Promoting Nutrition in the Schools

A Strategy Formation Workbook for the Lexington Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition
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I. **Purpose of Workbook:** The purpose of this workbook is to help the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition develop a marketing plan to promote school nutrition among tweens (9 to 13 year olds) in Lexington, Kentucky. This workbook presents a mixture of local focus group data and interviews; and national data.

II. **Audience Segmentation:** A desire to be accepted by peers is of key importance in understanding tween motivations. Tweens can be divided into groups by degree of involvement, age, and gender. Tweens can also be divided according to breakfast habits.

III. **Grab-N-Go Breakfast Program:** A Grab-N-Go Breakfast program was tested at Tates Creek Middle School (TCMS) from April 26th to May 7th, 2004. Promoting breakfast was chosen by the School Nutrition Subcommittee of the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition because the group wanted to increase school breakfast consumption and because of the correlation between eating breakfast and maintaining a healthy weight.

IV. **Product Benefits:** Tween reactions to the Grab-N-Go Breakfast concept were largely positive during the focus group research. Of those tweens who do not see themselves participating, the vast majority indicate that this is because they eat breakfast at home. Still, even these tweens join the non-breakfast eaters in noting the following benefits of school breakfast consumption: increased performance in the morning, less hunger before lunch, spending time with friends, ability to save time and sleep later, and food variety.

V. **The Competition:** In the case of school breakfast, Lexington research indicates that tweens see three primary competitors: eating breakfast at home, eating breakfast elsewhere, and participating before school activities.

VI. **Pricing Strategy:** The major costs of school breakfast identified by tweens in Lexington are: time at home, time at school, food choices and quality, and monetary cost.

VII. **Placement Strategy:** It seems quite clear that more students would take advantage of school breakfast if the breakfasts were sold in common areas. Middle school principals and parents acknowledge difficulties inherent in allowing food in places outside the cafeteria, as do tweens.

VIII. **Partners:** Any School Breakfast Program requires a multitude of stakeholders to achieve success. Parents, school food service personnel, teachers, principals, and custodial personnel should be
involved, in addition, of course, to the tween consumers themselves. Parent opinions regarding the Grab-N-Go program itself vary, though focus groups conducted after the program reveal more positive parental opinions than focus groups conducted before the program. Specific changes to the Grab-N-Go program suggested by school food service staff include:

- Providing a chocolate milk choice
- better promotion, provision of more hot foods
- An improved bag for moisture resistance
- Working with bus schedules to allow more students time to eat breakfast at school.

Teacher reaction to the Grab-N-Go breakfasts offered during CATS testing is generally positive. Seven of eight middle school principals interviewed indicate that they would support a Grab-N-Go type-program aimed at increasing school breakfast consumption.

**IX. Promotional Strategy:** Two audiences are key in considering promotional strategy for a School Breakfast Program: tweens and their parents. Parents have a strong desire to achieve better communication with schools. Tween promotion suggestions reflect their highly peer-motivated nature.

**X. Other Potential Coalition Action Areas:** A number of issues other than school breakfast arose in the focus groups. These issues are outlined in part three of this report.

**XI. School Food and Beverage Options:** Tweens desire variety in their menu options, and are quite open to the introduction of healthier menu items. Parents are concerned both about their children receiving multiple portions or receiving too little food. There is great concern about school vending machines. Tweens enjoy the availability of healthy vending machine options, and are very likely to snack at school daily, depending largely on the permissiveness of their teachers. Lexington parents are not pleased with their children receiving food as a reward in the classroom.

**XII. School Food Presentation and Atmosphere:** Lexington tweens and parents express concerns about school food presentation and cafeteria facilities, noting that improvement in these areas may positively affect their attitudes about school food service.

**XIII. School Nutrition Curriculum:** School Food Service personnel believe that having a strong, consistent nutrition curriculum in the schools would be helpful in getting the students to try more healthy options and increase the variety of foods they try. Parents are pleased when school nutrition lessons are utilized by their children at home.
Nutrition is a crucial health issue for Lexington children. A survey taken of school health entrance records in 2002 found that 41% of Fayette County 6th graders were either overweight or at risk of becoming so (Lexington Fayette County Health Department Report 2002). Studies indicate that between 70 and 80 percent of overweight children and adolescents will remain overweight or become obese as adults (AfHK, 2004). The epidemic of childhood obesity has significant psychological, social and economic implications.

Further, schools are key places to intervene in the area of nutrition because children spend so much time in the school setting. It is where behaviors are directly and indirectly taught. Seventeen percent of students eat school breakfast and 63% eat school lunch. All FCPS middle schools have vending machines, use food as rewards and require a 9 week health class for 6th grade students (data obtained from Lexington/Fayette County Public Schools Food Service).

School food programs have a key role to play in child and adolescent nutrition. Students who participate in the National School Lunch Program enjoy better nutrition than those who make other lunchtime choices. They consume more vegetables and grain foods, drink more milk and fewer sugary drinks, and eat fewer snack foods. School Lunch and Breakfast Programs also protect against being overweight in some students — one study shows that girls whose families participated in the Food Stamp Program and the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs had a lower risk of being overweight than did who did not participate in these programs. Evaluations suggest that the availability of feeding programs in public schools throughout the academic year increases the probability that children will eat breakfast and improve their educational status (Pollitt 1995).
Poor nutrition practices among students affect schools in a number of ways. Suboptimal academic achievement and financial strains caused by absenteeism and lower test scores are consequences of poor school nutrition, to say nothing of the potentially lasting physical consequences of poor nutrition on the students themselves (AfHK, 2004). The good news is that there is ample room for innovation and improvement, and that great strides have already been made by the dedicated School Food Service Staff and other important stakeholders in Fayette County, Kentucky. The Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition is now poised to create a marketing plan that will allow for further improvements to student and school health in Fayette County.

**About this Workbook**

The purpose of this workbook is to help the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition develop a marketing plan to promote good nutrition in school settings among tweens (9 to 13 year olds) in Lexington/Fayette County, Kentucky. Research is the bedrock of any marketing plan, and therefore, this report summarizes information on tweens, their perceptions of school nutrition, and factors that influence school nutrition that will be useful to coalition members in making evidence-based decisions. The information reported here is based on the following data sources:

- Marketing research conducted with tweens and their parents in Fayette County by the Lexington Fayette County Health Department. Kentucky research includes 27 focus group interviews conducted with tweens, 24 group interviews conducted with parents
- Results of a survey on the Grab-N-Go Breakfast pilot project distributed to students at Tates Creek Middle School in May 2004. This survey was conducted by Fayette County Public Schools.
- Results of a survey on the Grab-N-Go Breakfast pilot project distributed to teachers at Tates Creek Middle School in May 2004. This survey was conducted by Fayette County Public Schools.
- Insights from ten interviews conducted with middle school principals and other school staff in summer 2004.
- Other published research reports

This part of the workbook is organized into three parts. Part one provides a description of the tween audience the coalition has chosen to address. Part two discusses the Grab-N-Go Breakfast as a possible means of increasing school breakfast consumption among middle school students in Lexington/Fayette County. Part two is divided into six sections that correspond with key components of a marketing plan:
• **Audience Segmentation**: Target audience characteristics
• **Product Strategy**: Tween and parental perceptions of the benefits of school breakfast
• **The Competition**: Tween and parental perceptions of activities that compete with school breakfast
• **Pricing Strategy**: Tween and parental perceptions of the psychological, social and financial costs of school breakfast
• **Placement Strategy**: Factors associated with location of school breakfast distribution and consumption
• **Promotional Strategy**: Recommendations for promoting school breakfast among tweens

Marketing questions are placed at the end of each section, along with a list of research highlights to guide discussion as the coalition develops each component of the marketing plan.

Part three of this workbook is divided into three sections:

• **School Food and Beverage Options**: Reactions to types and amounts of food offered at school
• **School Food Presentation and Atmosphere**: Reactions to cafeteria facilities, time allotted for lunchtime meals, and presentation of the meals themselves
• **School Nutrition Curriculum**: Suggestions for incorporation of additional nutrition-based instruction in school curriculums

Each of these three discussions is followed by marketing questions designed to allow the coalition to choose action priorities and develop a marketing plan.
Social marketers are committed to understanding everything they can about their consumers – the people they hope to reach. In understanding tweens, it is important that we explore the developmental characteristics of the tween years, ages 9 to 13, and the motivating or driving forces in their lives.

