



School Breakfast: A Necessity for Good Health and Academic Achievement in Minnesota Schools

What is the School Breakfast Program and Why is it Important?

The School Breakfast program, a program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has played an important role in the American school system for nearly fifty years. Since its launch, the program has ensured that the most vulnerable children receive a nutritious start to their day. Given the state of the economy, the need for the program is stronger than ever before.

The School Breakfast program was introduced in 1966 to provide breakfast for “nutritionally needy children” in U.S. public schools. Schools in poor areas and areas where children had to travel a significant distance were the main focus of the program. Schools considered “in severe need” received higher federal payments to encourage participation. The program was expanded in the 1970s to include children of working mothers and children from low-income families.¹

In 1973, the program began allocating grants based on the number of meals served at each school. The program became permanent in 1975, with the intention of providing more children with adequate nutrition and increasing participation by schools “in severe need.” Today, more than 150,000 Minnesota students eat school breakfasts each school day.²



Examples of Successful School Breakfast Programs

- The *Universal School Breakfast* program, which provides free breakfast to all students in the school regardless of their family’s income level, has proven to be a successful program, particularly in high need areas, those where more than 40 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, because it gives *all* children access to school breakfast. The program frees school breakfast of the stigma normally associated with reduced-price and free breakfasts provided in the school cafeteria.
- Another program that has proven successful, especially in elementary schools in high need areas, is *Breakfast in the Classroom*, which moves school breakfast from

the cafeteria to the classroom. This program removes the stigma associated with sitting in the cafeteria eating breakfast while other students socialize in classrooms or hallways. Breakfast in the classroom also allows students to eat breakfast even when buses run late, as they sometimes do in a cold-weather state like Minnesota.

Who is Eligible for Free School Breakfast?

- Household income is used to determine which children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. In Minnesota, all students who qualify for either free *or* reduced-price meals receive a breakfast free of charge. The Minnesota legislature has authorized an additional state payment of 30 cents to schools for each reduced-priced breakfast served and an additional 55 cents for each regular-priced breakfast served in order to increase student access to breakfast (Minnesota Statutes, Section 124D.1158).
- Schools send applications for free or reduced price meals home at the beginning of each school year. Families are made aware of eligibility guidelines and are able to apply for free or reduced-price meal qualification at any point during the school year. The school receives the application, processes it, and then issues the family an eligibility determination.³
- The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expands meal opportunities for students. Schools in high poverty areas will be able to offer all students free meals without requiring individual applications from students. In order to be eligible, a school must enroll at least 40 percent of its students in the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Program. This new option will make it easier for low-income students to qualify for and receive free breakfast and lunch.⁴ The USDA will release more information about this program in the 2011-2012 school year.
- In addition to improving access to school breakfast and lunch, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 also required the USDA to issue a proposed rule, released on January 13, 2011, to update school nutrition standards to match the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.⁵ Changes include doubling the amount of fruit servings, increasing vegetable servings and limiting milk options to fat-free milk (unflavored or flavored) and unflavored low-fat milk. Also, instead of having to choose between a fruit and a vegetable, children will have the option to have both.⁶

The Current Status of the School Breakfast Program in Minnesota

School breakfast is currently required to be offered at any public school building in which at least 33 percent of the school lunches served during the second preceding year were served free or at a reduced price, in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, Section 124D.117. This requirement does not apply to a school in which fewer than 25 students are expected to participate in the School Breakfast program.

- During the 2009-2010 school year, 112,638 low-income children participated in the school breakfast programs on an average day.⁷
- 47.2 low-income children ate breakfast for every 100 low-income children who ate lunch in school year 2009-2010.⁸ These numbers demonstrate that although there is a demand for school breakfast, participation levels do not match those of the school lunch program because breakfast is not as accessible to children.
- Minnesota ranked 31st out of all 50 states in offering a school breakfast program in school year 2009-2010, with 76.7 percent of Minnesota schools providing breakfast programs.⁹

Why We Need to Sustain Funding for School Breakfast Programs in Minnesota

With the State of Minnesota facing severe budget deficits, concern has grown about the possibility of cuts to existing programs, including School Breakfast. Several studies have shown that there is a need for breakfast programs in our schools. Unemployment rates remain high, and more parents are unable to ensure that their children are able to eat a nutritious breakfast in the home. Although participation in school breakfast programs has been lower than in school lunch programs, trends show that in schools where breakfast is served in the classroom, participation rates soar.^{10,11}

