

Children Participating in School Breakfast

DEFINITION

Children participating in school breakfast is the percentage of low-income public school 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

Children who suffer from undernutrition have poorer overall health status than well-nourished children, miss more days of school and are less ready to learn when they do attend.¹ Students who eat breakfast have significantly higher math and reading scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness and lower incidences of social and behavioral problems.²

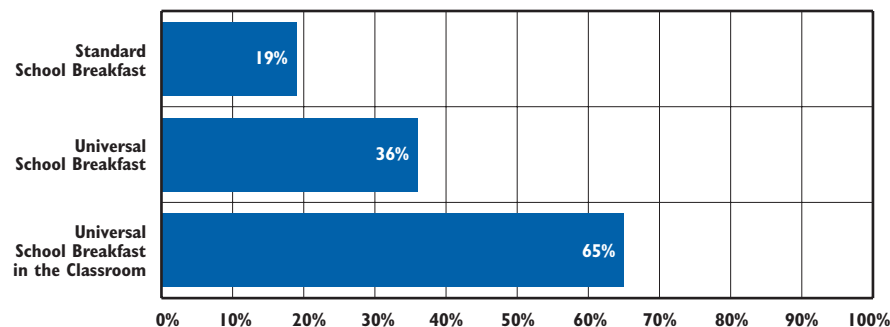
Low-income students are more likely than other students to arrive at school without an adequate breakfast. Research shows that when there is a school breakfast program available, low-income students are significantly more likely to consume a breakfast.³ The School Breakfast Program offers nutritious meals, providing children who participate with one-fourth or more of their Recommended Daily Allowance for key nutrients.⁴

In Rhode Island, one in three households with children did not have

enough food to meet basic needs at all times during the year in 2000.⁵ Rhode Islanders who are Hispanic, have children under the age of 6, are single parents or have not finished high school are the most likely to report that they did not have enough food to meet their basic needs.⁶ For other children, long commute times and rushed family schedules make having time for eating breakfast before school difficult and put children at a disadvantage in their ability to concentrate and arrive in class ready to learn.⁷

In 1995, almost two-thirds (62%) of Rhode Island public schools did not offer the breakfast program.⁸ Rhode Island state legislation now requires all public schools to provide students with access to school breakfast.⁹ Federal and state funds are available to support the costs of the School Breakfast Program. To receive a reduced-price meal, household income must be below 185% of the federal poverty level. For free meals, household income must fall below 130% of poverty. Children in Food Stamp and Family Independence Program households are automatically eligible for free meals.¹⁰ In October 2003, an average of 19,659 breakfasts was served daily across Rhode Island. Of these, 79% were to low-income children eligible for free or reduced price meals.¹¹

Participation Rates in School Breakfast for Three Different Program Models



Source: *Evaluation of the Universal School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Key Interim Report Findings from the First Year of Implementation*. (November 2002). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.

- ◆ Universal School Breakfast Programs offer school breakfast free to all students, regardless of family income. Universal programs increase school breakfast participation dramatically, especially among low-income students. When schools offer breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day, participation increases three-fold.¹²
- ◆ Providing free school breakfast to all students can significantly improve the number of low-income children who access the program by removing the stigma that arises when the program is only offered to low-income students. Schools save money by providing universal free breakfast through eliminating paperwork and increased economies of scale as the total number of breakfasts served increases.¹³
- ◆ Rhode Island ranks 33rd in the country for participation in school breakfast by low-income students. In Rhode Island, there are only 38 low-income students participating in school breakfast for every 100 low-income students participating in school lunch.¹⁴
- ◆ In March 2003, Pawtucket joined Cranston, Central Falls and Providence as the fourth school district in the state to offer universal free school breakfast to every student in the public schools.¹⁵ Efforts are currently underway to develop universal free school breakfast programs in the remaining core cities.¹⁶

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Table 11.