**General Characteristics**

In an extensive review of the literature, Aeffect, Inc. (2000) found that, despite rapid developmental changes and a fragile self-esteem, the tween years are a positive, optimistic phase of life. During these years, tweens are developing their self-identity and seeking ways to define and express themselves. They fantasize about being rich, famous, and successful, and seek ways to express their individuality. Distinctive social needs and desires for tweens are: belonging, mastering new skills, gaining a sense of power and freedom, and having fun.

- **Being accepted by peers** is one of the primary motivations during this time. Tweens want to be popular and prefer “hanging out with friends” to all other activities, including watching television and playing video games. Friends have a major impact on their emerging self image. Because they look to peers for approval, tweens have a deep fear of humiliation. Peer influence was the single most commonly-mentioned impetus for activity in the Lexington focus groups, and was seen as similarly important in decisions about where and what Lexington tweens eat.

- Despite attempts to become independent, tweens also have a profound need for unconditional love, support, and guidance from parents. Perceived parental expectations are important and prevent many tweens from engaging in risky behaviors, such as drinking and smoking.

- The tween years also are time for mastering new skills. Tweens need acceptance, a sense of control, and opportunities to discover their talents.
• Tweens are exploring freedom and independence in complex ways. They are developing a sense of control and enjoy the power of making their own choices. They like to influence adults and enjoy freedom. Although interested in learning the rules, tweens also begin to question authority. They need opportunities to make small decisions and try new things, while still being able to rely on parents to make big decisions. The opportunity to try new things is particularly important in tween nutrition, as Lexington tweens indicated a strong desire for variety in their meal and snack options.

• Tweens also like to have fun. Never underestimate their desire to be silly and frivolous. They especially like to “gross out” adults and play with friends.

Segments in the Tween Population

Social marketers recognize that it is not possible to be “all things to all people” and attempt to identify subgroups or segments in the consumer population that share needs, wants, and values that make them likely to respond to public health interventions similarly. Differences within the tween population that should be considered in designing programs to promote physical activity include age and gender. By understanding these differences, it is possible to select specific segments to receive special attention and increase program effectiveness and efficiency by tailoring strategies to address their special needs and wants.

Age

Significant changes in physical and emotional maturation take place during the tween years, creating important differences between younger and older tweens. Younger tweens (9 to 11 years of age) have an increasing need to be recognized as individuals. They look to peers for validation and advice, but also respond to family encouragement and attention, e.g., when parents or other relatives attend games they play. In contrast, as tweens enter middle school, they begin to feel more self-conscious as they begin to compare themselves to teenagers. They admire teenage role models and spokespersons in the media and begin to watch television shows and read magazines geared to teens (Affect, Inc., 2000). Lexington tweens, for instance, recommended high school celebrities (talented athletes and student leaders from local schools) as the best spokespersons for new programs aimed at increasing physical activity and nutrition.
Finally, the Lexington research found that older tweens are at times reticent to participate in activities with younger tweens, preferring instead to hang out with peers their own age or older.

**Gender**

There are also major differences between girls and boys (PortiCo Research, 2002). Girls tend to be even more concerned about being with friends and place a strong value on beauty and glamour. Less emphasis is placed on getting girls to be physically active and they are usually given fewer options than boys. Relationships with friends carry less emotional weight for boys than girls, but they are still compelled to feel part of a group (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Boys are motivated by messages that express power, bravery and “good versus evil” (Aeffect, Inc., 2000). Also, Lexington focus group data indicates that middle school girls are more likely than boys to skip meals such as breakfast because of body image issues.
Part II: Increasing School Breakfast Consumption
Grab-N-Go Breakfast

A Grab-N-Go Breakfast program was tested at Tates Creek Middle School (TCMS) from April 26th to May 7th, 2004. Promoting breakfast was chosen by the School Nutrition Subcommittee of the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition because the group wanted to increase school breakfast consumption and because of the correlation between eating breakfast and maintaining a healthy weight. These dates corresponded with annual school-wide testing, in the hopes that providing breakfast to students would correlate with increased test scores, and make school administrators more likely to consider offering the program. Grab-N-Go breakfasts consisted of a variety of portable foods (muffins, Go-gurt, etc.) presented to students in colorful paper bags. The bag color corresponded with its contents, making for faster breakfast selection. The breakfasts were offered free of charge to students and faculty/staff during the first week of the program. During the second week, prices for student Grab-N-Go breakfasts reverted to state-mandated pricing of $1.10 (less for students who qualify for free or reduced price meals).

When the program began, 6th graders were required to eat the breakfasts in the cafeteria, while 7th and 8th graders were given the option of eating in the gymnasium. This policy was later changed and all students were required to eat in the cafeteria. A total of 2299 Grab-N-Go breakfasts were served during the program, 1673 during the first week and 626 during the second week. Focus groups were conducted both before and after the Grab-N-Go program. Teacher (n=42) and student (n=209) surveys were conducted after the program ended.
In addition to the overall tween characteristics defined in part one, tweens may be further segmented according to their breakfast habits.

**Tweens who eat breakfast at home**

Some tweens and parents prefer that breakfast be eaten at home and say they are very unlikely to participate in school breakfast offerings. In a survey of 209 students after the pilot test, 56.5% say they eat breakfast at home.

Within this segment, the majority of Lexington tweens are responsible for making their own breakfast decisions. Many parents report making multiple breakfast options available (cereal, breakfast bars, eggs, etc.) so that their children could choose what breakfast food to have on a given morning, if any. A smaller percentage of parents report preparing breakfast for their children each day. Research indicates, however, that eating breakfast is strongly related to having a parent present at the evening meal, but surprisingly not related to the parent being present in the mornings (Videon & Manning, 2003).

**Tweens who do not eat breakfast regularly**

Another important segment of the middle school population consists of those who do not eat breakfast regularly. In the Tates Creek Middle School survey, 18.7% or 39 students report that they do not eat breakfast at all. Of those 39 students, 19 or 48.7% ate breakfast at least one morning during the Grab-N-Go program. This indicates that the program was successful in reaching nearly half of the students who report not eating breakfast regularly. In Lexington focus groups, few of the students who do not eat breakfast could give specific reasons for skipping this meal. Typically, they simply said: *I don’t like breakfast* or *it makes me feel sick*. A small number of Lexington tweens, particularly females, refuse to eat breakfast in an attempt at weight loss:
In a nationally representative survey of adolescents (Videon & Manning, 2003), skipping breakfast was related to:

- Being a girl
- Being an older adolescent
- Perceiving oneself as being overweight
- Being European American

**Tweens who regularly eat breakfast on the way to school**

Lexington focus group responses, in addition to school observations, tell us that some students eat or pick up breakfast on the way to school. This breakfast may be from a fast food restaurant, something picked up at home then eaten at school, or purchased at a nearby gas station convenience store. 5.7% of survey respondents report routinely eating breakfast on the way to school.

**Tweens who regularly eat breakfast at school**

19.1% (40/209) of survey respondents report routinely eating breakfast at school. In the 2003-2004 school year, an average of 116 breakfasts were served daily at Tates Creek Middle School.

### Grab-N-Go Program Participation

The following table, based on results of the student survey, compares reported Grab-N-Go participation to reported usual breakfast location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eat at School</th>
<th>Eat at Home</th>
<th>Eat on the Way to School</th>
<th>Don’t Eat Breakfast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grab-N-Go Participation</td>
<td>97.5%(39/40)</td>
<td>59.3%(64/108)</td>
<td>50.0%(6/12)</td>
<td>48.7%(19/39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(#participating/#in category)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who participated, average number of days of participation</td>
<td>8.65 days</td>
<td>3.71 days</td>
<td>5.50 days</td>
<td>4.94 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Importantly, however, 37 (27.2%) of the 136 surveyed students who report Grab-N-Go Breakfast program participation ate the breakfast all ten days, including three students who report not ordinarily eating breakfast. This retention rate seems particularly strong for a pilot program. Thirteen (9.6%) of the program participants report trying the Grab-N-Go Breakfast only once. Seventy-two (34.4%) of the 209 students report that they did not participate in the program.

