

ACCESS TO SCHOOL BREAKFAST:

A Key Strategy for Improving Children's Health, Education, and Well-Being

The national School Breakfast Program offers children the nutritious breakfasts they need to start the day ready to learn. During the 2017-2018 school year, 14.6 million children (including 12.5 million low-income children) in the U.S. participated in the School Breakfast Program and ate breakfast at school each day.¹

Rhode Island law requires that all public schools make breakfasts and lunches available to all students, including students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on their income. Children in families with incomes less than 130% of the federal poverty level (\$27,729 for a family of three) are eligible for free meals, and children in families with incomes between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level (\$39,461 for a family of three) are eligible for reduced-price meals.^{2,3}

THE BENEFITS OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST

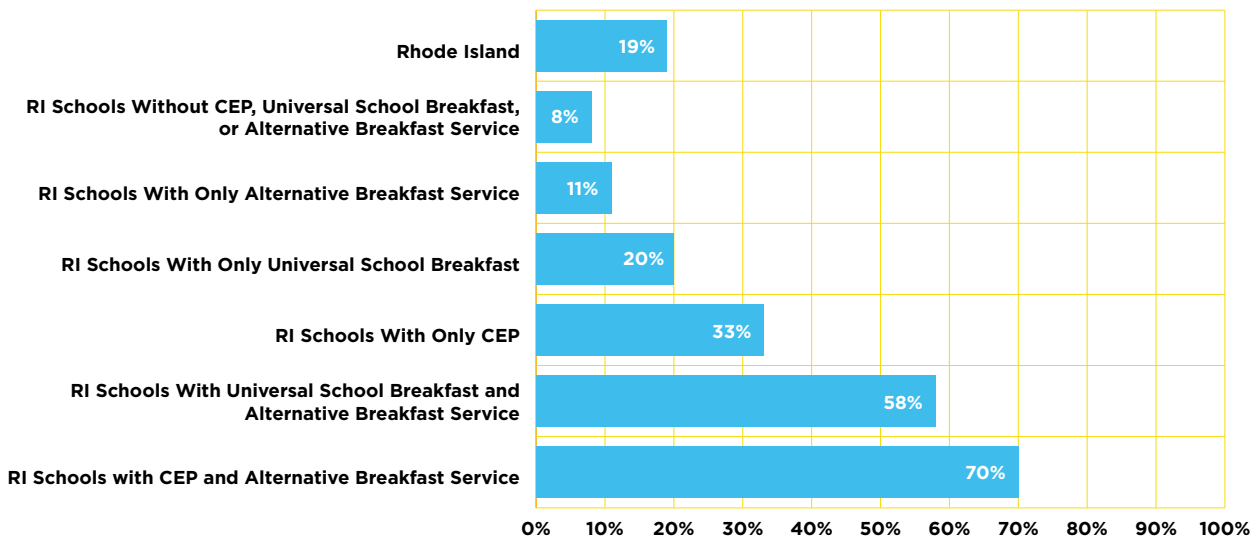
- **Education:** The School Breakfast Program helps schools support academic success. Children who participate in school breakfast have improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance and are less likely to be tardy. Children who eat breakfast at school, closer to class and test-taking time, do better on standardized tests than children who skip breakfast or who eat breakfast at home.⁴
- **Health:** Low-income children who eat school breakfast have better overall diet quality than those who eat breakfast at home or who skip breakfast. Children who participate in school breakfast are more likely to eat fruit and drink milk at breakfast. School breakfast participation is associated with a lower body mass index (BMI) and a lower probability of being overweight or obese.⁵
- **Emotional Well-Being:** Food insecurity is associated with higher levels of anxiety and irritability in children. Children who experience hunger are seven times more likely to engage in physical altercations, and teens who experience hunger are more likely to have difficulty getting along with peers, get suspended from school, and struggle with depression, compared to their peers. School breakfast participation positively affects children's mental health, reducing hyperactivity, anxiety, and depression.⁶

**Low-Income
Children Far Less
Likely to Eat School
Breakfast Than Lunch**

53 to 100

- During the 2017-2018 school year in Rhode Island, 53 low-income students participated in the School Breakfast Program for every 100 low-income students who participated in the School Lunch Program. Rhode Island ranks 33rd in the U.S. for participation in the School Breakfast Program.⁷
- If Rhode Island increased low-income student participation in the School Breakfast Program to 70% of School Lunch Program participation, the state would receive \$2.6 million in additional federal funds.⁸

CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM, RHODE ISLAND, OCTOBER 2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2018.



