

School Nutrition Fact Sheet: School Breakfast Program

Kids Missing in the Morning!

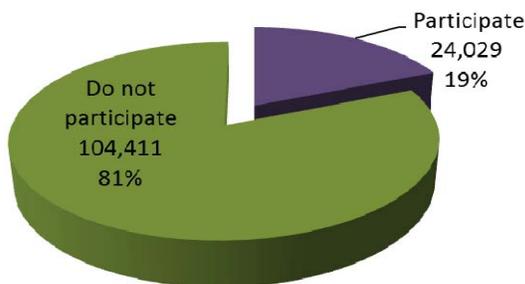
Every morning, kids are missing from schools across Montana. Some are absent, some are tardy, some are just “not there” – distracted by the rumbling in their stomachs as first period drags on and lunch feels like an eternity away. Some have to leave class to visit the nurse because their tummies hurt, and some get sent to the principal because they acted out, made irritable by their hunger.

A Simple Solution

School breakfasts give kids the nourishment they need to learn. Eating breakfast has been shown to improve test scores and student behavior.

Program Availability and Participation

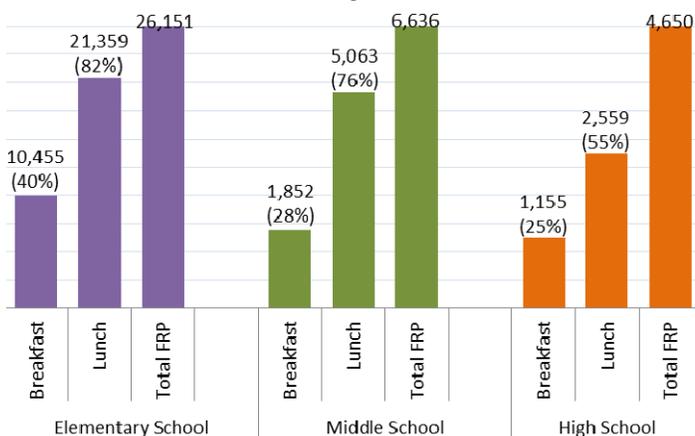
- 159 schools (20%) do not offer breakfast.
- 10% of high-need schools do not offer breakfast.¹
- 19% of Montana students eat breakfast at school.



Serving Montana’s Most Vulnerable Kids

In Montana’s high-need schools, only 36% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price (FRP) meals participate in School Breakfast.² Middle and high schools suffer from the lowest participation rates (less than 30%).

Meal Participation among Free and Reduced Price (FRP) Students at High-Need Schools



NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST

- Reimbursable meals meet federal nutrition standards.
- Breakfasts served as part of the School Breakfast Program provide one fourth or more of the daily nutrients children need.
- No more than 30 percent of calories in schools breakfasts can come from fat; less than 10 percent can come from saturated fat.
- Research shows that children who have school breakfast eat more fruits, drink more milk, and consume a wider variety of foods than those who don’t eat breakfast or have breakfast at home.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

- Studies conclude that students who eat school breakfast increase their math and reading scores and improve their speed and memory in cognitive tests.
- Research shows that children who eat breakfast at school – closer to class and test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.
- **“This is not a food service program, it is academic support.”** —Valerie Addis, Food Services Director, Missoula County Public Schools

BEHAVIORAL BENEFITS

- Students who participate in school breakfast have lower rates of absence and tardiness and exhibit decreased behavioral and psychological problems.
- **“One of the biggest changes I saw was with student behavior – issues with paying attention, staying on-task and focused. I have done a lot of interventions with my students, but the thing that made the most significant difference was the School Breakfast Program.”** —Genelle Hocevar, teacher at Chief Joseph Elementary, Great Falls

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- In these tough economic times with 19% of children living in poverty, school breakfast is more crucial than ever to struggling Montana families.
- If 75% of the free/reduced price students in high-need schools ate school breakfast, Montana schools would receive an additional \$3.3 million in federal funding.

¹ Schools with over 40% of students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals are considered high-need.

² To receive free breakfast, household income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level; for reduced price, income must be between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level. For the 2010-2011 school year, 130 percent of the poverty level is \$23,803 per year for a family of three; 185 percent for a family of three is \$33,874 per year.

Why are Kids not eating School Breakfast?

Barriers to breakfast participation include not getting to school in time to eat before the bell and the stigma of sitting in the cafeteria eating while all the other kids are socializing outside.

Alternative Breakfast Options

The following programs have proven highly effective in dramatically increasing breakfast participation.

- **Universal Breakfast** – Breakfast is offered free to all students. Ideal for schools with 75% or higher FRP participation. Universal breakfast is currently offered at 127 sites, including schools, residential child care institutions, and attendance centers.

When Bryant School in Helena started offering Universal Breakfast, participation increased by 10%.

- **Breakfast in the Classroom** – Food is delivered to each classroom and is often combined with attendance-taking and announcements.

At Hawthorne School in Missoula, participation increased from less than 30% to nearly 95% once Breakfast in the Classroom was implemented.

- **Grab N Go** – Breakfast is packaged so students can quickly grab it from the cafeteria or carts elsewhere in the school. They eat it in the cafeteria, the classroom or on the school grounds.

At Victor School, offering the Grab N Go option increased breakfast participation from 16% to 93%.



Policy Recommendations to Increase School Breakfast Participation

- In districts with high-need schools and low breakfast participation, legislators can partner with the school administration and/or PTA to explore expanded breakfast options.
- Recommend that schools with 40 percent or more free or reduced-price (FRP) students offer a school breakfast program.
- Fund free universal school breakfast to kindergarten students in districts with 40 percent or more of kindergarten students eligible for FRP school meals.
- Eliminate the co-payment for breakfasts served to K-12 students eligible for reduced-price meals and providing increased reimbursement to schools for every reduced-price breakfast served.
- Create financial incentives for schools to increase breakfast participation, start a new breakfast program, or maintain a 75 percent participation rate.
- Encourage schools to offer nutrition education on the importance of breakfast to physical and mental performance.

For more information on expanding breakfast options...

OPI School Nutrition Programs: http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/SchoolPrograms/School_Nutrition/

USDA Food and Nutrition Service: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/>

Food Research and Action Center:

<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-and-lunch/school-breakfast-program/>

Imagine a Montana where every child eats a healthy breakfast.