vulnerable populations in Massachusetts — children, families, elders, and immigrants — and tailored a range of solutions for them.



Chefs in Schools

Project Bread’s Chefs in Schools is an advanced pilot program based in public schools in East Boston, Lawrence, Chelsea, and Salem. This program, which was supported with a \$1,000,000 multi-year grant from the Arbella Charitable Foundation in 2011, seeks to provide healthy school food to low-income children.

The Chefs in School Initiative is grounded in Project Bread’s mission to protect food-insecure children from hunger. It’s located in schools because the school meals program, which offers a breakfast and lunch, is a reliable way to provide low-income children over 50 percent of their daily caloric intake.

The program began six years ago in the Boston Public Schools when Project Bread put its Chef in Residence, Kirk Conrad, into a school kitchen to see what it would take to improve the quality of the food served. Created through a pioneering collaboration between Project Bread, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Public Health Commission, and the Harvard School of Public Health, the Chefs in Schools Initiative has already been evaluated in a preliminary study led by the Harvard School of Public Health. The study found that students at the Chefs schools not only liked the healthy school lunch, but actually ate more vegetables and whole grains than children in the control schools.

The current program, with the support of the Arbella Charitable Foundation, has expanded to three additional schools districts in the state. It now employs three chefs, working to train kitchen staffs in scratch cooking skills, create a healthy cookbook using commodity foods, and enhance the healthy food presentation within cafeterias. This work aims to bring the program to scale across the state, at which time it will affect the nutritional lives of more than 300,000 low-income children.

Massachusetts Farm to School Project

Since 2004, Project Bread has worked with the Massachusetts Farm to School Project to ensure that low-income children have access to fresh, local fruits and vegetables at summer meal sites. Through this collaborative effort, Massachusetts Farm to School connects farmers and Summer Food Service Program sponsors while Project Bread provides seed money for these programs to utilize the fresh produce. During the summer of 2011, over 20 summer sponsors purchased local produce through this initiative.





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Massachusetts Kindergarten Initiative

In 2010–2011, Project Bread partnered with the Massachusetts Farm to School Project and the Farm Bureau Agricultural Preservation Corporation to bring the first Massachusetts Kindergarten Initiative to Worcester. This pilot program connected 300 kindergartners from four low-income neighborhood schools with school nutrition professionals and farmers to learn about where their food comes from. The project included fresh, local snacks for taste testing, field trips to local farms, as well as in-class nutrition education and workshops, including cooking demonstrations for parents, by Project Bread’s Chef in Residence, Kirk Conrad.

School Breakfast Outreach

Since 1994, Project Bread has worked to increase participation in two federal child nutrition programs, the National School Breakfast Program and the Summer Food Service Program. Project Bread’s outreach staff focuses primarily on assisting school districts in low-income communities that have a high percentage of children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals.

In 2011, Project Bread targeted high school students, whose breakfast participation is generally low, through a school breakfast video contest. High school students were asked to create short videos that demonstrate the benefits of eating breakfast at school to generate excitement and awareness about the School Breakfast Program while reducing stigma among that age group. High school students submitted 47 short videos . . . and the video submitted by the group from Lawrence won the contest. The winning video is being used to promote the School Breakfast Program across the state and is featured, along with several honorable mentions at www.projectbread.org/schoolvideos.



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Photo © Tom Hammon



Summer Meals Outreach

When school lets out for summer, school meals are no longer available and thousands of children in low-income communities in Massachusetts lose an important source of nutrition and are at increased risk for hunger. In response, the USDA provides funding for summer meals at schools, parks, public pools, and social service organizations in neighborhoods where the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price school meals is 50 percent or higher. Summer meals are free for all children age 18 and under and no registration is required — removing the stigma for low-income kids.

To promote use of this program, Project Bread collaborates with several partners to offer grants of up to \$5,000 to summer meals programs across Massachusetts. The funding is used to purchase items that will improve long-term participation and quality, such as equipment for food preparation, storage, transport, and safety as well as for tables and chairs, recreation equipment, sporting goods, arts and crafts supplies, and computers. In 2011, Project Bread granted \$129,023 to 28 programs, which operated 424 summer meal sites in order to expand and strengthen their programs. As a result, the number of summer meals served in 2011 grew to 1,881,446 — a four percent increase (or 69,235 more meals) over the previous summer.

Teen Texting Campaign

In 2011, Project Bread launched a first of its kind teen texting campaign to bring more teens and preteens to Boston summer meals sites over the summer. Since teens scatter to jobs or recreation programs when school is out, they are harder to reach and urban teens are always “on the move.” As a result Project Bread deployed their favorite piece of technology, their cell phones, for outreach. Throughout the summer, over 300 Boston kids texted Project Bread to find quick, confidential information about the free summer meals sites closest to them. In addition, Project Bread provided summer sites with grants to enhance programming for teens and preteens. Meal sites in Boston served an additional 115,234 meals to kids and an average of 562 additional kids attended the programs daily over 2010.



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