THE COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROGRAM (CEP)

- The federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools and districts with 40% or more students identified as low-income (e.g., enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or other public benefit programs) or at-risk (e.g., homeless or in foster care) to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students and offers higher reimbursements. Other benefits of participating in CEP include increases in school breakfast participation, reduced administrative work, and elimination of unpaid meal debts.⁹
- During the 2018-2019 school year, Central Falls, all elementary schools in Providence, some schools in Pawtucket, Highlander Charter School, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, and the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center were implementing CEP.¹⁰

UNIVERSAL SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

- Universal School Breakfast Programs, which provide free breakfast to all children regardless of income, increase school breakfast participation by removing the stigma often associated with school breakfast and can reduce the administrative burden for schools.¹¹
- During the 2018-2019 school year, all schools in Cranston and Woonsocket, selected schools in five other districts (East Providence, North Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, and Warwick), and three charter schools (Achievement First, The Learning Community, and Segue Institute for Learning) offered universal school breakfast.¹²

ALTERNATIVE BREAKFAST SERVICE/“BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM”/“BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL”

- Making breakfast part of the school day is another proven strategy for increasing breakfast participation, reducing stigma, and increasing convenience.¹³
- During the 2018-2019 school year, several Rhode Island school districts offered alternative breakfast service, including “breakfast in the classroom”, “grab and go” breakfasts, bagged breakfasts, or breakfast on a cart in all or some of their schools.¹⁴
- Many of the states with the highest school breakfast participation rates have passed legislation requiring high-poverty schools to offer breakfast after the bell and/or offer free breakfast to all students¹⁵

PERCENTAGE OF ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST, OCTOBER 2018

