School Breakfast Matters

Reach of School Breakfast

School breakfast participation has doubled in just 20 years. By 2019, nearly 15 million children participated in school breakfast every day and 85% of them qualified for free or reduced price meals. One in seven children in the U.S. is food insecure with much higher rates projected due to COVID-19. School breakfast reaches children who are most at-risk for food insecurity, providing them vital nutrition to support mood, attention, and cognition.\(^1\)

Breakfast & Brain Activation

Significantly higher brain activation is observed in the pre-frontal cortex when a nutritionally balanced breakfast is consumed. This area of the brain is involved in the control of emotion, mood, expectations, behavior, reward, decision-making, and cognition.\(^9,10\) Thus, a child who is fed a nutritious breakfast is likely to be more calm, focused, organized, thoughtful and ready to learn.

Looking at the Science

Breakfast is linked with numerous health and educational benefits — including improved academic performance, increased school attendance, more focused classroom behavior, and better dietary intake.\(^4-7\)

A systematic review of 45 breakfast studies\(^8\) showed that:

- Students who eat breakfast have positive outcomes, such as
  - Improved math & memory
  - Better satiety, and
  - Increased attention in class.

Nutritionally vulnerable children demonstrated the most substantial outcomes on their
  - Verbal skills,
  - Memorization, and
  - Matching tests.

Daily Participation in School Breakfast\(^2\)
(Millions of Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participating Students</th>
<th>% Qualifying for Free or Reduced Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>84%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>82%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>84%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>85%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>85%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\)Percent of students who receive free or reduced price breakfast

Call to Action: Help create awareness of the numerous health and educational benefits of school breakfast and encourage children to participate in the school breakfast program.
References:


3 Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning, FRAC, October 2016.


6 School meals are a back-to-school essential for students, FRAC ResearchWIRE. Summer 2019:1-4.

7 Sampasa-Kanyinga H, Hamilton HA. Eating breakfast regularly is related to higher school connectedness and academic performance in Canadian middle- and high-school students, Public Health. 2017;145:120-123.

