

TWITTER TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOL CAFETERIAS

IN THE SPRING OF 2014, the Iowa Department of Education's Team Nutrition Program, along with the University of Iowa Public Policy Center, took on a project to address school breakfast participation among Iowa teens. Iowa currently ranks 47th out of the 50 states in school breakfast participation when comparing the number of students who receive free or reduced priced lunches.

To figure out the best way to address this issue, we worked with students from Waukee High School in Waukee, Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids, and Pleasant Valley High School in Bettendorf. These students identified barriers, motivators, and benefits to eating school breakfast. After much discussion, they determined that Twitter would be the best method to reach their peers and encourage them to eat school breakfast.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide food service directors, cafeteria workers, and school administrators with information and resources to develop and manage their own Twitter account, including how to set up an account, how to develop messages, what to tweet about, and how to increase your followers.

Creating and managing a Twitter account is both easy and a great way to engage your students. There are many tools available that can help you make social media understandable and convenient to use.

We hope these materials will be useful to you in reaching out to students to promote your school breakfast program!

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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Use of social media has become common in communication in the 21st century, especially among adolescents. Social media can refer to a variety of platforms, with the most common being Facebook and Twitter. Using social media has become especially important for organizations to quickly provide information to large numbers of people in a timely manner.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Guide to Writing for Social Media," social media can help organizations achieve the following:

- Disseminate information in a timely manner.
- Increase the potential impact of messages.
- Make information sharing easier across large networks of people.
- Target messages towards particular and diverse audiences.
- Empower people to make healthier decisions.

Social media is very helpful in spreading messages, influencing decision making, and promoting behavior change.¹

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *CDC's guide to writing for social media*. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/guidetowritingforsocialmedia.pdf>

INTRODUCTION TO TWITTER

The high school students we collaborated with over the course of this project identified Twitter as the best option for reaching their peers to address school breakfast participation. Many of the students we talked to said that they did not know that their school served breakfast. Those who did know about the breakfast program said they were not aware of what the breakfast options were. These students think that Twitter will be the easiest and most effective way to share this information with their peers.

Students use Twitter instead of Facebook because of the ease of reading and posting updates. They have moved away from Facebook because parents and other family members use Facebook. Students told us that they check Twitter multiple times per day. It is often one of the first things they check when they wake up in the morning and one of the last things they check before falling asleep at night.

*Facebook remains popular and is used widely among parents. Facebook may be a good choice of medium if you wish to reach out to parents about school meals.

Twitter is a platform composed of short posts—called tweets—used to quickly and immediately share information. Each tweet has a limit of 140 characters, so users have to be creative when they write their posts in order to get their messages across while adhering to the short length. Twitter can be used to share information, pictures, and web links among other things.

Essential Terms

- **Handle:** The term “handle” refers to your Twitter username. This should be short and simple, but explain what information the account will be posting about.

Examples: The USDA's MyPlate initiative uses @MyPlate. The Twitter handle for Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids is @CRJHawks. The School Nutrition Association uses @SchoolLunch.

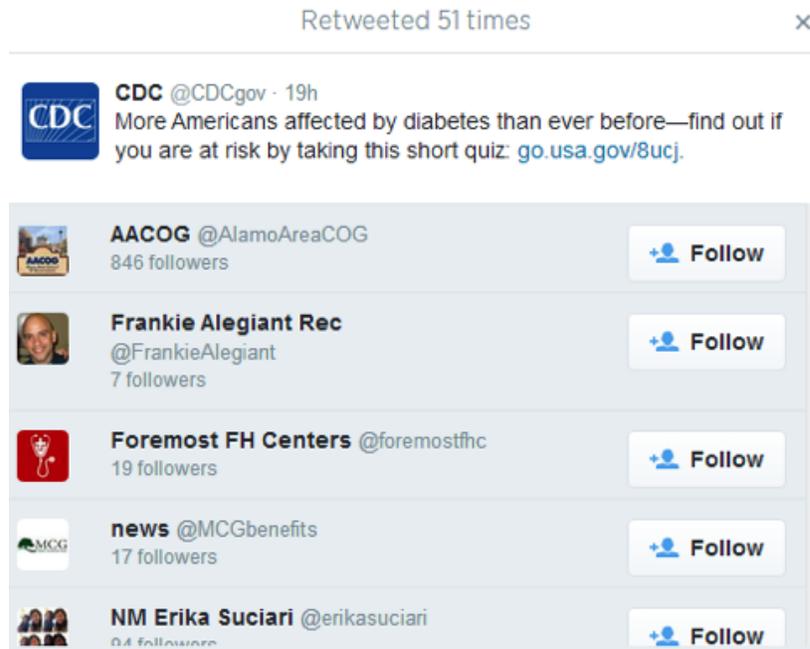
- **Retweet:** When another user tweets a message that you believe is important for your followers, you can retweet it, which will forward the message to your network.

