

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 undernourishment 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

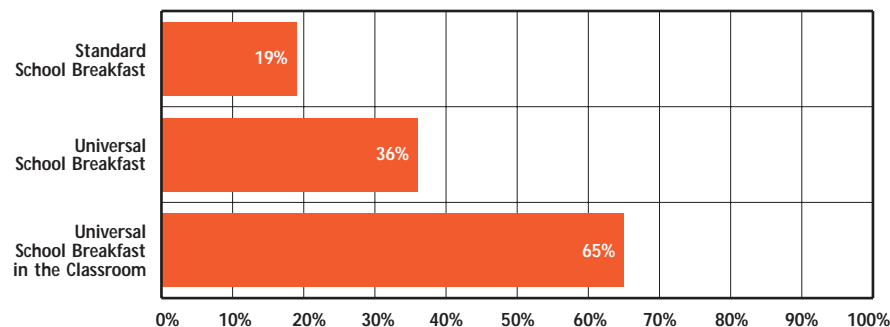
Low-income students are more likely than other students to arrive at school without an adequate breakfast.³ Research shows that when school breakfast is available, low-income students are significantly more likely to consume a breakfast than if there was no breakfast program.⁴

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 law 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 2002, an average of 17,391 breakfasts were served daily across Rhode Island. Of these, 88% were provided to low-income children eligible for free or reduced price meals.¹¹

Participation Rates in the School Breakfast for Three Different Program Models



◆ 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

Source: *Evaluation of the Universal School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Key Interim Report Findings from the First Year of Implementation* (November 2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

◆ 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 the elimination of paperwork and increased economies of scale as the total number of breakfast 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 37 low-income students participating in school breakfast for every 100 low-income students participating in school lunch.¹⁴

◆ In the 2002-2003 school year, Cranston joined Central Falls and Providence as the third school district in the state to offer a Universal School Breakfast program free to every student in the public schools. Efforts are currently underway to develop Universal School Breakfast programs in the remaining core cities.¹⁵

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Table 10. Children Participating in School Breakfast, Rhode Island, Fall 2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT	2001 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	3,177	9	<1%	81	2	2%
Bristol-Warren	3,664	188	5%	963	151	16%
Burrillville	2,661	112	4%	531	66	12%
Central Falls	3,638	1,088	30%	2,937	858	29%
Chariho	3,718	73	2%	507	54	11%
Coventry	5,585	325	6%	722	166	23%
Cranston	10,737	1,465	14%	2,152	700	33%
Cumberland	5,128	259	5%	655	171	26%
East Greenwich	2,362	47	2%	128	27	21%
East Providence	6,363	447	7%	1,888	395	21%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,126	60	3%	202	31	15%
Foster	374	51	14%	55	27	49%
Foster-Glocester	1,632	48	3%	145	20	14%
Glocester	751	6	1%	95	5	5%
Jamestown	572	6	1%	29	3	10%
Johnston	3,260	156	5%	621	137	22%
Lincoln	3,520	156	4%	324	137	42%
Little Compton	331	1	<1%	22	1	5%
Middletown	2,845	98	3%	482	80	17%
Narragansett	1,672	32	2%	171	21	12%
New Shoreham	130	5	4%	14	5	36%
Newport	2,920	540	18%	1,398	516	37%
North Kingstown	4,334	201	5%	494	163	33%
North Providence	3,378	217	6%	737	187	25%
North Smithfield	1,791	42	2%	148	20	14%
Pawtucket	9,491	1,416	15%	6,201	1,416	23%
Portsmouth	2,792	67	2%	158	35	22%
Providence	27,277	7,579	28%	21,692	7,579	35%
Scituate	1,711	25	1%	119	16	21%
Smithfield	2,625	76	3%	149	35	23%
South Kingstown	4,165	122	3%	567	109	22%
Tiverton	2,154	85	4%	355	46	13%
Warwick	12,084	645	5%	2,158	491	23%
West Warwick	3,659	401	11%	1,260	330	26%
Westerly	3,591	190	5%	681	190	28%
Woonsocket	6,534	1,153	18%	3,584	1,153	32%
Core Cities	53,519	12,177	23%	37,072	11,852	32%
Remainder of State	99,233	5,214	5%	15,353	3,491	23%
Rhode Island	152,752	17,391	11%	52,425	15,343	29%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of School Food Services, October 2001 and October 2002. Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.

Fall enrollment is the public school enrollment as of October 1, 2001. Average daily participation in breakfast is the number of students eating breakfast in school on average in the month of October 2002. 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 2001. 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 2002. Half-day kindergarten, 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 2002: FRAC's Annual Status Report on the School Breakfast Program* (2002). 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). The 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 2002.

¹² *Evaluation of the Universal School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Key Interim Report Findings from the First Year of Implementation* (November 2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

¹⁵ The George Wiley Center, Cranston, RI, February, 2003.