**Marketing Questions**

*Which segments of the tween population should be given the greatest priority in designing school breakfast programming?*
**Product Strategy**

In a social marketing plan, the ‘product’ refers to the behavior being promoted – school breakfast consumption. To be marketed successfully, social marketers believe the product must provide a solution to problems that consumers consider important and/or offer them benefits they truly want. Therefore, the goal of the product strategy is to identify product benefits that best meet tweens’ needs and aspirations. In this section, we outline the factors that are most important to tweens and their perceptions of the benefits of school breakfast.

Tween reactions to the Grab-N-Go Breakfast concept were largely positive during the focus group research. Of those tweens who do not see themselves participating, the vast majority indicate that this is because they eat breakfast at home. Still, even these tweens join the non-breakfast eaters in noting the following benefits of school breakfast consumption: increased performance in the morning, less hunger before lunch, spending time with friends, ability to save time and sleep later, and food variety.

**Increased performance in the morning**

The boost in performance provided by breakfast is well documented. In an extensive literature review, Pollitt (1995) notes that an extended overnight and morning fast has adverse effects on cognition, particularly in nutritionally at-risk children. Consumption of a breakfast containing 25% of 10 year olds’ daily nutritional requirements has been shown to significantly improve student creativity and voluntary physical endurance (Wyon, Abrahamsson, Jartelius, Fletcher, 1995).

Moreover, many Lexington tweens consider increased energy as a key benefit of eating breakfast. Some even note that they feel as though breakfast at school provides an added advantage over breakfast eaten at home because it is eaten closer to class time.

*It provides energy. It helps you think a lot better during school hours.*
Well, it would help some of our classmates stay awake.

...if you don’t have breakfast, you can’t really do anything.

**Less hunger before lunch**

Breakfast consumption is also vital in preventing hunger prior to lunchtime, which at some middle schools may be delayed for some students until after noon. One study found that students who are “food-insufficient” have significantly lower math scores and are more likely to repeat a grade, see a psychologist, and be suspended from school (Alaimo, Olson, Frongillo, 2001). In another study, hungry children were twice as likely to have impaired functioning (as reported by parent or child). Further, teachers reported higher levels of hyperactivity, absenteeism, and tardiness among hungry/at-risk children than among their peers who were not hungry (Murphy et al., 1998).

*It starts your day off so you won’t be hungry until lunch.*

**Spending time with friends**

Tweens are highly peer-motivated. Lexington tweens indicate in focus groups and on the survey that one of the things they value most about a School Breakfast Program is the ability to socialize with their friends while eating breakfast. Students who arrive before school begins, but don’t participate in the breakfast program, wait in designated gathering areas for classes to start. They express a strong desire for the School Breakfast Program to allow them to spend this time with their friends.

**Ability to save time and sleep later**

There is also a general consensus among tweens that school breakfast could save time at home in the morning, especially for tweens who prepare their own meals. This time is particularly valuable because it would allow...
them to sleep in later. Adolescents have reported they would rather sleep longer in the morning than eat breakfast (Neumark-Sztainer, 1999).

I would probably eat that instead of eating at home because I know it’s going to be at school and I won’t have to worry about the time issue at home.

School breakfast also saves time by eliminating the time required to clean up. Other tweens who typically have the option of eating at home note that school breakfast eliminates the need for breakfast preparation and cleanup at home in the morning, either for themselves or for their parents.

I think my parents would like it so they wouldn’t have to clean up the dishes and stuff. (Some parents in the focus groups agreed with this sentiment)

You could spend a lot less time at home.

Some tweens who ordinarily eat breakfast at home see school breakfasts as a beneficial option that would be available when circumstances prevent them from eating at home.

If you sleep in, because my cat usually steps on my alarm and sets it off during the middle of the night. I turn it off then and I sleep in by accident.

If you have a lot of homework and you didn’t get it all done the night before, and you have to do it when you normally eat breakfast.

**Variety**

Lexington tweens match national trends for this generation in their love of variety, as the tween years are a time for exploring new options, ideas, and activities. Because of this, Lexington tweens note that any School Breakfast Program should have a variety of menu options, and that this variety should be constantly changing.

Students in one focus group specifically state that they prefer to avoid a predictable routine in school meals. At the same time, students want to be made aware of their choices in advance.

They have the same thing every week. (Lexington tween describing a drawback of the current School Breakfast Program)
Preferred Breakfast Foods

Importantly, 36.8% of the students surveyed list the foods offered during the Grab-N-Go pilot as something they like about the program. The student survey found that the top six most-requested foods the students would like to see offered for breakfast at school are cereal (79), doughnuts (60), eggs (38), pancakes (35), bacon (34), and pizza (34). The high demand for cereal is somewhat surprising, and may represent an opportunity to increase milk consumption in addition to school breakfast consumption. Some of the foods offered during the Grab-N-Go breakfast are found in the 20 most popular suggestions, including muffins (26 students), yogurt (17), fruit (15), and chicken (15). Of students listing specific foods as items they like about the program overall, chicken, yogurt, muffin, and Go-gurt are most popular. The focus groups confirm tween preferences for these four items, as well as for fresh fruit (muffins and chicken on a roll were most popular), and indicate some disdain for the parfait and cheese on a roll entrées.

Portability

A few students expose an unintended consequence of the Grab-N-Go program when they indicate a desire to save some breakfast items for later in the day. Such behavior is deemed problematic by many of the middle school principals the research team spoke with, but may indicate a deeper problem associated with student hunger throughout the school day. Nonetheless, some students see the ability to turn Grab-N-Go foods into snacks later in the day as a benefit of the Grab-N-Go program.
I could probably eat it after school, because I get really hungry then, because we have a really early lunch, my class does.

Conspicuously absent from tweens’ view of school breakfast are benefits mentioned by adults, including improved test scores and improved classroom behavior. These factors are described in greater detail in the Partners portion of the Place section.

**Marketing Questions**

Which benefits of school breakfast do tweens value most?
Because consumers always have choices, it is important to consider how the competition influences health behavior. In social marketing, competition refers to the behavioral options that compete with public health recommendations and services, i.e., activities that compete for tweens’ time.

In the case of school breakfast, Lexington research indicates that tweens see three primary competitors:

- Eating breakfast at home (also described above)
- Eating breakfast elsewhere
- Before-school activities

**Eating breakfast at home**

Reasons given for eating breakfast at home instead of at school include:

- Cost: it is cheaper to eat at home, especially for families with several children
- Greater control over the food served and consumed
- Lack of time to eat at school
- Personal preference for foods not served at school or for eating in the home environment

**Eating breakfast elsewhere**

Some Lexington tweens, despite not eating breakfast at home, get breakfast from other locations, namely fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Students were observed arriving at school with bags from McDonalds and some focus group tweens describe a daily ritual of stopping by a gas station convenience store near school before school starts to purchase such items as doughnuts, candy, chips, milk, and soft drinks.
**Before-school activities**

Lexington tweens who participate in clubs and sports that meet before school starts say they do not have time to eat breakfast at school.

*It would be good for the basketball team, because we’re always hungry. No one eats breakfast because we have practice in the morning sometimes, have to get up earlier.*

**Marketing Questions**

*Which benefits best distinguish school breakfast from its competition?*
Pricing Strategy

In social marketing, price refers to the psychological, social, and financial costs that consumers exchange for product benefits. The goal of the pricing strategy is to identify the costs of eating school breakfast and develop ways to make those costs more affordable for tweens and their families. The major costs of school breakfast identified by tweens in Lexington are:

- Time at home
- Time at school
- Food choices and quality
- Monetary cost

Time at home

Time constraints at home and at school appear to be the biggest reason for tweens to avoid breakfast overall. Tweens and parents in the Lexington focus groups gave vivid descriptions of harried morning routines, whether or not breakfast was included. For some tweens, parent work schedules keep them from eating breakfast, while many more tweens simply use the time that would be occupied by breakfast for sleep or to complete homework.

I can never eat breakfast on school days because I don’t have time.

My mom works at the hospital at nights, and it’s... when I do eat breakfast, it’s hard for her to come home and... because she doesn’t get home until 7:30, and I have to go by then.

