Benefits of a Strong School Breakfast Program

The School Breakfast Program is the epitome of good public policy. It not only reduces hunger, but it has a range of other positive outcomes that advance key national priorities. An extensive body of research documents the positive impact of the program on student achievement, health and well-being.

DC public schools deserve recognition for connecting students to school breakfast. The annual Food Research and Action Center’s School Breakfast Scorecard ranked DC as number one in the country in school breakfast participation for SY2012-13. DC schools served 70 low-income children breakfast for every 100 that received lunch during SY2012-2013. On average each day, 30,836 low-income students ate breakfast each day in SY2012-13 compared with 26,666 in SY2011-12, an increase of 15.6 percent.

Let’s all work to ensure DC schools continue to garner the national number one school breakfast ranking in SY 2013-14 because:

Eating School Breakfast Helps Struggling Families

School breakfast is a critical support to struggling families trying to stretch limited resources. It provides children a significant portion of the nutrition their bodies and brains need each school day and reduces strain on tight family food budgets. In Gallup surveys taken between 2008 and 2012, 23.5 percent of households with children responded that there were times in the past year when they did not have enough money to buy food that they needed. School breakfast also is a crucial support to low-income working families where parents have non-traditional work hours or long early morning commutes, often coming on top of long work hours.

Eating School Breakfast Improves Academic Performance

Making sure every child has eaten a healthy breakfast is an important but often overlooked tool to boost academic performance. Children who skip breakfast are less able to master the tasks necessary to do well in school. They have more difficulty distinguishing among similar images, show increased errors, and have slower memory recall. Children who live in families that experience hunger have lower math scores and an increased likelihood of repeating a grade, and receive more special education services. Children who eat breakfast at school – closer to class and test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.
Eating School Breakfast Reduces Behavioral Problems

Every parent knows that hungry children often are cranky and are more likely to misbehave. Teenagers experiencing hunger are more likely to be suspended from school, and to have difficulty getting along with other children and establishing friendships. Students who participate in school breakfast exhibit decreased behavioral and psychological problems and have lower rates of absence and tardiness.

Providing students with breakfast in the classroom is associated with fewer disciplinary office referrals.

Eating School Breakfast Improves Children’s Diets

Breakfasts served as part of the School Breakfast Program provide key nutrients children need every day—and updated nutrition requirements established under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 have amplified these benefits. All meals meet nutrition guidelines that limit sodium and saturated fats and eliminate trans fats. New standards increased the availability of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains on the school menu. Children who participate in school breakfast are more likely to consume diets that are adequate or exceed standards for important vitamins and minerals than those who do not eat school breakfast or who have breakfast at home.

Eating School Breakfast Can Help Reduce Obesity

Obesity translates into increased risks of premature death and an overall lower quality of life. Children and adolescents who eat breakfast (and school breakfast) are significantly less likely to be overweight, while skipping breakfast is associated with a higher risk of obesity.

School breakfast also helps build lifelong healthy eating habits.

This piece was adapted from School Breakfast: Reaching More Children, Making Breakfast Better, the first in Food Research and Action Center’s Child Nutrition Reauthorization Issue Brief series: available at: www.frac.org. For more information on school breakfast, please contact:

D.C. Hunger Solutions
1200 18th Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202-986-2200; email info@dchunger.org
www.dchunger.org

References