Core Cities

36%

OF ALL CHILDREN

Remainder of State

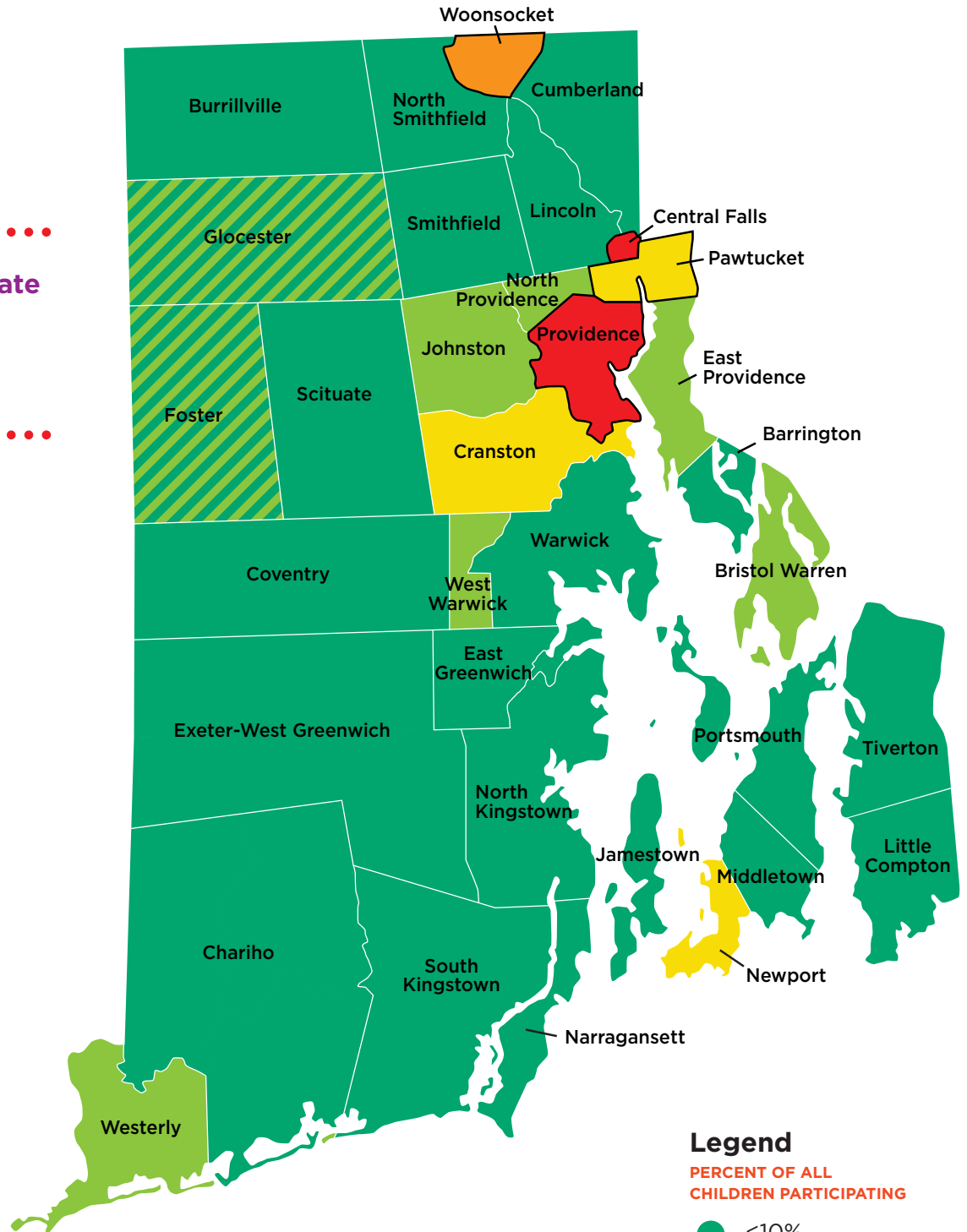
10%

OF ALL CHILDREN

Rhode Island

19%

OF ALL CHILDREN



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2018.

Note: Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. See table on page 4 for separate rates for the Foster, Gloucester, and Foster-Gloicester districts. Bristol Warren includes Bristol and Warren. Chariho includes Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton. Exeter-West Greenwich includes Exeter and West Greenwich.



CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST, RHODE ISLAND, OCTOBER 2018

SCHOOL DISTRICT	OCTOBER 2018 ENROLLMENT	% LOW-INCOME	% OF ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN BREAKFAST
Barrington	3,357	4%	1%
Bristol Warren	3,383	30%	10%
Burrillville	2,368	30%	7%
Central Falls	2,774	91%	48%
Chariho	3,364	20%	5%
Coventry	9,462	31%	4%
Cranston	11,224	43%	22%
Cumberland	4,837	19%	9%
East Greenwich	2,544	5%	3%
East Providence	5,890	48%	18%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,628	16%	5%
Foster	270	24%	11%
Foster-Glocester	1,344	15%	7%
Glocester	556	12%	11%
Jamestown	486	8%	3%
Johnston	3,409	45%	11%
Lincoln	3,214	27%	7%
Little Compton	253	12%	1%
Middletown	2,487	30%	5%
Narragansett	1,332	21%	6%
New Shoreham	136	16%	8%
Newport	2,338	66%	22%
North Kingstown	4,264	22%	6%
North Providence	4,027	38%	15%
North Smithfield	1,730	16%	4%
Pawtucket	10,325	76%	24%
Portsmouth	2,500	14%	4%
Providence	27,141	84%	41%
Scituate	1,245	18%	2%
Smithfield	2,699	14%	5%
South Kingstown	3,050	17%	7%
Tiverton	3,550	24%	3%
Warwick	9,334	29%	7%
West Warwick	3,993	50%	15%
Westerly	2,740	36%	10%
Woonsocket	6,734	79%	34%
Charter Schools	8,892	68%	34%
State-Operated Schools	1,842	63%	28%
UCAP	137	80%	17%
Four Core Cities	46,974	82%	36%
Remainder of State	103,014	29%	10%
Rhode Island	160,859	47%	19%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2018.

Notes: Children are counted as low-income if they are eligible for the Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program. % of all children participating in school breakfast is the percentage of all children participating in school breakfast on an average day. Core cities include Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pass legislation requiring districts and individual schools that are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to participate in this program or apply for a waiver if participation is not financially viable.
- Encourage all schools to offer breakfast at no charge to all students using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) if eligible or by implementing Universal School Breakfast if they are not.
- Pass legislation requiring that high-poverty districts and schools provide “breakfast after the bell” as a key strategy for increasing school breakfast participation.
- Encourage all schools to offer “breakfast after the bell” through “breakfast in the classroom,” which is most effective at the elementary school level, or through “grab and go” or “second chance breakfast” models, which may be more effective at the secondary school level.
- Provide funding to support districts and schools implementing alternative breakfast service so they can purchase equipment and supplies like meal carts and tablets that make alternative breakfast service work more efficiently.
- Raise awareness about how increasing school breakfast can be part of a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce chronic absence, improve grade-level reading, reduce childhood hunger and obesity, and improve children’s emotional well-being.

REFERENCES

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- ^{10,12,14} Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2018.



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