

# 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 helps ensure that the nation's most vulnerable children start their day off with a healthy meal. Nationally, during the 2020-2021 school year, nearly 14.0 million children ate breakfast at school each day through the School Breakfast Program, a decrease of 4.7% from the 2018-2019 school year (pre-pandemic).<sup>1</sup> The School Breakfast Program offers nutritious meals, which together with school lunches, make up a large proportion of the daily dietary intake of participating children.<sup>2</sup> The School Breakfast Program helps schools support academic success and improves attendance, behavior, and health, including reduced obesity rates.<sup>3</sup>

Food-insecure families often do not have sufficient food to provide nutritious breakfasts every morning, and children in these families are at risk of falling behind their peers physically, cognitively, academically, emotionally, and socially. Children who are

undernourished are more likely to have poorer cognitive functioning when they miss breakfast. They are more likely to have behavior, emotional, and academic challenges, more likely to repeat a grade, and more likely to be suspended. Children experiencing hunger are also more likely to be tardy or absent from school.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

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 (less than 130% of the federal poverty level for free meals and between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level for reduced-price meals).<sup>7,8</sup>

During the 2020–2021 school year, in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of meals (99.4% of breakfasts and 99.8% of lunches) were offered to children at no charge. In Rhode Island, during the 2020-2021 school year, free breakfasts and lunches were available to all students, regardless of income. An average of 29,335 children participated in school breakfast, a decline of 14.5% from the 2018-2019 school year (pre-pandemic), and an average of 38,653 children participated in school lunch, a 48.4% decline from the 2018-2019 school year (pre-pandemic).<sup>9</sup>



## Strategies for Increasing School Breakfast Participation

- ◆ **The federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools and districts with 40% or more students identified as low-income, homeless or in foster care to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students and reduces administrative burdens. In Rhode Island, in the 2020-2021 school year, 67% of eligible schools participated in CEP, up from 57% in 2019-2020.**<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ **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.**<sup>11</sup> All schools in Rhode Island offered universal free breakfast during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ **Making breakfast part of the school day is another proven strategy for increasing breakfast participation, reducing stigma, and increasing convenience.**<sup>13</sup>



## A Response to COVID-19: Pandemic-EBT

- ◆ **The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close buildings and classrooms and many students had to quarantine to comply with health mandates, impacting students' ability to receive school meals.**<sup>14,15</sup>
- ◆ **In March 2020, the U.S. Congress enacted Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT), a new nutrition assistance program that allowed states to provide funds in grocery benefits to make up for meals missed due to classroom closures and quarantining. P-EBT provided families whose children qualified for free or reduced-price meals with funds to purchase breakfast and lunch, substantially reducing food insecurity.**<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ **In October 2020, Congress extended P-EBT through the 2020-2021 school year with additional considerations and flexibilities to address the combination of in-person, distance learning, and hybrid instruction models and to replace meals missed at child care centers. The program was subsequently extended to children under six in SNAP households, as well as into the summer of 2021.**<sup>17,18</sup> In July 2021, 67,672 students received P-EBT benefits in Rhode Island.<sup>19</sup>

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Table 14.

Children Participating in School Breakfast, Rhode Island, October 2019

SCHOOL DISTRICT	OCTOBER 2019 ENROLLMENT	ESTIMATED AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	% OF ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN BREAKFAST	# OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	ESTIMATED AVERAGE DAILY PARTICIPATION IN BREAKFAST	% OF ALL LOW-INCOME CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST
Barrington	3,375	63	2%	147	11	7%
Bristol Warren	3,124	227	7%	932	171	18%
Burrillville	2,227	172	8%	759	125	16%
Central Falls	2,877	1,533	53%	NA	NA	NA
Chariho	3,152	166	5%	552	104	19%
Coventry	4,524	409	9%	1,311	297	23%
Cranston	10,324	2,714	26%	4,502	1,523	34%
Cumberland	4,508	469	10%	952	258	27%
East Greenwich	2,579	82	3%	139	38	28%
East Providence	5,026	1,063	21%	2,244	687	31%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,580	84	5%	230	41	18%
Foster	239	34	14%	59	27	46%
Foster-Glocester	1,354	121	9%	199	63	31%
Glocester	555	64	11%	68	22	33%
Jamestown	483	*	1%	34	*	11%
Johnston	3,199	403	13%	1,403	283	20%
Lincoln	3,191	219	7%	893	145	16%
Little Compton	237	*	1%	30	*	4%
Middletown	2,094	179	9%	456	114	25%
Narragansett	1,267	81	6%	256	41	16%
New Shoreham	134	11	8%	28	*	21%
Newport	2,075	336	16%	1,407	299	21%
North Kingstown	3,953	316	8%	844	263	31%
North Providence	3,530	606	17%	1,641	397	24%
North Smithfield	1,645	74	4%	272	44	16%
Pawtucket	8,657	2,495	29%	NA	NA	NA
Portsmouth	2,403	105	4%	394	53	14%
Providence	22,958	11,431	50%	NA	NA	NA
Scituate	1,226	32	3%	130	14	11%
Smithfield	2,379	148	6%	337	75	22%
South Kingstown	2,860	181	6%	475	136	29%
Tiverton	1,717	150	9%	360	88	25%
Warwick	8,302	588	7%	2,917	407	14%
West Warwick	3,586	630	18%	1,816	494	27%
Westerly	2,489	338	14%	894	274	31%
Woonsocket	5,884	2,417	41%	4,397	1,927	44%
Charter Schools	8,989	2,873	32%	NA	NA	NA
State-Operated Schools	1,860	505	27%	NA	NA	NA
UCAP	128	42	33%	112	42	38%
Four Core Cities	40,376	17,875	44%	NA	NA	NA
Remainder of State	89,337	10,073	11%	26,681	6,506	24%
Rhode Island	140,690	31,368	22%	NA	NA	NA

## Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2019. (Newer data not available due to COVID-19 pandemic.)

NA indicates that data on low-income students and their participation in school breakfast was not available because some or all schools in this district were using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and therefore not collecting data on the incomes of students' families. During the 2019-2020 school year, Central Falls, Providence, some schools in Pawtucket, Highlander Charter School, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center were using CEP.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

Charter schools include: Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Charette Charter School, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, RI Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, SouthSide Elementary Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Charter School. State-operated schools include William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

The October 2019 enrollment and number of low-income students are for the full month of October and are not comparable with the October 1, 2019 enrollment numbers reported elsewhere in the 2020 Factbook.

(Sources and References are continued on page 179)