Example: USDA Team Nutrition (@TeamNutrition) frequently retweets messages from other government agencies and programs so that their followers can see useful or relevant information from these other Twitter accounts. Below is a recipe originally posted by the MyPlate twitter and retweeted by USDA Team Nutrition:



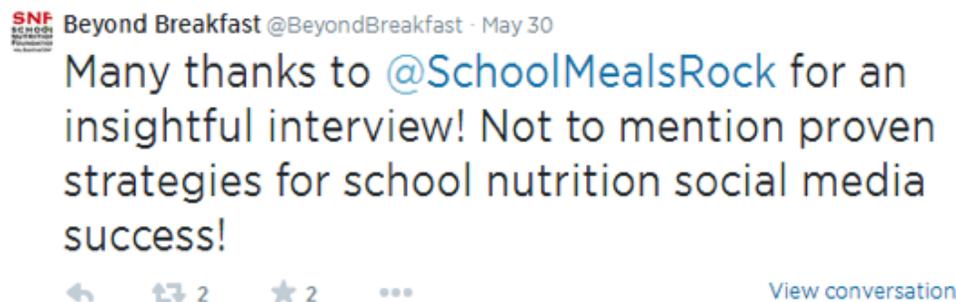
In addition to you retweeting posts from other Twitter accounts, your followers can retweet things that you have posted. Followers can make additions to your tweet, such as a comment, as long as it fits within the 140 allowed characters. Although Tweets can be up to 140 characters (including spaces and punctuation), CDC recommends that tweets be less than that to allow for other text to be added when the tweet is retweeted. Writing tweets of 120 characters or less makes it easier for followers to retweet your message without having to edit it to make it briefer.¹

Example: Below, you can see a tweet posted by the CDC that has been retweet 51 times by other users. These users are listed—so you can see who has been retweeting your information:



- **Mention:** A mention refers to when you link to another Twitter user in your message. When people refer to your account, or when you refer to the accounts of others, the handle will be preceded by a @ symbol.

Examples: Below you can see an example of a mention. The School Nutrition Association school breakfast Twitter account (@BeyondBreakfast) has mentioned the account @SchoolMealsRock in a post:

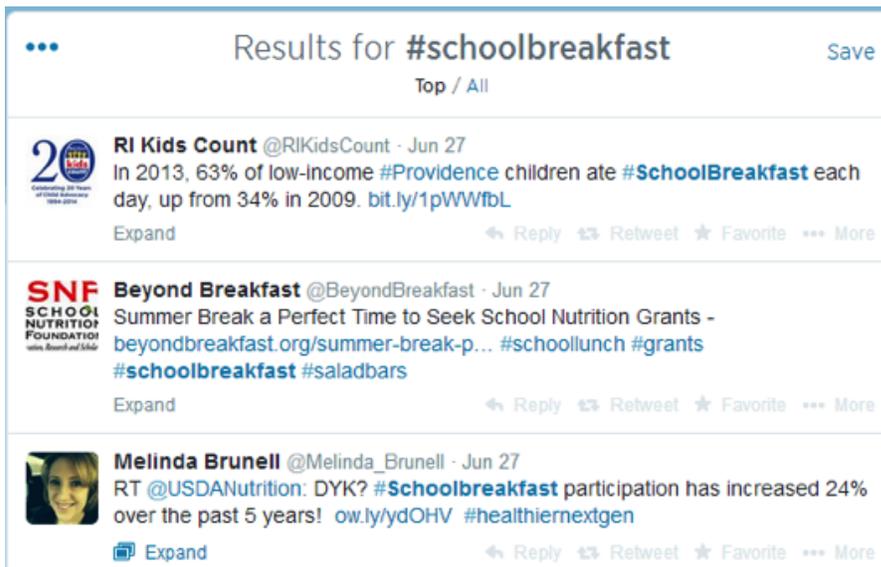


- **Hashtag:** A hashtag is created within a message when you put a # symbol in front of a word or short phrase.

Examples: #SchoolBreakfast, #MyPlate

Hashtags are keywords that help form conversations around a particular topic. Hashtags make searching to find information about particular topic easier. Clicking on a hashtag in any tweet shows you all other tweets “tagged” with that keyword.

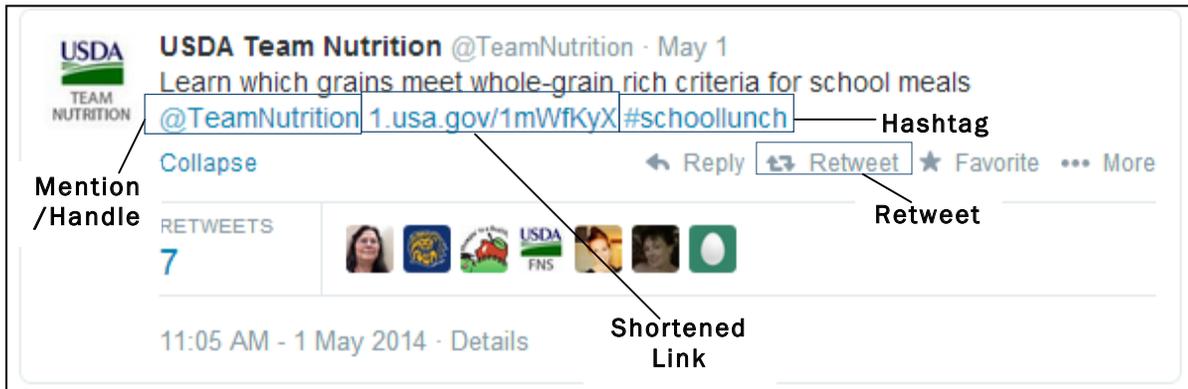
Example: If you were to click on #SchoolBreakfast or search for it using the search bar in Twitter, a list of all tweets “tagged” with that hashtag would appear:



Although it is most common to find a hashtag at the end of a tweet, Twitter allows you to insert a hashtag at any point in the Tweet. Check out this tweet below from the USDA MyPlate Twitter:

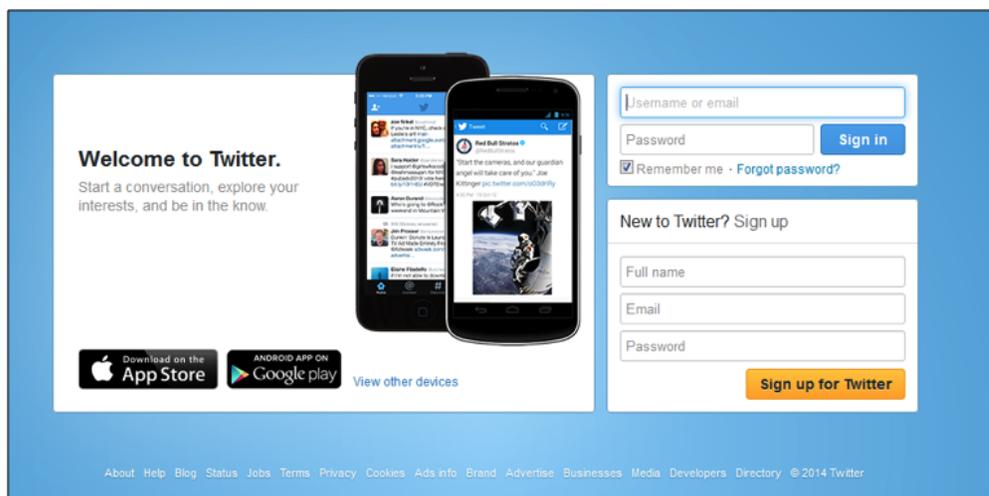


Anatomy of a Tweet:



SETTING UP A TWITTER ACCOUNT

1. Before creating your Twitter account, be sure to discuss this with your school administration to make sure that you are following appropriate policies and that the administration is onboard with the project.
 - Ask for permission to create a social media account for posting school meal and nutrition information.
 - Are there rules that need to be followed? Does this need school board approval? Do tweets need to be pre-approved by the administration?
2. Decide on a Twitter handle ahead of time. Your handle should be simple and describe what the account is for. You may want to consider including your school name.
 - Get this approved by the administration as well.
 - Make sure you have 1 or 2 extra handles prepared in case your first choice is not available.
3. Register your account on <http://www.twitter.com>.



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4. Choose a profile picture and write a short description of your account. This can be done under the “Edit Profile” tab. This is also an opportune place to link to your monthly menus.
- Your profile picture can be an image or a logo.
 - The description of your account should make clear what you will be tweeting about.

Elements of a Twitter profile:



For additional help signing up for and using Twitter, visit the Twitter Help Center at <https://support.twitter.com/>.

HOW TO WRITE WHEN USING TWITTER

Best Practices

- Keep content short and simple. The CDC recommends keeping tweets to 120 characters rather than the full limit of 140 characters. This allows any followers who want to retweet the message to do so without having to trim it down. However, avoid abbreviations or “text speak” as much as possible. (For example, typing “u” for “you.”)
- Find ways to provide more information. This can be accomplished by using a link to a website (shortened using something such as <http://bit.ly> or <http://tinyurl.com>) or a relevant image. Shortening your links will help save space in your character count. Be sure that you are using verified links and websites. See “Shortening Links” below for more information on how to do this.
- Promote your profile. Put your Twitter handle on materials you already publish, such as your daily menus or website. You can also post the Twitter handle within the cafeteria. For example, it could be included on video screens, table tents, or notifications in the food lines.

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- Engage your followers. Pay attention to retweets, mentions, and replies. Be sure to answer any questions asked by your followers.
 - Set a schedule. Make sure you have a set posting schedule and know who is in charge of posting. Students said that they want a post at night before bed (8-9 PM) and one when they wake up in the morning (6:30-7:30 AM).
 - Be aware of timing of posts. Post or schedule your posts at times that make sense. The school administration may not want your posts to be published during the school day because it could encourage students to use their phones during class.
 - Keep a casual tone. Messages should be friendly and stir the reader to action. When not posting menu related items, try to highlight statistics or ask questions.
 - Use hashtags. Hashtags can help you connect ideas or have a discussion. They can also be used to highlight an important theme within the post.
 - Utilize students. Consider using individual students, student groups, or a marketing class to help with your Twitter account. They will be able to identify key individuals who have a lot of followers and who can help increase the followers of this account. They can also help write tweets that will make students want to read them. We would suggest school staff approve all tweets before they are posted.

Steps

1. Write out what you want to say without giving any thought to length. It is most helpful to do this in the posting box on Twitter to see your character count. Microsoft Word can also be helpful here. If you draft a tweet in Word, select the desired content, and then click on "Review Word Count," Word can tell you the number of words, characters (with spaces), and characters (without spaces) as a reference.

Example:

Menu for Monday, May 5: The hot breakfast item is breakfast pizza, served with your choice of fruit or juice and milk. The lunch entrée options are breaded chicken patties, tacos, or grilled cheese. All are served with your choice of a vegetable, fruit and milk. (This post is 264 characters, including spaces.)

2. Trim out any words that can be deleted while leaving the core information intact and keeping the message understandable. Be sure to leave enough characters for any links or hashtags you will be including.