Time at school

The morning schedule at school is also a significant barrier to the School Breakfast Program. In the Tates Creek survey, 19% of students list lack of time as a reason they did not participate in the Grab-N-Go program and 54% said time is a critical factor in whether or not they eat breakfast at school. In fact, some tweens have more time to eat at home than at school.
Kids at my school ... we have breakfast, and they’re always late to class because they’re in the lunchroom eating breakfast.

But our school doesn’t do that. For our breakfast, we have exactly like 15 minutes and then we have to go to our lockers and then we start homeroom and stuff. So we don’t have enough time to eat because it depends on what time you get to school.

A lot of people would just rather eat at home. Because they have more time.

The busing schedule is especially problematic for tweens who depend upon it for transportation.

And my bus is always the last bus. Once we get in, it says, “All buses are here,” and then they start.

Yeah, but that middle school bus is tough because it’s made at least two runs, sometimes three, depending on where they’re coming from, because they run the elementary schools—there are two elementary schedules and then the high school buses and then middle school starts. So those...if those middle school buses get behind on any one of those two or three legs that have run before it, they just don’t have enough time. (Lexington parent)

The amount of time required to purchase breakfast at school is also mentioned by over one third of students as a factor influencing their decision to eat at school.

Clearly, morning schedules at home and school are a major issue that must be considered when designing a School Breakfast Program.
Food Choices and Quality

Many students are unaware of the numerous difficulties inherent in school food service: federal nutrition and pricing guidelines, tight budgets, small staffs, inadequate time to serve meals, and wide ranges of tastes, to name a few. Despite these constraints, thousands of meals are served daily at a particularly low cost.

Sadly, school food service is often an underappreciated job. This reality is particularly pertinent to the creation of a marketing plan. To increase school breakfast consumption, tween perceptions cannot be discounted. Their most common complaints are rumors of expired/ outdated food, food temperature, and food preferences.

• Rumors of expired/ outdated food

Early in the Grab-N-Go program, students were given orange juice cartons that were stamped with a manufacture date (as opposed to an expiration date) of February 14. Some students consuming the orange juice in May began to spread rumors about “expired orange juice.” These rumors were readily recalled by students in the surveys conducted a few weeks after the incident, and perhaps more remarkably were just as clearly detailed in the focus groups that were conducted a full two months after the Grab-N-Go program.

_Tween One:_ One kid was going around telling people that the orange juice was outdated and he had one that was... outdated January 15 or something.

_Tween Two:_ Oh, that’s nothing. My friend, she had one that was from December from two years ago. From two years, from that time.

• Food temperature

Food and beverage temperature is also a source of frequent complaints from the tweens, both in discussions of the Grab-N-Go menu items and school foods in general. Tweens speak particularly often about milk, which is prone to freezing.

_Some of the food that wasn’t supposed to be warm was warm._

...the apple, because it’s been in there with the chicken, the apple would be warm.

_Like the pretzel was cold but the peaches was hot._
• **Food preferences**

Students also voice strong preferences about breakfast foods served. They are less likely to eat breakfast at school on days when they do not like the foods offered. In fact, several students suggest that upcoming menus be more actively advertised so that they can “decide whether to eat at home or at school”.

• **Stigma**

Finally, there was ample concern early in Grab-N-Go planning that many students would be reticent to eat breakfast at school because of the belief that only students who are eligible for free and reduced price school meals eat breakfast at school. Such stigma is not mentioned at all in the surveys, and is rarely mentioned in the tween focus groups (parents mentioned the stigma more than the tweens did). The relatively large number of students participating in the Grab-N-Go program, even in the second week, combined with the relative absence of the issue in focus group discussions may indicate that the free/reduced stigma is not a major barrier to tween participation in a School Breakfast Program.

**Monetary Cost**

Monetary cost is not a widespread barrier to participation. Although 35% rank cost as one of the top five considerations in deciding whether or not to eat breakfast at school, only 5% of students surveyed list the actual cost of the Grab-N-Go breakfast as a reason for participating. Similarly, there was relatively little conversation among tween or parent focus group participants about the cost of school breakfasts. Of those tweens who find the school breakfast option too expensive, a few mention the effect of this added daily cost in addition to other daily costs, particularly as spread across multiple siblings. Some parents agree with this statement. A few other tweens note that the money allocated for breakfast might be better spent on other food options.

*And probably if it was cheaper, because my mom doesn’t like to spend a lot every single day, because I already have to have something to buy a drink. And I run track and we’re not allowed to drink sodas. We’re only allowed to have one a week during track, so she already has to pay a dollar to get that drink, whatever.*
It’s not too expensive, but we always don’t have the money.

If I wanted to get…if I would pay for a milk and a muffin, I could get three doughnuts and a big thing of milk at the Speedway or something like that.

Interestingly, many of the focus group discussions about the Grab-N-Go program conducted after the program itself reveal a great deal of confusion about the actual price of the Grab-N-Go breakfast (for which $1.10 was charged). Many students insist that the breakfast cost $1.60, which correlates with the cost of the lunchtime meal at school. There are a couple of other respondents who believe the breakfast cost $4.00. Misperceptions about the price of breakfast may have contributed to lower Grab-N-Go participation in the second (non-free) week of the program, as the vast majority of tweens and parents considered $1.10 to be a fair price. (Some tweens prefer $1.00 for convenience sake – a matter that would need to be addressed at the state/federal level).

Marketing Questions

How can we reduce the perceived costs of eating school breakfast for tweens and their families?
Placement Strategy

Place refers to the distribution of goods and the location of sales and service encounters. In social marketing, place may be thought of as where and when tweens can be purchase and eat school breakfast. Place includes the actual physical location of these outlets, operating hours, general attractiveness and comfort, and accessibility. It also includes partners or intermediaries – key stakeholders – that can provide information, goods and services and perform other functions that facilitate the change process.

Location

The most successful location to serve and eat school breakfast is a matter of some debate. On one hand, focus group data clearly indicates that a strategy including breakfast sales in a common morning entry/gathering area would be vastly preferable to sales in the cafeteria itself. It seems quite clear that more students would take advantage of school breakfast if the breakfasts were sold in common areas.

Or the front where the kids come in, just have a little booth or something, because that would be really easy. You could just walk right over, then you wouldn’t have to get out of your routine because I don’t like to make a detour.

Yeah, like when you walk in probably, in the front hallway or in the front, so people, when you walk in you’ll see it and you won’t have to go all the way back to the cafeteria.

Further, students prefer eating Grab-N-Go breakfasts in these common areas, particularly in classrooms (homeroom was frequently mentioned as a good time/place to eat a school breakfast by students whose schedules include a homeroom period). Many tweens also see hallways and gymnasiums as good places to eat school breakfast.
Like, if we have a certain time in the morning, like if we had 10 minutes to just sit in your classroom and just eat breakfast and finish it and then start the day. If they just reserved a certain time for us to do that.

What if that breakfast could be right after first period or something? That would be cool.

• Messiness

On the other hand, middle school principals and parents acknowledge difficulties inherent in allowing food in places outside the cafeteria (e.g., milk spilled on classroom carpets). Many of the tweens who participated in the preliminary focus groups about the Grab-N-Go breakfast option feel as though their teachers and principals would never allow students to eat outside of the cafeteria (i.e., in common areas or classrooms). This resistance is among the most-often mentioned barriers to school breakfast. On the other hand, the tweens indicate that they see eating outside of the cafeteria as a privilege, recognizing that said privilege could be retracted were they to be excessively messy.

I really don’t want to start inviting the kids to eat in the classrooms because it’s hard enough to keep those carpets. A lot of the rooms have carpet, and when somebody spills something, it’s hard enough to keep those carpets clean as it is, and we discourage eating food down in the classrooms anyway. (Lexington Middle School Principal)

Another drawback to the Grab-N-Go program is the potential for additional trash. There were isolated incidents of food throwing and exploding Go-gurt in the Grab-N-Go pilot program. This is a significant concern for the school principal, and for some teachers, as well. A member of the school custodial staff downplays the added cleaning effort, stating:

Just because your cafeteria is built for food handling, I’d prefer everything to stay in the cafeteria, but we did try it in the gym also, and it still wasn’t a bad...I mean, they didn’t make a mess with it in...even in the gym. It was still a good...you know, it was pretty good. To me, it was still safe enough to go into classrooms in the morning, if you had to go that route, other than have to have a cafeteria. You know, you could actually take this in...on a cart and put it into classrooms in the morning if they didn’t have a cafeteria, you know.

