



School Breakfast for Learning

In support of good nutrition and academic success for all of Alaska's children, the Alaska School Nutrition Association, Food Bank of Alaska, and the Alaska Food Coalition recommend that the legislature provide funds to support Alaska school participation the School Breakfast Program.

How School Breakfast Works

Children at schools participating in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) receive free, reduced-price, or full-price breakfast based on their family's income. The federal government, through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), offers reimbursements for these meals. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Child Nutrition Services, serves as the state agency for administration of funds and operational practices. Schools are not required by law to operate the School Breakfast Program.

Benefits of School Breakfast

Research has shown that school breakfast has a significant positive impact on children's behavior, academic performance, and readiness to learn. Studies have demonstrated that children participating in the School Breakfast Program have better grades, higher standardized test scores, improved attentiveness and classroom behavior, and reduced absenteeism and tardiness, as compared with eligible children who do not participate in the School Breakfast Program.

Barriers to School Breakfast

Currently, Alaska ranks 48th among the states for the percentage of low-income children accessing the School Breakfast Program. During the 2006-07 school year, only 34 percent of children who qualified for free and reduced-price school lunch received school breakfast. That year, 137 Alaska schools missed the daily opportunity to provide approximately 10,000 Alaska students from low-income families the morning nutrition they need for a successful school day.

The primary reason for this shortfall is that many schools in Alaska do not have sufficient funding to operate the School Breakfast Program. With the challenge of significant labor, transportation, and food costs acting as barriers to morning nutrition, it is difficult for many school districts to afford breakfast programs even with the federal reimbursements. School nutrition programs are generally expected to be self-sustaining and not draw on the district's general funds.

Families qualifying for “reduced-price” USDA breakfast and lunch, whose household income falls between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty line, pay a \$0.30 “co-pay” for each school breakfast and \$0.40 for each school lunch. While these co-pays may not sound significant, they create a barrier to school breakfast participation for some families who struggle to meet their basic living expenses. Fairbanks North Star Borough School District eliminated its breakfast co-pay starting in the 2006-07 school year and saw a 42% increase in breakfast participation among children in the reduced-price category.

How the State Can Help

We recommend that the state legislature provide \$1 million per year to supplement the federal reimbursements for school breakfast served to children in the free and reduced-price categories. At current participation levels, this policy would provide a 50-cent subsidy for every breakfast served to a low-income child. We also recommend that the state eliminate the 30-cent “co-pay” for reduced-price breakfast. At current participation levels, this would cost \$82,000 per year at most—and likely less because higher participation levels and higher reimbursements would help offset these costs. The elimination of the co-pay in Fairbanks had no net effect on the program’s finances due to increased federal reimbursements.

Good nutrition for our children is a wise investment for Alaska. Research shows that hungry children do not perform as well academically as their peers, and suffer a higher incidence of health, behavioral and emotional problems. By helping more low-income students start their day with school breakfast, the state can help ensure that our children succeed in school and grow to be healthy and productive adults.

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School Breakfast: Questions and Answers

How School Breakfast Works

Isn't it a family's responsibility to feed its kids? Schools have no role here.

Many families cannot afford to feed their children the healthy meals they would like to provide. One out of eight Alaska families struggles to put enough food on the table.¹ Even for more fortunate families, bus and commuting schedules can interfere with children being fed and ready to learn when they arrive at school. How can schools make this work with everything else they are required to do?

School breakfast supports the educational mission of schools by enhancing student achievement and learning. Hungry children show lower test scores, more absenteeism and tardiness, and more behavioral and emotional problems.²

How does the state government get involved in supporting breakfast in schools? 39 states have passed legislation supporting school breakfast. Alaska is not one of them.³ Alaska is missing out on \$1.9 million in federal funds due to underutilization of the School Breakfast Program—and state action can help leverage those federal dollars.⁴

Shouldn't schools be working on the obesity problem instead?

Eating a healthy breakfast is associated with reduced risk of obesity. 5 Children who eat school breakfast start their day with healthy foods including milk, fruits, vegetables, and whole or enriched grains.

References: Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson. "Household Food Security in the United States, 2005." Economic Research Report 29. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2006. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR29/>. Center on Hunger and Poverty. "The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies." June 2002. Available at <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/ConsequencesofHunger.pdf>

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). "School Breakfast Scorecard 2007." Washington, DC: FRAC, December 2007. Available at "http://www.frac.org/pdf/SBP_2007.pdf" Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 2003; 157:780-784. See also Center on Weight & Health, Pediatric Overweight: A Review of the Literature, June 2001, page 48.