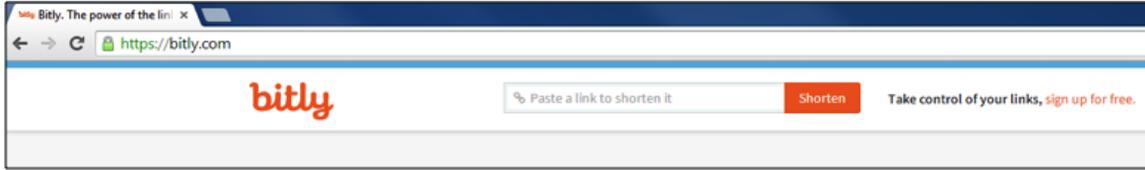
Example:

Mon. 5/5 - Breakfast: breakfast pizza w. fruit/juice & milk. Lunch: breaded chicken patty, tacos or grilled cheese w. veggie, fruit & milk (This post is 139 characters, including spaces.)

3. Tweet your post if posting immediately or use a scheduler, such as Hootsuite, to set up a time for the tweet to be posted.

Shortening Links

When posting website links to Twitter, it helps to use a link shortening tool so you can save the number of characters you have for the message itself. A fairly common and trusted website for this is <http://bit.ly>.



In order to use <http://bit.ly>, you copy the website address of the link you want to use and paste it in the box that says "Paste a link to shorten it." Then click the "Shorten" button. The website will automatically generate a shortened link for you to use.



To put the shortened link into your tweet, click on the button that says "Copy" and then paste it into the text of the tweet.

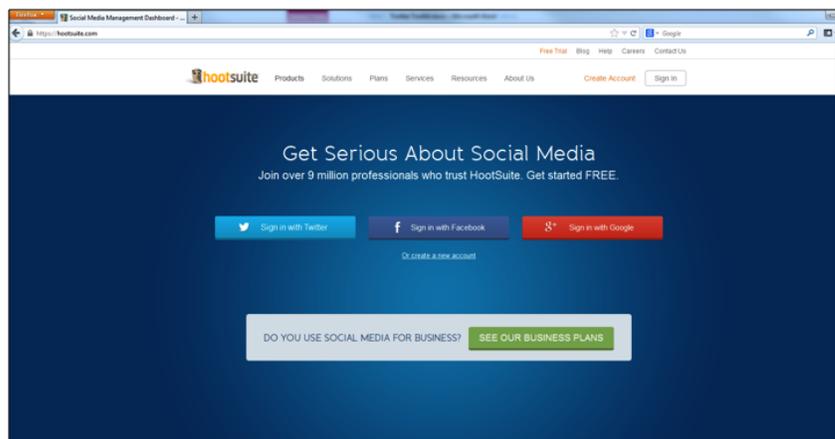
Scheduling Platforms

The following websites can be used to schedule your tweets days, weeks, and months in advance. They are extremely helpful tools if you think that you will not have the time to manage a Twitter account daily.