- More Americans have had to seek government assistance since the recession. Participation in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has continued to increase.¹² In Minnesota, the number of people receiving food support increased by over 80,000 people from December 2008 to January 2009. This growth rate was about three times higher than the average annual increase.¹³
- With an increase in families seeking government assistance, the number of students participating in school breakfast and lunch programs has also continued to rise.¹⁴ In the 2009-2010 school year, an average of 262,777 students received free or reduced price lunches daily,¹⁵ compared to just 194,885 students in school year 2002-2003.¹⁶
- High food prices have forced families to resort to eating less nutritious, low-priced food. By giving all children the right to eat breakfast in the classroom, more children will have access to food of higher quality.¹⁷
- During the 2009-2010 school year, an average of 112,638 low-income students ate free and reduced price breakfasts, as compared to 73,636 students in the 2002-2003 school year.¹⁸ The demand for school breakfast is high. Serving breakfast in classrooms would ensure that all children get a healthy jumpstart to their day.
- By raising participation in the School Breakfast program to 60 low-income children for every 100 eating lunch, 45,028 more children would have access to a nutritious breakfast, and Minnesota could gain \$10,639,980 in federal child nutrition funds.¹⁹

Impact on Student Health

- On average, children who eat breakfast have higher nutrient intakes than children who do not eat breakfast.²⁰
- Children who eat breakfast on a daily basis are less likely to become overweight.²¹ Several studies have found that children who skipped breakfast had higher body mass indexes (BMI) than children who ate breakfast²² and that overweight or obese children were more likely to skip breakfast than normal weight children.²³
- Data shows that eating school breakfast, unlike eating school lunch, prevents weight gain. Children who eat school breakfast weigh approximately four pounds less than children who do not take part in the school breakfast program.²⁴

Success in a Local School Shows the Effects School Breakfast has on the Learning Environment & Academic Achievement

- Nationwide studies have shown that eating breakfast has a positive effect on test scores, grades, school attendance and tardiness rates.²⁵
- Students at Ogilvie Elementary School in Ogilvie, MN have benefited from a grant from Action for Healthy Kids and the Kellogg's Corporate Citizenship Fund to implement a Breakfast in the Classroom program at their school. The school used the grant money to purchase a rolling cart and other equipment to bring breakfast out of the cafeteria and into the classrooms.²⁶
- Ogilvie Elementary School Principle Dave Endicott has reported that test performance has increased since the school began its *Breakfast in the Classroom* program. Student test scores increased dramatically the same year Ogilvie Elementary implemented its Breakfast in the Classroom program. The number of students who met the proficiency level on state comprehensive tests increased by 20 percent. Participation in school breakfast increased from approximately 70 students a day to almost 300.²⁷
- School Breakfast program participation has skyrocketed at the Mayo High School (District #535) by 64% and at the Burnsville Senior High School (District #191) by 156%. These increases in participation rates are attributed to easy access to school breakfast and successful marketing of the programs.²⁸



Past Minnesota School Breakfast Program Demonstrates a Long History of Success

- In the 1990s, Governor Jesse Ventura proposed expansion of the breakfast program, *Fast Break to Learning*, after several elementary schools experienced great success in a pilot program. Over 300 schools participated in this program with the help of state funding.²⁹
- Studies conducted by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, the Office of Educational Accountability, the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, have shown an increase in academic achievement among schools participating in the *Fast Break to Learning* school breakfast program. Third graders in *Fast Break to Learning* schools showed improvement in math scores between the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years.³⁰
- Almost all principals participating in the *Fast Break* program reported that their schools benefited from offering breakfast to their students. Most said that the program decreased tardiness and behavioral problems.³¹ Teachers who participated in the program also thought their students benefited from school breakfast. They reported that students who ate school breakfast appeared to be more attentive and focused in class, and that trips to the school nurse for headaches and stomachaches decreased when their schools started offering universal breakfast.³²
- Schools that participated in the *Fast Break to Learning* program had to adjust bus schedules so that children would get to school early enough to eat breakfast. Even so, bus scheduling remained a barrier throughout the time the breakfast program was available.³³
- Due to a \$6.4 million cut to school nutrition programs, the *Fast Break to Learning* program was eliminated in 2003.³⁴

Conclusions

- The USDA's School Breakfast program helps Minnesota children thrive by providing them with the nutrients and energy they need to stay focused in the classroom. If funding for this program were to be cut, many of the 112,000 low-income students in Minnesota who eat school breakfast daily would miss out on this vital start to their day.
- Existing school breakfast programs could improve with the help of additional funding and by offering breakfast in the classroom to children. Many school programs have been hindered by both a lack of funding and because breakfast is offered at a time when most children are not able to be at school. In addition, statistics show that students who pay full price for meals participate in the school breakfast program at a much lower rate than do students who receive free or reduced-price meal benefits. When students eat in the classroom, *all* children can eat together without the stigma that some would otherwise experience when eating in the cafeteria.

