

LESSONS LEARNED:

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL
MANDATE IN MASSACHUSETTS

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PREPARED BY
NATHAN GARCIA
EMERSON NATIONAL HUNGER FELLOW

CONGRESSIONAL
HUNGER CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

This report was created to assess the implementation of a Breakfast After The Bell Mandate within the state of Massachusetts so that policy makers who wish to create a similar mandate outside of Massachusetts may understand the program's challenges and keys to success. By using this assessment, it is my hope that readers will gain insight into the importance of school breakfast, and how to best utilize Breakfast After The Bell (BATB) service models as an effective tool to combat child food insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

To gain understanding of how the mandate was being implemented, I worked alongside the Child Nutrition Outreach Program (CNOP) staff at Project Bread in Boston to conduct interviews with School Nutrition Directors (SNDs) across the state of Massachusetts. SNDs were selected if they worked within a district with at least one site mandated by the state to implement a BATB program by the school year 2022-2023. Over the course of 4 months, we were able to conduct 37 interviews about the conditions and capacity of their breakfast programs, and their use of BATB service models.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals and groups who have committed countless hours to both understanding and combating food insecurity within the state of Massachusetts. It is through their significant contributions and hard work that this analysis is built upon, and I am grateful to have learned from their expertise. Though effects of COVID-19 are both present and yet to be fully revealed, it remains clear that addressing food insecurity and its root causes is work that requires the same urgency and dedication that has been offered and witnessed by myself from the following groups:



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This study and analysis was put into effect through the guidance provided by Emerson National Hunger Fellowship Director Tony Jackson and Program Specialist Emma Williamson. Administered through the Congressional Hunger Center, The Emerson Fellowship “bridges gaps between local efforts and national public policy, as fellows support partner organizations with program development, research, evaluation, outreach, organizing, and advocacy projects.”[1]



With the relationships they have fostered and the dedication of their staff to work toward “a Massachusetts where hunger is permanently solved”. Project Bread, led by President & CEO Erin McAleer, “connects people and communities in Massachusetts to reliable sources of food while advocating for policies that make food more accessible—so that no one goes hungry.”[2] It was through their training, expertise, and relationships at both a state, school district, and local level that the interviews which informed this study were able to be conducted. I am grateful to have had the unique opportunity to have worked alongside a group so committed to ending hunger.



CHILD NUTRITION OUTREACH PROGRAM

A department within Project Bread, the Child Nutrition Outreach Program (CNOP) works to increase participation in school breakfast and summer meals in Massachusetts” striving “to ensure that all children in the state have access to meals that help them learn and thrive.”[3] Leading the team with both a dedication to ending food insecurity and a profound expertise the Director of Child Nutrition, Natasha Smith, formulated the work plan (which was the derivation for this report). It was through her guidance along with the support of Assistant Child Nutrition Director Sharon Johnson, Child Nutrition Outreach Coordinators Clara Obstfeld, Chloe Miller, Research Assistant Kaveri Sastry, and Senior Communications Associate Sabba Rault that this assessment of the implementation of a Breakfast After the Bell programs in Massachusetts was able to be conducted. In addition to their comprehensive understanding of the nuances and intricacies of School Meal Programs, their ability to build strong, meaningful relationships, and the significant impact of those relationships was possibly the most inspiring take away from this project.



An integral partner in ending food insecurity through school meal programs, “the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is responsible for all public school services in the Commonwealth from pre-k to high school. In addition to traditional schooling, DESE provides a number of services for students, families, and educators including special needs accommodations, professional development, vocational and other alternative schooling, and opportunities for college preparation.”[4] The Office of Food and Nutrition Programs, led by Rob Leshin, is responsible for overseeing federal child nutrition programs within the state of Massachusetts. The data provided by DESE was key to understanding the impact of the Breakfast After The Bell models and the levels of need experienced by students across the state. The significant impact of DESE on school meal programs, as well as their partnership with Project Bread is yet another example of the importance of meaningful relationships and dedication required to effectively combat food insecurity among students.