The custodian also suggests that fruit be sliced so that there is less temptation to throw it.

The tweens are quite aware of their own propensities, and see these as a barrier to the program being allowed to exist, particularly outside of the cafeteria:
I know a lot of kids don’t even throw things away at lunch, so you there would be a lot more trash in school.

Many students explain that messiness associated with school breakfast can be alleviated through enforcement of existing rules. (Further, for what it’s worth, a few students indicate a desire for more trash cans in school hallways.)

A lot of times they have rules, they aren’t really enforced, but if you enforce them, then they work.

**Marketing Questions**

Should school breakfasts be sold and/or eaten outside of the cafeteria? How can messiness associated with school breakfast best be addressed?
Any School Breakfast Program requires a multitude of stakeholders to achieve success. Parents, school food service personnel, teachers, principals, and custodial personnel should be involved, in addition, of course, to the tween consumers themselves. Key points to consider in working with these groups are briefly explained below.

**Parents**

Parent opinions regarding the Grab-N-Go program itself vary, though focus groups conducted after the program reveal more positive parental opinions than focus groups conducted before the program. Parent-raised key issues associated with school breakfast are outlined below.

- **Importance of breakfast**

  Most, but not all Lexington parents who participated in the focus groups, agree that breakfast is an important meal, particularly for their children. Many parents agree that children should eat in the morning, particularly in cases when their children don’t eat lunch until later in the day.

  *But I kind of lean more toward the eggs and oatmeal because I think that will stay with him a little bit longer, considering that they don’t eat lunch until 12:30. So, he gets on the bus at 8:15, 8:20, he doesn’t eat again till 12:00, that’s four hours later, and for them, I think it’s a little harder. For me, I could probably… do…go…should go longer without eating. But it’s… For them, I think it’s important to have something good on their stomach that’s going to last for a while.*

  Parents list several benefits of breakfast for their children, including sufficient energy, added mental capacity, and improved behavior.

  *But, yeah, it’s very important. I think their brains wouldn’t…they’d just be too lethargic and too sluggish, and they just wouldn’t have the brain power if they didn’t have the breakfast.*
I remember a guy—a nutritionist or something, come into school when I was in high school, and said to us one time—we were having a health fair or something—and he said, “Just remember: you haven’t eaten since the night before. Your brain needs the food, your brain has to have food to think,” and I tell my kids that. They’re almost like, “Oh, the brain’s got to have food.” Whether your stomach is hungry or not, just, your brain has to get started in the morning.

Breakfast is the meal where you can eat whatever you want and you work it off during the day, so I don’t think there’s anything that is too unhealthy for breakfast.

Some parents, however, express a lack of willingness to push breakfast on their children, allowing them to make the choice of whether to eat or not.

I don’t think that forcing them to have breakfast is the right idea, either. If you get up and you’re not hungry, why eat? ... It hasn’t affected my senior son, he doesn’t eat. So, and he goes to school, he’s doing just fine.

Well, mine don’t care to eat in the morning, and I feel guilty about that because I do go down and the food is there. I have a bowl of bran cereal with strawberries or banana or some kind of healthful thing. And the food is there, but they just choose not to eat.

• Monetary Cost

Most parents see the $1.10 price for school breakfast as fair, though some point out that breakfast served at home is more cost effective for them.

Well, my problem with it is, it’s just more money to spend, they’re always nickel-and-diming us to death at school. You are constantly sending in money for something, and we probably would not participate because of that, because we have...my daughter has time to eat breakfast at home and that’s just what we would probably continue to do.

One parent suggests that school breakfast be an entirely free program, owing to the many benefits of breakfast:

It seems like it would be more beneficial for the school to—never mind the 35 cents that the school will make off of this bag of food, because it is ultimately the school, the individual schools, the school system and the community as a whole who are going to benefit from kids who are well-fed in the mornings and do better in class, don’t misbehave as
often because they have the distraction of hunger, doing better on their testing, their grades are higher, then you get higher marks on the federal side of things, and more federal money to take care of this and everything else. Seems like a…it would be important enough to just say, “Here you go.”

• **Time**

Parents discuss time in a number of ways in the focus groups. Many parents have hectic morning schedules, though a hectic schedule does not necessarily correlate with whether no breakfast is served at home.

*Especially if you’re like me: I have to be at work at 7:00, so I get myself up at 4:30, and it’s just like a chore, just, well, I’ve got to wake up everybody in the house, and I go through the house and say, “Well, no one wakes me up.” But, with all that said, it’s just…it’s a big rush basically, trying to provide them a good, nutritional breakfast.*

*It may be an advantage to some of the parents that feel like they’re rushed with having to prepare breakfast for the kids in the morning. Then they have that option that they’ll have it at school then, so.* (Lexington parent referring to Grab-N-Go program)

*I think it’s good. I think it’s convenient. If the children would just…grab onto it, I guess, it would be good.* (Lexington parent referring to Grab-N-Go program)

*Yeah, I’d…tell them to do that. Save some time around the house and mess around the house.* (Lexington parent referring to Grab-N-Go program)

Other parents are concerned about their children avoiding too much morning free time at school:

*Mine would never eat breakfast at school because I don’t leave them any more than I have to, and I would never have them just sitting there all that time enough to eat breakfast at school.*

Parents echo tweens in seeing school breakfast as an emergency option to be exercised if there’s no time or food available to eat at home.

*Me not making it to the grocery. Because sometimes my kids are real bad about, they’ll use the last drop of milk or whatever, and they drink orange juice like it’s… water.*
Another point that parents frequently make about breakfast at school is the opportunity for social time it provides. Parents differ as to whether they consider this a positive or negative aspect of school breakfast.

I think this is what my daughter really likes about having breakfast at school, is the social time. They have their cafeteria and they can go sit and they can have that morning where they’re talking about whatever from the night before and what they’re going to do during the day, because they go off into all their other classes. So it’s a social…it’s that first morning social time. It’s like us having coffee at work or whatever with your co-workers.

• Getting the information

Over half of the Tates Creek Middle School parents who participated in focus groups conducted after the Grab-N-Go program report knowing nothing about the program prior to the focus group. Many parents are highly concerned about what they perceive as a minimal flow of information from the school. Parent suggestions for improved information flow are contained in the Promotion section, below. One parent’s comment about this lack of information is particularly telling:

See, and my kids conned me into taking them to the store so they could make a goodie bag, because I was thinking that it was something they had to bring to school. (Lexington parent upon hearing a description of the Grab-N-Go program)

• Role of parents

Some Lexington parents feel particularly helpless when it comes to making their own opinions known to school decision-makers. The multitude of school decision-makers (i.e. principals, teachers, central office staff, parent-teacher associations, site-based decision-making councils) is seen by many parents as difficult to navigate. Further, some parents report resistance when trying to work with one of these groups.

I think sometimes it seems like PTA is kind of a clique, and I keep saying, “You need new blood,” and, “If this should recycle itself,” and, “If you’ve done this for a few years, look around, find somebody and bring some more people in.”

A few parents report achieving some success in making their opinions known to school authorities. This success appears to positively affect their opinions of the process.
Again, our school is real good about healthy stuff …I have made particular friends with the lunch ladies, and they think that’s just a boot that I care anything about them. I said, “You feed my kids. Five days a week you are their mom at lunch, so I want to know what you’re making here, I want to know what they’re choosing…” And so, they know my kids and they know what they’re eating.

School Food Service Personnel

As noted earlier in this report, there is no doubt that school food service personnel are underappreciated. Food workers at Tates Creek Middle School were quite willing to do the extra work that came along with implementing a new School Breakfast Program, and certainly seem to have students’ best nutritional interests in mind. Further, it was reported that the implementation of the Grab-N-Go breakfast project may have improved morale for the school nutrition staff at Tates Creek Middle School, as the group proved to themselves that they were more than capable of instituting such a change.

You know, all food service people have the children’s benefit at heart, and we’re in the business because we like to feed children. We want to see the children be well-nourished and happy, we like to give the children food they like. You know, it’s just an extension… The school kitchen is just an extension of the kitchen at home, and I think we…she and the rest of us, her staff, we were pleased to think that we were doing something that the children would…would benefit the children, the children would like.

