

Best Practices: Community Collaboration

In order to reach more families in your community, working closely with partners can be critical to success. Many community based organizations are still serving meals through SFSP and working with nearby school districts to provide flexibility for families. For communities with multiple providers, there are many options available to bolster meal service. Strategically planning meal pickup times to cover more days, sites, and times is a primary strategy to increase access. However, even community organizations that do not serve meals can support school districts by sharing resources like vehicles and volunteers.

Effective collaboration looks different in every community and often requires some “out of the box” thinking. Offering small incentives for participation, in addition to meals, is a great way to get families excited about Grab & Go sites. Districts have had success distributing other incentives, like USDA farm to family boxes, or smaller items, like individual fresh fruits and vegetables. While there are certainly USDA programs and local farmers you can leverage for little or no cost, incentives need not be large to be effective. Consider reaching out to a local cafe to contribute coffee for parents or a grocery store for in-kind donations. Whatever strategy you take, be sure to communicate as much as possible with families so that they know there is a special reason to attend sites on that day.

Examples of Effective Collaboration

In Springfield, as a part of their Fall Festival run by **Springfield Public Schools**, the district distributed spaghetti squash, oyster mushrooms, and apples courtesy of the Springfield Food Policy Council. In **Greenfield**, students received extra apples courtesy of a multi-pallet donation from Apex Orchards. In **Dedham**, 250 USDA farm boxes are distributed weekly and have contributed to a 38% increase in student meals distributed by the schools.

Stakeholders in Westfield have been collaborating this school year so that students have access to lunch and breakfast at a variety of sites from 11 AM to 1:30PM. **The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Westfield** serves breakfast and lunch at their club and three housing properties. **Westfield Public Schools** serves breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday at ten school sites throughout the city, providing a variety of meal site types and locations.

Billerica Public Schools provides meals to cohorts of students who are attending the education program offered at the **Billerica Boys & Girls Club** on their remote learning days. In addition they have increased participation by approximately 150 families/households through a weekly distribution of farmers boxes through the **Council of Aging** and the **Housing Department**. The **Greater Boston Food Bank** is also



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supporting the community by supplying Billerica Public Schools with shelf stable grocery items that they provide to families.

Waltham Public Schools operates Grab & Go sites at three schools and is having great success with their weekly family meal kits, which were recently spotlighted in the national [SNA magazine](#). They collaborate with the **Waltham Boys & Girls Club** to provide breakfast and lunch daily for students who are doing their remote school days at the Boys & Girls Club. The Boys & Girls Club also distributes Grab & Go dinner meals daily (hot meals with reheating instructions) and **Healthy Waltham** distributes 700 meal boxes two or three times a month. These organizations often share resources, such as vans and marketing efforts.

This fall, **Salem Public Schools** reached out to the **Council on Aging** to collaborate on school meals. Because there is limited programming now at the Council, they were able to lend a bus to deliver meals to students in Salem with the schools paying for the driver. The schools have two other school buses that do home deliveries and open sites. The Council on Aging bus goes to two housing properties with one-hour stops at each property. In addition, the **Salem Food Pantry** distributes groceries at several schools during the 3-4 pm Grab & Go meal pickup window.

You may want to consider a one day meal site and [promote it to families as a special event](#). **Carver Public Schools** set up a one day Grab & Go site at the **Carver Fire Department** and families loved it. The cars drove through the station stalls to get meals and see all of the trucks, without leaving their cars. The Fire Chief even handed out hats and coloring books. Participation doubled that day!

Holyoke Public Schools and **The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Holyoke** collaborated this fall to cover multiple meal times. While the school system serves out of school-based sites during the lunch hour, the Boys and Girls Club covers housing properties and delivers to community partners and individual households. **Sodexo** and **Holyoke Public Schools** have offered home deliveries to roughly 200 students since the beginning of the pandemic by partnering with Vanpool and their bus company. The district also runs an active backpack program where families are given shelf stable items to assist those in need. These backpacks are delivered to families and offered at food distribution locations. Between the two meal providers and separate meal times, a wider range of students are able to access free meals.