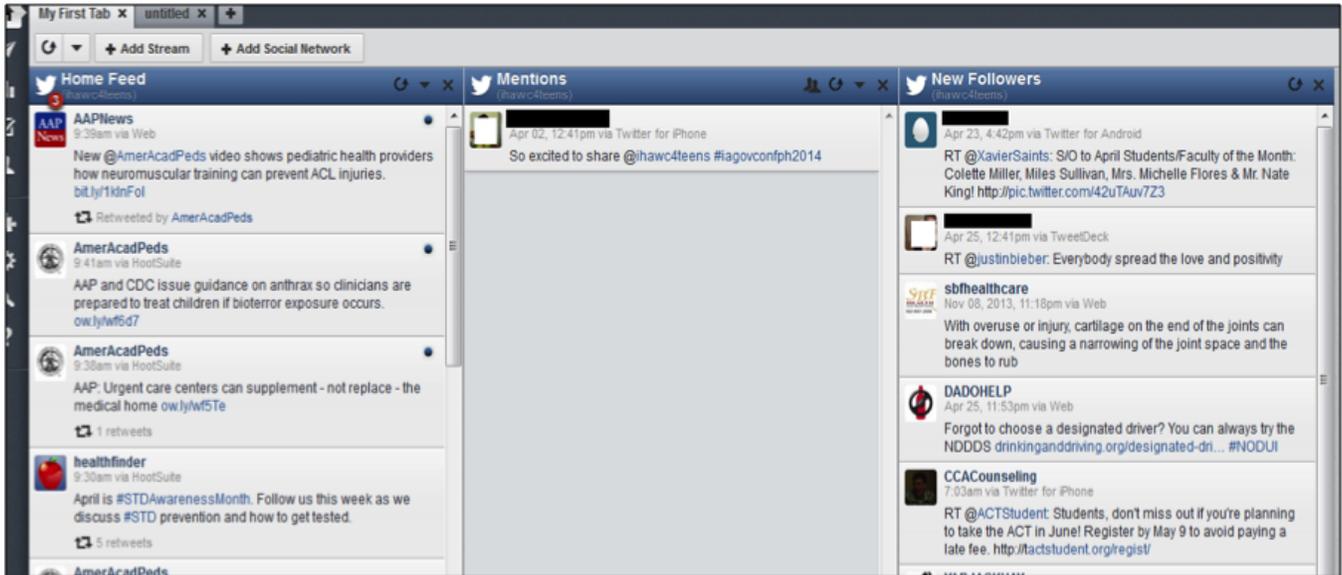
HOOTSUITE

Hootsuite (<http://www.hootsuite.com>) is an online update program that you can use to schedule your social media posts. It also helps you keep track of interactions with your followers and can give you insights on your reach and interactions.

Hootsuite is free to use in its most basic form, but you can pay to get more tools and analytics:

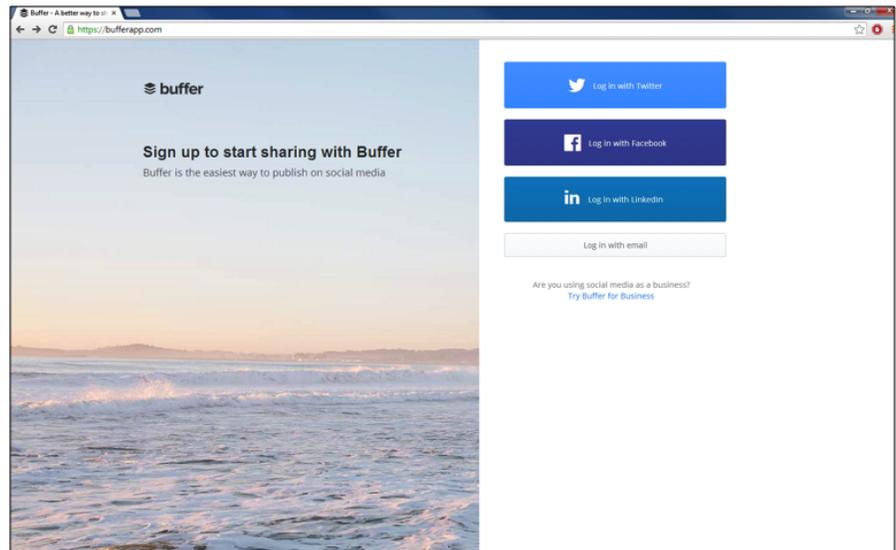


Here is an example of what the Hootsuite dashboard looks like:



BUFFER

Buffer (<http://bufferapp.com>) is another free website that allows you to manage multiple social media accounts at once. It also allows you to schedule posts ahead of time. Another benefit of Buffer is that it will shorten your links for you. Similar to Hootsuite, Buffer allows you to “mention” other accounts in your posts and provides analytics, such as the number of clicks on a link. Unlike Hootsuite, Buffer attaches directly to your account, allowing you to schedule tweets and retweets directly from Twitter, rather than by having to log in to the Buffer account.