Specific changes to the Grab-N-Go program suggested by school food service staff include providing a chocolate milk choice, better promotion, provision of more hot foods, an improved bag for moisture resistance, and working with bus schedules to allow more students time to eat breakfast at school. The 15-20 minute window of opportunity schools have to feed hundreds of children breakfast at each school is considered a significant barrier. There is currently some discussion about a change in start times in the 2005-2006
school year which may alleviate this time crunch somewhat, provided school officials decide to allocate some of the added time for school meals. Another important suggestion made by the school food service director is that there be better lines of communication between parents and school food service, so that parents might come to better understand some of the requirements that school food service staff face.

• **Teachers**

Teacher reaction to the Grab-N-Go breakfasts offered during CATS testing is generally positive. Of those who completed the survey, 93% indicate that the program was “no inconvenience for me”, and 83% indicate that they would definitely or probably recommend the program to teachers from other schools. Teacher comments are also largely positive, with some comments about food being taken into classrooms or thrown in the gymnasium.

> A few kids tried to eat in class at first, but no real problems.

> Students were not complaining of being hungry.

> Bags are not good too easy for kids to sneak food out of the lunchroom.

> The promotion of breakfast is a real benefit to the kids. I think this promotion had a positive effect on getting more kids to eat.

• **Principals**

Eight Lexington middle school principals were interviewed as part of the coalition’s research efforts. Of those eight, seven indicate that they would support a Grab-N-Go type-program aimed at increasing school breakfast consumption. Two of the seven principals, including the principal at Tates Creek Middle School, indicate their strong preference that the program be restricted to the cafeteria.

> The one major problem we had was down in the gym. One day we didn’t have enough supervision and the kids took advantage of it.
and started throwing the fruit, the apples, the cartons of orange juice and milk. (Tates Creek Middle School Principal describing Grab-N-Go program)

Nonetheless, the Tates Creek Middle School principal, whose efforts were essential to the existence of the program, seems generally pleased with the results.

And so, my pleasant surprise was that they didn't leave a mess down in the gym that I was expecting. That was a nice, pleasant surprise. I was also kind of pleasantly surprised on how many kids actually participated. ... That...it actually went faster than what I expected, because that was one of the other things that I was pleasantly surprised with is, is I was really expecting a...a lag time, and we were going to be ready to start school and we wouldn't be able to because kids were still eating breakfast. But, with the Grab-and-Go, they were pretty much able to come right on through and, just like it says, grab the bag and go.

Most of the other principals interviewed seem equally committed to their students' eating breakfast daily, while mentioning the problems of school timing, bus schedules, classroom management, student supervision, and cleanliness that have already been mentioned elsewhere in this report. Some of the principals also demonstrate a keen awareness of the issues that school food service personnel at their schools face.

Our lunch ladies do an excellent job. They're wonderful folks. They're just trying to get something done that's difficult to do.

For principals, one of the key selling points for school breakfast is its ability to provide students with the daily start they need to perform well on state testing. In the case of Tates Creek Middle School, the 2004 Academic Index for CATS testing rose from 60.6 in 2003 to 64.1 in 2004, with particularly strong improvement in Social Studies, Practical Living/Vocational Studies, and Science. There is no way to directly link the Grab-N-Go Breakfast Program to this elevation in score status, but the news may be an important selling point for principals and other administrators, nonetheless. What is established is that students who are hungry perform less well on standardized tests that students who are not hungry (CHPNP, 1998).

Principals and administrators are also likely to see other benefits associated with school breakfast. Students who participate in school breakfast have lower rates of absence and tardiness (Cook, Ohri-Vachaspati, Kelly, 1996; Murphy, Pagano, Bishop, 2001), demonstrate improved reading and math scores (MDCFL, 1998), show
improved speed and memory in cognitive tests (Grantham-McGregor, Chang, Walker, 1998), have fewer
discipline problems (MDCFL, 1998), and are suspended from school less often (Murphy, et al., 2001).

• Custodial Personnel

The research conducted for this report includes one interview with a Tates Creek Middle School custodial
staff member, who is supportive of the Grab-N-Go Breakfast Program (see comments in the “Messiness”
section above). Still, one person’s opinion is not a representative sample of the group of custodial personnel
who would be affected by any program aimed at increasing the number of students who eat breakfast at
school. For this reason, custodial personnel should likely be engaged as key stakeholders in the School
Breakfast Program planning and implementation process.

Marketing Questions

How can the coalition encourage parents to promote breakfast to tweens?

How can the coalition encourage school food service staff, teachers, principals, custodial staff, and other community mentors to promote breakfast to tweens?
Promotional Strategy

The Promotional Strategy includes guidelines for designing attention-getting and effective messages; spokespersons, and designation of appropriate information. Promotional activities may encompass advertising, public relations, printed materials, promotional items, signage, special events and displays, personal selling and entertainment media. Policy changes, professional training, community-based activities, and skills building usually are combined with communication activities to bring about the desired changes.

Two audiences are key in considering promotional strategy for a School Breakfast Program: tweens and their parents. Promotion ideas from the focus group discussions are presented in bulleted form below, first for tweens, then for their parents.

Promoting School Breakfast to Tweens

- Use peer influence

  *It’s like, if some people said it was good, then everyone would just try it and it would just probably grow from there.*

  You could have a certain group of people who know a bunch of people and talk a lot could start it doing it, or work on it for the first week. Then the more people would know about it. (i.e. viral marketing)

- Avoid unpublicized menu changes
- Use school celebrities as spokespersons

  *They could get a bunch of people...like the football players or the basketball team or the cheerleading team.*

- Use school announcements to explain the breakfast program/menu
At the end of the school year when they had it, they had a news thing where it tells you...what was happening in school, and they should have put it on there.

- Use email/school website to distribute program information/menu
- Provide up-to-date promotional posters in key places at school

I don’t know, but the big thing with them is kids who are dressed for the 70s and stuff and they think they look really dorky ... You want kids on the posters that are dressed in style. I don’t know, it doesn’t bother me. But they were all grossed out about the Health book or something because the kids were all in 70s look.

- Allow tweens to design the packaging themselves
- Create a student committee to help design menus and promote the program
- Provide prizes/incentives for purchasing the breakfasts

To persuade people to buy them, you could have a sticker on the bottom of it or something, for a prize or something like that.

You could also do incentives in school, like teacher incentive, where you could give the kid a free breakfast coupon for doing X-Y-Z. (Lexington parent)

- Allow students to fill their own bags as they go through the line

Yeah, if they let you make a combination, like go, “I want this and this,” and three things—one, two, three—in a bag. That would be cool.

- If the breakfasts are served in the cafeteria, improve the cafeteria environment

I’d probably make a few alterations, add decorations.
Promoting School Breakfast to Parents

There appears to be no single best and most affordable way for schools to communicate with parents. Parents see direct mail as most effective, but principals note the high cost of such mailings. For this reason, active and continued promotion using a multitude of resources may be the best strategy.

- Allow sufficient time and resources to get the word out, using:
  - Email
  - School website
  - Mailed newsletters (including with report cards)
  - Parent orientation
  - PTA meetings
  - Newsletters sent home with students (some, but not nearly all, of these make it home, according to parents and tweens)
  - Channel 13
  - Signage at school entry areas (student pick-up zones)

*When they have assemblies and the parents come, then they could tell them about it, instead of standing there talking on and on and on.* (Lexington tween)

*Nobody takes the newsletters home. Those are basketballs. You just shoot them in the garbage.* (Lexington tween)

- Provide assurance that breakfast money will be spent on breakfast by encouraging parents to put the money on students’ cafeteria meal card

*If I gave my child a dollar and a quarter and said, “If you want to have breakfast, I hear they’re going to have breakfast available and it’s grab-and-go and so you can grab it and then go to study hall or do stuff,” he’d pocket the money and spend it later on something else.*

*Well, now, that’s solved if you have the lunch money into their account, where if they are actually hungry they can go through the line and get it, but you don’t give them the cash.*
• Actively involve parents in program design and implementation, utilizing their own powers of peer influence

Added promotional note: It is perhaps easy to overlook Lexington’s several private schools in promoting school breakfast. Lexington parents whose children attend private schools reported many of the same barriers to breakfast, as did their tween children.

