



**Laura Benavidez and Melissa Infusino**

*Interim Co-Director of Food Services for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Executive Director of the LA Fund for Public Education (LA Fund)*

In school year 2012-2013, with the goal of ensuring that every student in Los Angeles starts the day ready to learn, LAUSD in partnership with the LA Fund began an ambitious three year effort to implement Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) across the district's 600+ schools serving over 600,000 students in grades PK-12. Today that vision is a reality. LAUSD, the second largest school district in the country, leads the nation in school breakfast participation, providing every student access to a free, nutritious meal as they begin their academic day. Studies have shown that when schools provide a BIC offering that is served universally free to all students and after the school day has begun, students exhibit: increased attention span and focus, increased academic performance, decrease absenteeism and tardiness, and reduce their visits to the nurse because of hunger. Students eating together in a calm family-like setting also promotes social skills, while at the same time reducing the stigma traditionally associated with breakfast in the cafeteria programs. In addition to many academic and social benefits, a successful BIC program draws down significant federal USDA school breakfast reimbursement dollars that can be reinvested into the program.

In her role as Co-Director of Food Services for LAUSD, Laura Benavidez advocated for and developed the pilot for the BIC program. Building off of the pilot, Ms. Benavidez co-lead the strategy and many related processes to implement BIC across LAUSD. For the last three years she has overseen the logistics of the BIC program including staffing, menu decisions, inventory, technology upgrades for greater accountability, policies/procedures, purchasing, and contracts. The LAUSD Breakfast in the Classroom program ensures that the district's 600,000 students, learning in over 1,100 locations daily have access to a nutritious breakfast each school day. In addition, Ms. Benavidez acts as the Spanish Media liaison for Food Service at LAUSD and has overseen the implementation of the District's cafeteria management MyPaymentsPlus system for parents. Ms. Benavidez holds a Bachelor's of Science in Food Science and Technology from Texas A&M University, an MBA in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix and is currently in the process of obtaining her PhD in Child Nutrition.

As the Executive Director of the LA Fund, Melissa Infusino and Senior Advisor Jean Brown were integral partners to Laura and the LAUSD team, providing financial and staff resources throughout the three year BIC implementation effort. While Ms. Benavidez and her team focused on the many responsibilities of Food Services to roll out BIC to over 1,000 schools, the LA Fund identified the strategic need to address principal and teacher questions and concerns with the implementation. Ms. Infusino tapped Senior Advisor Jean Brown, a respected and retired LAUSD administrator, to identify an implementation timeline and build a team of retired school principals to support these school-based leaders through BIC preparation and implementation in their buildings. The "Jean Team," as they came to be known, would join LAUSD Food Service staff at every school's BIC informational meeting, address questions,



develop resource materials, and even build new school schedules accommodating for BIC for those principals who were stretched thin by existing demands of the job. The sensibilities of these retired principals to their peers who were now implementing BIC was incredibly effective at allaying concerns and preparing school buildings to successfully launch BIC the district.

While the implementation of BIC across the district rested squarely on the shoulders of LAUSD Food Services and the LA Fund's "Jean Team," the success of this nation-leading implementation would not have been possible without the support of many key partners including but not limited to Superintendent Dr. John Deasy, CAA Foundation, The California Endowment, California Food Advocates, LAUSD Parent Community Services Branch, Choose Health LA!, No Kid Hungry Los Angeles and Share our Strength, ChildObesity180, SEIU Local 99, Health School Food Coalition, and InnerCity Struggle.