Children Participating in School Breakfast, Rhode Island, Fall 2003

SCHOOL DISTRICT	2003 FALL ENROLLMENT	DISTRICT WIDE AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	PERCENT OF ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN BREAKFAST	NUMBER OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	PERCENT OF ALL LOW-INCOME CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST
Barrington	3,325	31	1%	84	6	7%
Bristol Warren	3,579	196	5%	901	166	18%
Burrillville	2,515	105	4%	526	64	12%
Central Falls	3,631	1,010	28%	3,003	833	28%
Charlho	3,685	95	3%	515	66	13%
Coventry	5,613	539	10%	954	259	27%
Cranston	10,831	1,333	12%	2,408	698	29%
Cumberland	5,161	261	5%	653	176	27%
East Greenwich	2,379	50	2%	126	36	29%
East Providence	6,210	467	8%	2,013	414	21%
Exeter-West Greenwich	2,096	61	3%	217	32	15%
Foster	344	37	11%	53	23	43%
Foster-Glocester	1,693	62	4%	158	34	22%
Glocester	735	21	3%	102	18	18%
Jamestown	545	3	1%	34	2	6%
Johnston	3,189	185	6%	778	146	19%
Lincoln	3,452	144	4%	356	134	38%
Little Compton	312	0	0%	20	0	0%
Middletown	2,768	116	4%	489	96	20%
Narragansett	1,644	33	2%	211	23	11%
New Shoreham	151	11	7%	14	7	50%
Newport	2,754	525	19%	1,303	498	38%
North Kingstown	4,492	174	4%	537	138	26%
North Providence	3,352	262	8%	809	205	25%
North Smithfield	1,926	27	1%	185	8	4%
Pawtucket	9,350	1,989	21%	6,215	1,649	27%
Portsmouth	2,945	73	2%	210	33	16%
Providence	27,471	8,544	31%	22,882	7,288	32%
Scituate	1,731	35	2%	164	20	12%
Smithfield	2,611	102	4%	184	54	29%
South Kingstown	4,010	124	3%	467	104	22%
Tiverton	2,149	113	5%	320	58	18%
Warwick	11,537	695	6%	2,325	495	21%
West Warwick	3,684	393	11%	1,269	301	24%
Westerly	3,674	392	11%	787	225	29%
Woonsocket	6,729	1,451	22%	4,207	1,257	30%
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>53,619</i>	<i>13,912</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>38,879</i>	<i>11,826</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>98,654</i>	<i>5,747</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>16,600</i>	<i>3,740</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>152,273</i>	<i>19,659</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>55,479</i>	<i>15,566</i>	<i>28%</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, October 2002 and October 2003. Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.

Fall enrollment is the public school enrollment as of October 1, 2003. Average daily participation in breakfast is the number of students eating breakfast in school on average in the month of October 2003. Number of low-income students is the number of students eligible for and enrolled in free or reduced price lunches in the month of October 2003. Low-income average daily participation in breakfast is the number of students eligible for and enrolled in free or reduced price lunches, eating breakfast in school on average in the month of October 2003. Private schools and residential child care facilities may offer the School Breakfast Program, but are not included in these calculations.

References for Indicator

- ¹ *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies.* (June 2002). Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, Center on Hunger and Poverty.
- ^{2,3,4,7,9,10,13,14} *School Breakfast Scorecard 2003: FRAC's Annual Status Report on the School Breakfast Program.* (2003). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.
- ^{5,6} *The Rhode Island Food Security Monitoring Project: Assessing the Prevalence of Hunger and Food Insecurity in Rhode Island Year 2000, Summary Report.* (January 2001). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health.
- ⁸ Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, Fall 1995.
- ¹¹ Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, Fall 2003.
- ¹² *Evaluation of the Universal School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Key Interim Report Findings from the First Year of Implementation.* (November 2002). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.
- ¹⁵ Castellucci, J. (March 26, 2003). *School Board Opens Breakfast Program to All.* Providence Journal.
- ¹⁶ The George Wiley Center. March, 2004.