**Marketing Questions**

*Which of these suggestions should the coalition adopt when promoting school breakfast to tweens and their parents?*
variety of other school nutrition topics were discussed in focus groups and individual interviews, often without prompting by the moderator. In fact, in almost all group discussions, parents and tweens voice their opinions about the school food service, revealing two apparent themes:

(1) People seem particularly eager to discuss School Food Service; and

(2) Feelings about school food service exist along a broad range, from extreme appreciation to strong contempt.

This portion of the report focuses on these issues: school food and beverage options, school food presentation and atmosphere, and the school nutrition curriculum. These areas are presented below with as much data on benefits, barriers, etc. as is available from the focus groups and interviews. A series of marketing questions follows this section of the report.
All stakeholders express concern about the foods and beverages available at school. We look first at the items and portions offered at lunch and then focus on snacks sold at school.

School Lunch Variety and Portion Control

• Menu Variety

Lexington tweens indicate a strong preference for a variety of menu options. They want these options to be constantly changing (i.e. they prefer that a school menu not have the same items on a weekly rotation), and they desire frequent introduction of new foods.

If they start out with grapes and oranges on Monday, grapes and oranges will stay there for like three weeks, then they’ll change it. (Lexington tween)

This desire for variety explains why some innovative cafeteria options, such as salad bars, are quite successful when they are first introduced to a school, only to wane in popularity over time.

We have had experience with salad bars for a long time, and it has...my experience has been, when we first started them, it goes great guns. Everybody wants to from eat the salad bar. And then pretty soon you’ve got five people going to the salad bar: ...yesterday we fed 1,034 reimbursable lunches at (a Fayette County school), and about 35 of the people went to the salad bar. (School Food Service Director)

• Providing Healthy Food Options

Tween desire for variety could be an excellent way to introduce healthy food options. Several Lexington parents and a few principals believe school menu options to be too high in calories and fat. Noting fried and “snack” (nachos and pizza are common examples) foods served at mealtimes, some of these respondents
believe that the cafeteria’s need to make a profit is overshadowing its’ mission of providing healthy meals. A la carte items and fast food options in school cafeterias are also seen by parents and tweens alike as poor nutrition, but a financial boon for school food service. Indeed, the elimination of fast food in schools is listed as a top five priority by community participants in a recent state-sponsored obesity forum held in Lexington. Importantly, other parents and principals are quick to praise school food service for its ability to serve thousands of students balanced meals at affordable prices.

Still, parents seem reliant on school menu offerings as role models for eating habits at home:

Well, I know the schools play a big part, too, because …with my…seven-year-old, if he doesn’t like what they’re having, they’ll just give him peanut butter and jelly. … They really need to give them the healthier stuff that they’re having instead of giving them an alternative. And with my five-year-old, he goes to Maxwell, so they had El Jardin [salad bar] every week, so he couldn’t wait to have those salads. He just loved it. … And now he likes that at home, too, so that’s a positive role model.

Crucial from a marketing perspective, Lexington focus group data shows that tweens are indeed open to trying new, healthy menu options. Some Lexington tweens went so far in focus groups as to advocate for removal of less healthy options (generically defined) so that their peers would have no choice but to achieve better diets. The key here appears to be variety. Another popular suggestion is allowing a committee of tweens to have a hand in selecting and marketing these “healthy” menu options.

• School Portion Control

Several parents are concerned about the portions that their children receive at school meals, while some tweens are reporting unhealthy levels of consumption. Importantly, at issue here is not only possible duties of school food service staff, but of other school personnel, as well.

But the school doesn’t control it as far as healthy portions, the school controls it as far as money portions …Because my son can go up and get five pineapple upside down cakes if he wants to … lunch lady is not going to say, “Oh, well, you’re a little bit overweight, you don’t need to have that.” … But I’ve already been through that, and they’ve told me that’s not their responsibility to monitor my child’s food. (Lexington parent)
And they have to pay extra if they want extra. So, that’s pretty much the only control, I think, over the basic, obvious control: you can’t eat a whole pan of this stuff. But I think the school already, basically, does control that, and what they feel are healthy portions. I think they need to increase it a little bit. (Lexington parent)

Like the chicken sandwiches, I have two, and three things of fries. (Lexington tween describing his favorite lunch day at the school cafeteria)

School Snacks and Vending

- Soft Drinks/Vending

The Center for Weight and Health (CWH) considers the reduction of sweetened beverages one of the most promising interventions to prevent childhood obesity (CWH 2001). Soft drinks are the sixth leading food source of energy among children, representing over 50% of total beverage consumption (Subar, Dobes-Smith, and Cook, 1998). Soft drinks may also displace more nutritious beverages. For instance, a recent study of children aged 6-13 years found that children will choose sweetened drinks over milk when given a choice, but will drink milk if not given a choice (Mrdjenovic 2003). Research also has shown that each 4.2-ounce rise in soft drink consumption is associated with a 1-ounce decline in milk consumption; the result is a loss of 34 mg. of calcium and a gain of 31 calories (Yen and Lin, 2002).

The majority of food and beverage vending in FCPS schools is managed by the principal’s office. The beverage machines in the school cafeterias (mostly juice, juice drinks and milk) are managed by the School Food Service and make up only a small portion of the overall school vending program.

School vending decisions outside of the cafeteria are made by a district committee that includes the FCPS internal auditor, a principal from each of the three levels, Directors of Pupil Personnel, School Food Service and Transportation, a representative of the Lexington Fayette County Health Department and a parent. In 2003 Fayette County Public Schools renegotiated their food and beverage vending contracts. The number of
healthy beverages increased from 21% of the machine offerings to 72% and increased the number of healthy snacks from 1% of offerings to 40%. Though more healthy choices are available, there is still room for improvement.

Most Lexington tweens report enjoying the increased non-soda offerings in school vending machines. In some cases, it appears as though these options are insufficiently stocked, as tweens recall instances of their school running out of particular products. Some tweens suggest adding more “healthy drink” machines to school campuses to avoid this stocking problem, while a few go so far as to suggest removal of the soda machines.

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*Every one in the whole school likes three flavors of Gatorade. The only thing everyone drinks. Like Thursday or Wednesday, they came and refilled it, and Thursday, they're all out of those three. I like that kind, too.*

*Well...if they put some more healthy vending machines in the schools, if they took out some of the...because we already have more than one that's Sprite and stuff. If they took out maybe a couple of those and put in some healthier ones to drink...may be better.*

*Take the Coke machine out of the school.* (Lexington tween)

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What is apparent from the focus groups is that beverage vending machines are a part of the routine culture of Lexington tweens. Many tweens report carrying money for one or two drinks daily, particularly if they are involved in athletics (some coaches appear to be discouraging soda consumption, as well). Additionally, several Lexington tweens express a desire to have some of the vending machine beverage options available to them in the lunch line, as well.

Of course some, several Lexington tweens prefer soda, and soda sales continue to be profitable for the schools and for the soda companies who pay exclusivity money to the school district to stock machines on campus. Tweens tell stories of avoiding policies that prohibit soda sales at certain times of the day by simply making their soda purchase in the teacher’s lounge, where the machine has no time lock.

Several Lexington parents also express disdain for school food vending machines, though Lexington tweens appear to be aware of the availability of new, cheaper and healthier options, largely due to an in-school advertising campaign sponsored by the Lexington/Fayette County Health Department. Students report
frequenting these machines, as well as school-operated concessions. These machines/concessions are required by state law not to conflict in operating schedule with school food service, but appear to be utilized by some tweens as their only source of school food. Along those lines, legislative policies for school vending machines are seen as a top five priority by Lexington residents who participated in the recent state-sponsored regional obesity forum. ¹

Parental opinions vary regarding snacks in Lexington schools. Some parents strongly oppose snacking at school for nutritional reasons, while others believe that their children should be allowed to snack at school as needed in order to avoid the lack of attentiveness that hunger creates.

A key issue raised in focus group discussions, however, is that of the origin of school snack foods. In-classroom sales appear to account for a significant portion of school snacking, generally as teachers strive to raise funds for the various extracurricular activities they sponsor.

