

# Children Participating in School Breakfast

## DEFINITION

*Children participating in school breakfast* is the percentage of low-income children who participate in the School Breakfast Program. Children are counted as low-income if they are eligible for and enrolled in the Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The School Breakfast program is a key component of eliminating child hunger, and it has been proven to improve children's health, school attendance and behavior.<sup>1</sup> School Breakfast Programs offer nutritious meals, and participating children are more likely to meet their Recommended Daily Allowances of four key nutrients.<sup>2</sup> Students who participate in school breakfast programs have higher standardized test scores, fewer absences, reduced tardiness, better behavior and lower risks of obesity.<sup>3</sup>

Food-insecure families often do not have sufficient food to provide nutritious breakfasts to their children every morning, and children in these families are at risk of falling behind their peers physically, cognitively, academically, emotionally and socially.<sup>4,5</sup> Children who suffer from undernutrition or food insecurity are more likely than their peers to have poor health, be absent from school, show aggression and anxiety, suffer from childhood obesity and need special education services.<sup>6,7</sup> Nationally,

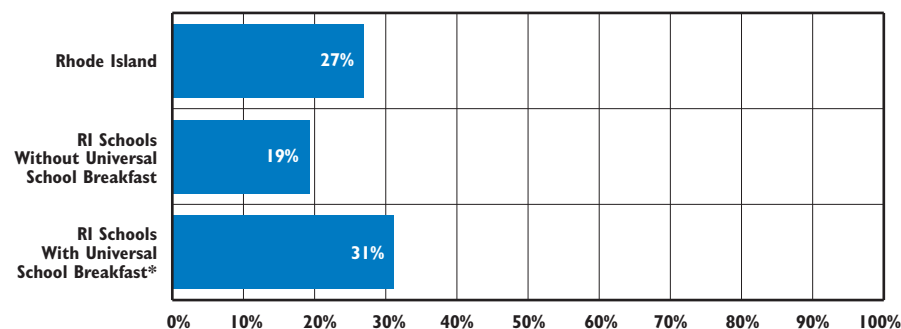
kindergarteners in households experiencing food insecurity missed, on average, two days more of school each year than their peers in food-secure households.<sup>8</sup> Risk factors for food insecurity in Rhode Island include being Hispanic, having children under the age of six, being a single parent, and not finishing high school.<sup>9</sup>

Rhode Island state law requires all public schools to provide students with access to school breakfast, although higher-income parents may be required to pay for some share of the costs. Rhode Island also receives over \$5.4 million in federal funds for the School Breakfast Program, which flows directly into the state's economy.<sup>10</sup>

If Rhode Island increased low-income student participation in the School Breakfast Program from 40% to 60% of School Lunch Program participation rates, the state would receive more than \$2.4 million in additional federal funds to support the School Breakfast Program.<sup>11</sup>

During the 2008-2009 school year, 39 low-income students participated in the School Breakfast Program for every 100 low-income students that participated in the School Lunch Program. Rhode Island ranks 41st in the country for participation in the School Breakfast Program when participation is analyzed as the ratio of low-income students in the School Breakfast Program to low-income students in the School Lunch Program, down from 37th last year.<sup>12</sup>

**Low-Income Children Participating in the School Breakfast Program, Rhode Island, October 2009**



\* Includes all schools in Central Falls, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket that offer universal breakfast throughout the district, as well as selected schools in East Providence.

Source: Rhode Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, Office of Finance and Office of Network & Information Systems, October 2009.

◆ In 2009, the percentage of low-income students participating in School Breakfast Programs in schools offering universal school breakfast was 31% compared with 19% of students participating in non-universal programs in the remainder of the state.<sup>13</sup>

◆ Universal School Breakfast Programs, which provide free breakfast to all children regardless of income, increase school breakfast participation and can reduce administrative costs. When schools offer breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day, participation rates increase even more.<sup>14</sup>

◆ During the 2009-2010 school year, 16 school districts in Rhode Island with severe-need schools (schools in which 40% or more of students qualify for free or reduced price schools meals) did not offer universal school breakfast.<sup>15</sup> Data show that universal classroom breakfast programs are key to increasing school breakfast participation among low-income students, especially in severe-needs schools.<sup>16</sup>

◆ Each day a low-income student does not participate in the School Breakfast Program in a severe-needs school, the district loses \$1.68 in federal nutrition funding for each student who would have received a free breakfast and \$1.38 for each student who would have received a reduced-price breakfast.<sup>17</sup>

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Table 15.