ENGAGING STUDENTS

The most effective Twitter campaigns will draw from student voices to get your messages out there. After all, they are your audience! Try some of the following ideas for involving students in your campaign:

- Reach out to students from the get-go by collaborating with student council, or conducting a school-wide poll to get student input about what they would like to see in a food service Twitter campaign. You might see some level of negative input from students, but after they have had the opportunity to voice any negative opinions, students have many great ideas and are eager to be heard and to help.
- Form a school breakfast school advisory board or work with existing student groups to get regular feedback and ideas throughout the school year. Open a student position and put a designated student or students in charge of helping to manage the Twitter. You could have one student do this for the entire year, or rotate the position among multiple students.
- Host school-wide kick-off activities when you are ready to launch the Twitter campaign. Use promotional ideas to get students interested, such as:
 - “Coupons” for a free breakfast or breakfast item with the Twitter handle and/or hashtag printed on them
 - Items to hand out (e.g., stickers or pens) printed with the Twitter handle
 - Raffles of items donated by the school or PTA (e.g., school gear or clothing)
 - Give away a free breakfast to the first 5 or 10 followers of the Twitter account
 - Ask followers to tweet pictures related to school breakfast; have students vote on the best pictures and offer a prize to the winner(s)
- Relate tweets to current and important school events (e.g., like a big football game)
- Tweet facts about breakfast that are most relevant to students—like the ways in which breakfast improves concentration, focus, and energy throughout the day.
- Monitor what is trending on Twitter and incorporate current trends into school breakfast tweets, where possible and appropriate. For instance, if a major sporting event like NCAA March Madness or the Super Bowl is going on, considering making references to these events in your tweets.
- Tweet back at students who tweet at the school breakfast Twitter account—let the students know that they are being heard!
- Place an item about the Twitter campaign and/or school breakfast in the student school newspaper encouraging students and teachers to follow the account.

SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS

- Tweet the actual menu for the day, not just a link to the online menu.
 - Students would prefer to receive both breakfast and lunch information at the same time. They believe this will be more impactful and make more students likely to read it.
 - There will most likely not be room in one tweet for both breakfast and lunch information, so post two menu tweets (one for breakfast and another for lunch) back-to-back.
- Aim to have the message sent out the night before (roughly around 8-9 PM) and again in the morning when students would be waking up/getting ready (6:30-7:30 AM).
 - Students do not want more than 2-3 posts per day. If there are too many tweets, the students may stop reading them.
- Tweet the menu everyday as well as additional health/nutrition information every other day.
 - Time or theme tweets to coincide with other school or seasonal events.
 - Use puns with popular song lyrics or pop culture references to grab attention.
 - Consider tweeting about the nutrition of the food being served (i.e. calories, fat content, etc.) and tie them to benefits (i.e. academic performance, energy, etc.). Examples can be found on the following page.
- Do not include stock pictures of food. Students do not want to expect something that looks better in a photo than it does in real life.
 - If you do want to incorporate pictures of your own school food, make sure that the pictures used are not misleading. Pictures should accurately represent the food being served in terms of portion size, packaging, color, etc.

SAMPLE TWEETS

Developed by students from 3 Iowa high schools

It's Friday! What makes Fridays better? That's right, #schoolbreakfast

The first day of school means the first day of #schoolbreakfast. The breakfast of [NAME OF SCHOOL MASCOT]."

Just 1 more day until the big game at [NAME OF SCHOOL]. Make sure you're prepared with a #schoolbreakfast

There's a reason they call it "brain food" #finalsweek

The early bird gets the worm. #gotbreakfast?

RT if you like #schoolbreakfast!

Beat those Monday morning blues with #schoolbreakfast at 7 AM!

Get your breakfast to-go to energize you for first period!

It's negative WHAT outside?! Come warm up in the cafeteria with a nice, hot #schoolbreakfast

Enjoy the taste of healthy eating—guaranteed at #schoolbreakfast

Healthy breakfast, healthy self. #schoolbreakfast

A big game starts with a big breakfast #schoolbreakfast

Remember to start the day off right with school breakfast #schoolbreakfast

There are two types of people in the world: people who love bagels and liars. #TryOurBreakfastBagels

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day—don't miss out!