_In Social Studies, our teacher, (name omitted), she has a drawer full of candy bars and everything. You can buy stuff from her and eat it in her class._

Lexington tweens are quite savvy about their windows of opportunity for school snacking, listing in focus groups names of permissive teachers.

_What teachers you get ... Because if you get a certain teacher, then you know not to eat in there. (Lexington tween responding to question about what affects the amount of food eaten at school)_

• **Food as Reward**

In a statewide survey, 88% of KY schools said they used food as rewards for good behavior and academic performance. Pizza, candy, soft drinks and ice cream are the most common food rewards used in KY schools.
Teachers said the advantages of using food as rewards are that it’s easy, inexpensive and can bring about short term behavior change.

But using food as rewards for children is potentially problematic. Drawbacks include:

- role modeling poor nutrition habits to children, making classroom teaching strictly theoretical
- foods commonly used as rewards can contribute to health problems for children: obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cavities
- food preferences for sweet food increase significantly when foods are presented as rewards (Birch, 1990).
- may contribute to “disordered eating”

Many Lexington parents admit they use food as a reward, many apologetically, others unabashedly. Most Lexington parents, however, are unhappy about the idea of food being used as a reward in the classroom.

_I hate it when the teachers give them candy for doing their math. You do your math because you’re in school and that’s what you do. I think, sure, that there are times when you celebrate with food, but I think it’s a bad thing to set them up to teach them that, “I have accomplished something and so now I’m going to eat unhealthy things.” Because invariably, what the reward is, is some junk thing that you won’t let them have._

_Oh, yeah, my son came home the last day of school, the movie theater boxes of candy: the Nerds, the Sweet Tarts, the ones that you buy when you go to see a movie ... And I’m like, “First of all, you can’t have it because you’ve got braces.”_

Lexington tweens, however, indicate that they often receive food as a reward in the classroom. They can list the teachers who are most generous with food.

One Lexington middle school principal, asked about the prevalence of food as a reward in the classroom, is aware of both pros and cons of using food as a reward in the classroom.
That’s a tough one. I mean, because that’s the one thing that’s inexpensive and the kids like it, and, I mean, and you want intrinsic motivation to be the primary thing, but intrinsic motivation doesn’t always work. And I think food as a reward is kind of a double-edged thing. I mean, a lot of kids will perform for it and it’s affordable, and trying to find something else that… And, usually, …our teachers who do offer food as a reward, there are also other options, like computer time or, you know, free time to go the library. I mean, they offer other hooks which a lot of kids take, but there are some kids who, that…isn’t appealing.

The principal went on to state that he/she hadn’t considered placing limits on in-classroom food rewards, but would be particularly willing to consider alternatives.

(Footnotes)

1 Kentucky 2005 House Bill 56, filed by Representatives Burch and Feeley, would, if passed, address many school menu and vending issues by requiring the following:

- prohibit a school from selling during a school day food with more than 40% added sugar by weight, or items with more than 6 grams of fat per serving, except for seeds and nuts
- prohibit an elementary school from selling soda during a school day require during a school day that 75% of beverages offered in a middle school consist of healthy beverages
- prohibit healthy beverages from being sold at a higher price than other beverages
As noted in the pricing strategy section of part two above, tweens and parents alike raised comments about school food presentation and atmosphere. This section merely reiterates those comments, adding some supporting information so that the coalition may more effectively decide whether to address this issue.

- **Food presentation**

Lexington school food service personnel admit that there is room to improve the presentation of the food served in Lexington school cafeterias. Tweens appear particularly sensitive to presentation of fruit and vegetables, which are prone to spoil. The use of non-disposable plates and silverware is even becoming hard to find, owing to difficulties experienced in hiring and retaining dishwashers. Still, Lexington tweens and parents note that part of their lack of enthusiasm for school food service emanates from what is seen by many as a particularly bland presentation style. Importantly, at least some elements of presentation may not be incredibly difficult to attain – Lexington tweens are impressed, for example, simply by the colored bags used to hold the Grab-N-Go breakfasts.

*You see a Happy Meal is not in a brown paper bag.*  (Lexington parent)

- **Cafeteria environment**

Similarly, Lexington tweens and parents suggest that the cafeterias themselves are due for a face-lift. Brighter paint and student-created murals are among the tween suggestions for improving the cafeteria environment.

*When the kids come in and sit down, when they sit down and eat, it's always a family environment. You have something that resembles family: plants, paint colors, something that's not so much school. ... You go into a cafeteria, they have a lot of the school things, it's redundant. If you really want to change how they feel about a meal, you change what they see.*  (Lexington parent)
Time allotted for school meals. A major source of concern for all stakeholders in this research is the amount of time students are given to purchase and eat meals at school.

*The first ten minutes that they’re in there, they haven’t seen their friends and they can’t talk in class, and they’re like, “Na-na-na-na-na-na-na.” Five minutes to eat.* (Lexington parent)

*Well, I think these are…these are good programs, but I think in terms of year-round, our kids never have enough time to eat lunch, and that’s a real problem.* (Lexington parent)

While there is ample agreement on all sides that students should be less rushed to eat at school, and recognition that this rushing may contribute to poor nutrition at school and to poor eating habits elsewhere, this issue is nonetheless difficult to solve. Expanding time allotments for school lunch requires an expansion of school facilities, the school day, or both, and as such is a discussion that must be held at the school district and state level. Further, any effort toward expanded school lunch time would likely be concurrent with efforts at expanding school physical activity time.
School Food Service staff are concerned that they are considered to have the main responsibility for promoting good nutrition habits among students. This seems an unfair burden when the rest of the culture promotes poor nutrition in a number of ways.

School Food Service personnel believe that having a strong, consistent nutrition curriculum in the schools would be helpful in getting the students to try more healthy options and increase the variety of foods they try.

School Food Service personnel are not the only individuals who hold this belief. Lexington parents recognize that much of their children’s knowledge of nutrition comes, for better or for worse, from school. Parents point out that voids in nutrition education at school are quickly filled with bad nutritional habits, and that good nutrition education leads to better nutritional choices outside of school.

I really believe that the kids being educated at school has made my life much easier, because they will come home and go, “You know what? That’s not good for me.” And they’ve taken it seriously.

My daughter …I’m kind of surprised when I was asking her about the nutritional aspects. She has a strong sense of…like cholesterol. Did you-all know that word when you were in seventh grade? …She has a strong sense …that some foods are good for you and some foods are bad, and if you eat a lot of the bad foods, you’ll wind up sick. And I think that’s real good for the kids, and I asked her where she learned it, and she said she learned it at school and at Scouts and from home. So, I think it’s important to get those messages.

Importantly, principals report willingness to promote nutritional curriculum, so long as it fits into the parameters set down by state and federal requirements. Principals interviewed are willing to see nutrition (and physical activity) incorporated into multiple subjects, as well (not just health or P.E. class).
In the meantime, Lexington tweens show some confusion between sound nutritional education and popular diet trends (for instance, carbohydrate avoidance was touted by many Lexington tweens as an important health food option). Lexington tweens are well-versed in the Food Pyramid, but demonstrate less ability to parlay that knowledge into healthy food choices (particularly memorable is the tween who unjokingly described Taco Bell as a health food option because “tacos have all parts of the food pyramid”).

Lexington’s School Food Service Director sums up what appears to be a popular desire for nutrition curriculum:

I think if you know about food, you will eat a nutritious diet.

I mean, I don’t think you can separate food from nutrition ...

And I think so many people, like I say, nowadays are not exposed to food, different kinds of food. They have no idea what different foods are. They have no idea. There’s so much in the news, on TV, magazines, everywhere, about food and nutrition, but it is not information that applies to your day-to-day life ... And I think that the schools should spend more time ... teaching children about food.
Marketing Questions

Which of the issues in this part of the report does the coalition want to address in the coming year: school lunch variety and portion control, school vending, food used as reward, school food presentation, cafeteria atmosphere, nutrition curriculum?

For each of the chosen issues:

Who is the target audience?

What are the benefits of the product/behavioral change the coalition wants to promote?

What barriers to the acceptance of the product/behavioral change must be overcome?

Who must be involved in any attempt at overcoming these barriers?

What action steps should be taken to achieve the desired result?
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