

Proven Impacts of School Breakfast



Research shows why breakfast is the most important meal of the day. While it is intuitive that students need food to fuel their brains, recent research has helped quantify the true impact of school breakfast. The results corroborate what we have always known: breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

SKIPPING BREAKFAST AND EXPERIENCING HUNGER IMPAIR A CHILD'S ABILITY TO LEARN

- Children experiencing hunger have lower math scores and are more likely to repeat a grade. ¹
- Behavioral, emotional, and academic problems are more prevalent among children experiencing hunger. ²
- Children experiencing hunger are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy, in addition to having behavioral and attention problems more often than other children. ³
- Children who are undernourished have poorer cognitive functioning when they miss breakfast. ⁴

EATING BREAKFAST AT SCHOOL HELPS IMPROVE CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- 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. ⁵
- Providing breakfast to students at school improves their concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning. ^{6,7,8}
- Participating in school breakfast is associated with improved math grades, attendance, and punctuality. ^{9,10}
- Children perform better on tests of vocabulary and matching figures after eating breakfast. ^{11,12}
- Consuming breakfast improves children's performance on demanding mental tasks and reaction to frustration. ¹³

SCHOOL BREAKFAST IMPROVES STUDENT BEHAVIORAL AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and standardized achievement test scores as well as decreased tardiness. ¹⁴
- Children report that they believe eating breakfast increases their energy and ability to pay attention in school. ¹⁶

INCREASING BREAKFAST ACCESS YIELDS POSITIVE RESULTS FOR HEALTH AND LEARNING

- Schools that offer breakfast free to all students have higher breakfast participation, especially when breakfast is served in the classroom, resulting in a higher percentage of students consuming a nutritionally substantive breakfast. ^{17,18,19}
- Providing students with breakfast in the classroom is associated with lower tardy rates and fewer disciplinary office referrals. ¹⁶

SCHOOL BREAKFAST CAN IMPROVE CHILDREN'S NUTRITION AND PROTECT AGAINST OBESITY

- School breakfast participants are more likely to consume diets that are adequate or exceed standards for important vitamins and minerals (e.g., vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, phosphorus). ^{21,22,23}
- Low-income children who eat school breakfast have better overall diet quality than those who eat breakfast elsewhere or skip breakfast. ²⁴
- School breakfast participation is associated with a lower body mass index (BMI, an indicator of excess body fat), lower probability of being overweight, and lower probability of obesity. ^{25,26}

SCHOOL BREAKFAST DECREASES THE RISK OF FOOD INSECURITY

- School breakfast offered to all students for free may eliminate disparities between food secure and food insecure children in terms of eating breakfast at all. ²⁷
- Students with improved nutrient intake as a result of a school breakfast program offered free to all students report decreases in symptoms of hunger. ²⁸

Adapted from Food Research and Action Center's Breakfast for Learning: scientific research on the link between children's nutrition and academic performance. 2011.

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