Endnotes

- ¹ *School Breakfast Program: Program History*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC., <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/AboutBFast/ProgHistory.htm> (last visited Aug. 16, 2011).
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- ³ *Applying for Free and Reduced Price School Meals*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC., <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/frp/frp.process.htm> (last visited Aug. 16, 2011).
- ⁴ NEW ENGLAND ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH, *THE HEALTHY, HUNGER-FREE KIDS ACT OF 2010 FACT SHEET* (2010).
- ⁵ Susan T. Borra et al., *Developing Health Messages: Qualitative Studies with Children, Parents, and Teachers Help Identify Communications Opportunities for Healthful Lifestyles and the Prevention of Obesity*, 103(6) J. AM. DIETETIC ASS'N 721 (2003).
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- ⁷ FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., *SCHOOL BREAKFAST SCORECARD: SCHOOL YEAR 2009-2010 18* (2011), available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/sbscorecard2010.pdf>.
- ⁸ *Id.* at 1.
- ⁹ *Id.* at 19.
- ¹⁰ *Id.* at 5.
- ¹¹ FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., *SCHOOL BREAKFAST IN AMERICA'S BIG CITIES 1* (2011), available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/urbanbreakfast2009-2010.pdf>.
- ¹² JEFFERY LEVI ET AL., TRUST FOR AM.'S HEALTH, *F AS IN FAT: HOW OBESITY POLICIES ARE FAILING IN AMERICA 65* (2009) [hereinafter *F AS IN FAT*], available at <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/obesity2009/Obesity2009Report.pdf>.
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- ¹⁵ FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., *STATE OF THE STATES 2010: MINNESOTA 1* (2011) [hereinafter *STATE OF STATES MN*], available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/mn.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., *STATE OF THE STATES: 2004: A PROFILE OF FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS ACROSS THE NATION 49* (2004) [hereinafter *STATE OF STATES 2004*], available at <http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/state-of-the-states2004.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ *F AS IN FAT*, *supra* note 11 at 72.
- ¹⁸ *STATE OF STATES 2004*, *supra* note 15, at 51.
- ¹⁹ *STATE OF STATES MN*, *supra* note 14, at 1.

²⁰ FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., BREAKFAST FOR LEARNING 1 (2010), available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning1.pdf>.

²¹ Maureen T. Timlin et al., *Breakfast Eating and Weight Change in a 5-Year Prospective Analysis of Adolescents: Project EAT (Eating Among Teens)*, 121 PEDIATRICS e638-e645 (2008).

²² See Siega-Riz et al., *Trends in Breakfast Consumption for Children in the United States from 1965-1991*, 67 AM. J. CLINICAL NUTRITION 748S (1998); Keski-Rahkonen et al., *Breakfast Skipping and Health-Compromising Behaviors in Adolescents and Adults*, 57 EUR. J. CLINICAL NUTRITION 842 (2003); A. Sjoberg et al., *Meal Pattern, Food Choice, Nutrient Intake and Lifestyle Factors in the Goteborg Adolescence Study*, 57 EUR. J. CLINICAL NUTRITION 1569 (2003); W.S. Wolfe et al., *Overweight Schoolchildren in New York State: Prevalence and Characteristics*, 84 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 807 (1994).

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²⁵ Rampersaud et al., *Breakfast Habits, Nutritional Status, Body Weight, and Academic Performance in Children and Adolescents*, 105 J. AM. DIETETIC ASS'N. 743 (2005).

²⁶ *Breakfast in the Classroom: An Ingredient for Student Success!*, ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS, <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/campaigns/breakfast/breakfast-in-the-classroom.html> (last visited Aug. 16, 2011).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ SUSIE NANNEY, HEALTHY SCHOOLS CONFERENCE: CREATING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS: BRIDGING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE 7 (2010).

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³³ *Id.* at 16.

³⁴ THE MINNEAPOLIS FOUND., THE REAL COST OF CUTS: HOW THE 2003 BUDGET CUTS HAVE IMPACTED REAL PEOPLE 8 (2005), available at <http://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/Uploads/CuteEditor/Publications/Community/BudgetCuts/Education.pdf>.