Children Participating in School Breakfast, Rhode Island, October 2009

SCHOOL DISTRICT	OCTOBER 2009 ENROLLMENT	DISTRICT-WIDE AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	% OF ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN BREAKFAST	# OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	% OF ALL LOW-INCOME CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST
Barrington	3,538	12	<1%	141	5	4%
Bristol Warren	3,640	297	8%	1,132	176	16%
Burrillville	2,540	173	7%	753	129	17%
Central Falls	3,532	897	25%	2,600	654	25%
Chariho	3,603	135	4%	788	108	14%
Coventry	5,449	350	6%	1,246	218	17%
Cranston	11,443	959	8%	3,518	639	18%
Cumberland	5,188	367	7%	1,139	300	26%
East Greenwich	2,452	35	1%	186	26	14%
East Providence	5,570	360	6%	2,355	307	13%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,931	66	3%	267	40	15%
Foster	233	16	7%	37	12	32%
Foster-Glocester	1,427	40	3%	200	31	16%
Glocester	544	79	15%	119	73	61%
Jamestown	443	3	1%	24	2	8%
Johnston	3,244	240	7%	1,242	211	17%
Lincoln	3,652	218	6%	829	193	23%
Little Compton	311	11	4%	48	9	19%
Middletown	2,356	119	5%	622	96	15%
Narragansett	1,437	43	3%	211	36	17%
New Shoreham	122	18	15%	16	7	44%
Newport	2,402	405	17%	1,253	393	31%
North Kingstown	4,513	338	7%	811	263	32%
North Providence	3,558	260	7%	1,317	201	15%
North Smithfield	1,845	80	4%	254	44	17%
Pawtucket	9,952	2,065	21%	6,723	1,657	25%
Portsmouth	2,693	89	3%	306	52	17%
Providence	29,437	8,799	30%	22,685	7,709	34%
Scituate	1,683	18	1%	206	14	7%
Smithfield	2,668	65	2%	390	42	11%
South Kingstown	3,751	121	3%	590	105	18%
Tiverton	1,959	90	5%	385	53	14%
Warwick	10,513	421	4%	3,100	380	12%
West Warwick	3,738	462	12%	1,677	402	24%
Westerly	3,206	371	12%	966	289	30%
Woonsocket	6,527	2,111	32%	4,401	1,700	39%
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>55,588</i>	<i>14,739</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>39,339</i>	<i>12,515</i>	<i>32%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>95,512</i>	<i>5,394</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>23,198</i>	<i>4,061</i>	<i>18%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>151,100</i>	<i>20,133</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>62,537</i>	<i>16,576</i>	<i>27%</i>

## Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, Office of Finance and Office of Network & Information Systems, October 2009.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

“District-wide average daily participation in breakfast” is the average number of students who ate breakfast in school per school day during October 2009.

“Number of low-income students” is the number of students eligible for and enrolled in free or reduced-price meals during October 2009. “Low-income average daily participation in breakfast” is the average number of students eligible for and enrolled in free or reduced-price meals who ate breakfast in school per school day during October 2009.

To participate in the Reduced-Price Breakfast Program, students’ household income must fall between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty guideline. For the Free Breakfast Program, household income must fall below 130% of the federal poverty guideline. Children in households receiving Food Stamp/SNAP Benefits and households participating in the Rhode Island Works Program are automatically eligible for free meals.

## References

- <sup>1,3,4,11,12</sup> *School breakfast scorecard: School year 2008-2009.* (2009). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.
- <sup>2</sup> Murphy, J. M. (2007). Breakfast and learning: An updated review. *Current Nutrition & Food Science*, 3(1), 3-36.
- <sup>5</sup> Cook, J. T., March, E. L. & Ertinger de Cuba, S. (2009). *Even very low levels of food insecurity found to harm children's health: Children's HealthWatch Policy Action Brief.* Boston, MA: Children's HealthWatch.
- <sup>6</sup> National Anti-Hunger Organizations. (2009). *NAHO Roadmap to end childhood hunger in America by 2015.* Retrieved February 14, 2010 from [www.alliancetoendhunger.org](http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org).

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