Omelets, bagels, and pizza—oh, my! #schoolbreakfast #thechoicesareendless

Breakfast pizza today! #getyourstoday

Running late today? #schoolbreakfast can help. Grab a bagel before class.

Grab a bite to eat before class! Our breakfast sandwich is easy to carry and still socialize.

The best way to stay focused in school is with school breakfast. Remember to get yours this morning!

Grab a bite to eat before class! A breakfast sandwich is easy to carry and catch up with friends
#schoolbreakfast

Relive your weekend over #schoolbreakfast

Anyone want a breakfast sandwich? Don't miss out this morning!

90-degrees and sunny? Sounds like smoothie weather to us!

School breakfast is just the right size.

Eat #schoolbreakfast. Your stomach will thank you later.

#schoolbreakfast: it'll always be here for you (at least from 7-8 AM every day, that is)

Cool down with some fresh fruit this morning at #schoolbreakfast

#schoolbreakfast is a no-brainer. Low-sodium, low-fat—low stress!

Good breakfast = good mood! Come get yours at #schoolbreakfast and start the day off right.

Kickstart your metabolism with #schoolbreakfast this morning at 7 AM

RT if you love our delicious #schoolbreakfast

September is Better Breakfast Month—and what breakfast is better than the #[SCHOOL NAME]breakfast? 7-8 AM

Test or quiz today? Prepare your brain by eating #schoolbreakfast at 7 AM

It's a new term! Kick it off right with #schoolbreakfast

You're not the only one who can hear your tummy rumble in first period Spanish #eatschoolbreakfast

All you have to do is show up and eat. #schoolbreakfast #readymade

The only way to start your day is the #schoolbreakfast way

Get a head start on your weekend with #schoolbreakfast

One thing's for sure—you can always count on #schoolbreakfast to start your day off right!

Breakfast, maybe? Mon. 5/5 - Breakfast: breakfast pizza w. fruit/juice & milk.

Cinnamon rolls with fresh fruit/juice and milk-- comin' atcha like a dark horse. Tomorrow @ 8 AM.

TWITTER ACCOUNTS TO FOLLOW

The following established Twitter accounts may be helpful as your school works to set up its own school breakfast Twitter.

Government agencies & programs

U.S. Department of Agriculture

@USDA

<https://twitter.com/USDA>

USDA Nutrition

@USDANutrition

<https://twitter.com/USDANutrition>

USDA Team Nutrition

@TeamNutrition

<https://twitter.com/TeamNutrition>

Choose MyPlate

@MyPlate

<https://twitter.com/MyPlate>

Iowa Department of Education

@IADeptofED

<https://twitter.com/IADeptofEd>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

@CDCgov

<https://twitter.com/CDCgov>

Let's Move!

@letsmove

<https://twitter.com/letsmove>

Non-profit organizations

The School Nutrition Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to financial aid, education, professional development, and research in school food service. The School Nutrition Association runs the following Twitter accounts:

- **Beyond Breakfast**

@BeyondBreakfast

<https://twitter.com/BeyondBreakfast>

- **School Lunch**

@SchoolLunch

<https://twitter.com/SchoolLunch>

No Kid Hungry

@nokidhungry

<https://twitter.com/nokidhungry>

Healthy Plate

@healthyplate5

<https://twitter.com/healthyplate5>

School Breakfast Initiative (Minnesota)

@SchoolBfastMN

<https://twitter.com/SchoolBfastMN>

The Lunch Box

@lunchboxproject

<https://twitter.com/lunchboxproject>

Schools & school districts

Provo City School District

Child Nutrition Program

Provo, Utah

@ITSMealsProvo

<https://twitter.com/ITSMealsProvo>

Alachua County

Food and Nutrition Services

Alachua, Florida

@alachua_sm

https://twitter.com/alachua_sm

Hanover Community School District

Nutrition Services

Cedar Lake, Indiana

@HCWildcatLunch

<https://twitter.com/HCWildcatLunch>

Wisconsin School Nutrition Team

Madison, Wisconsin

@WisDPI_SNP

https://twitter.com/WisDPI_SNP