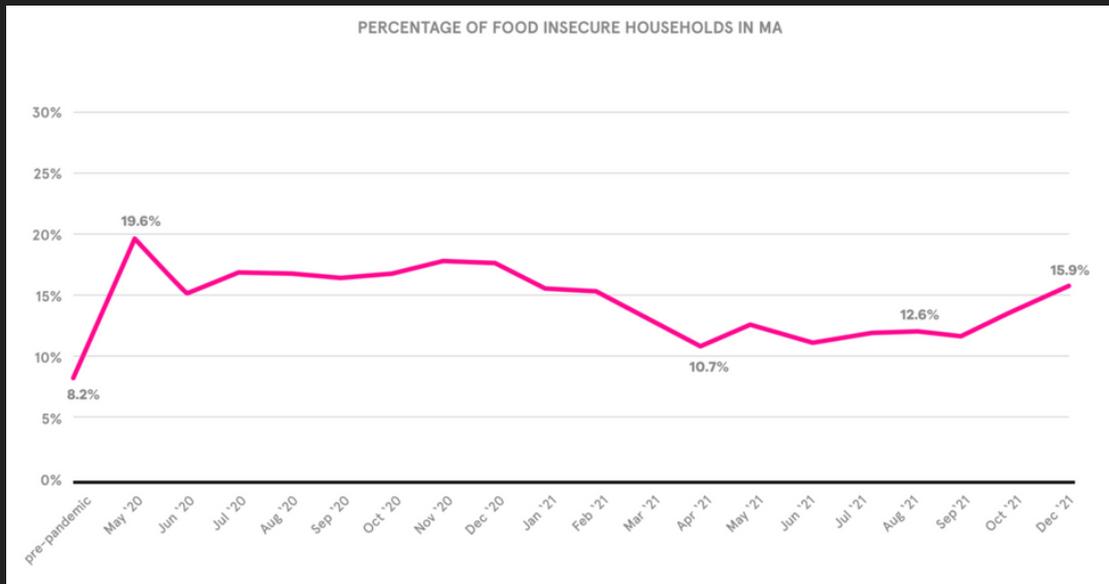


IMPACT OF COVID-19

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL PROGRAMS IN MASSACHUSETTS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO ACCOUNT FOR SOME OF THE WAYS COVID-19 HAS ALTERED THE LANDSCAPE.

FOOD INSECURITY IN MA DURING COVID-19

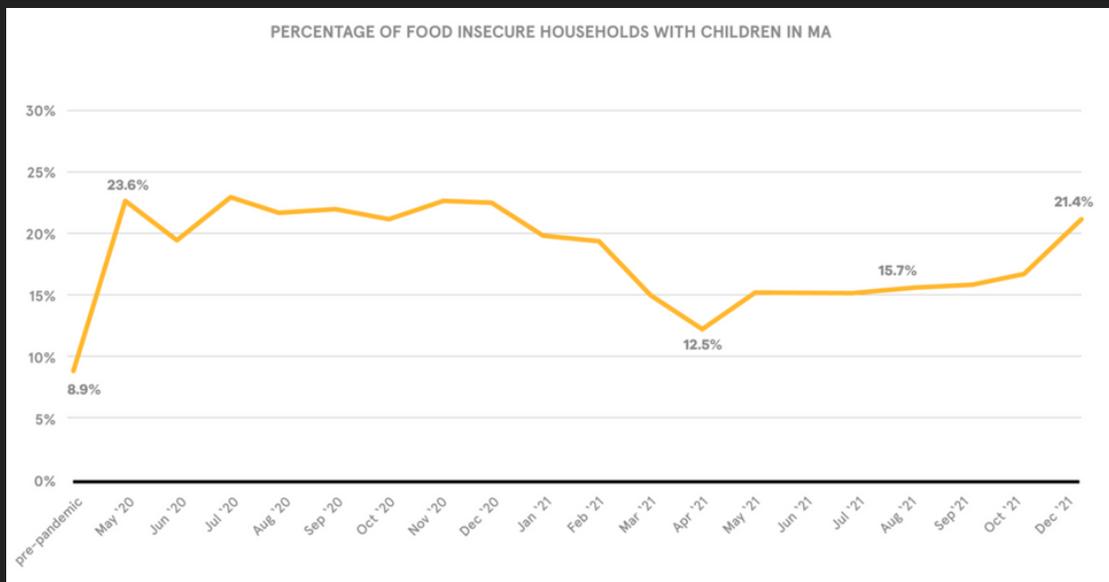
In Massachusetts, food insecurity trends have fluctuated throughout COVID-19. Both the introduction of government pandemic relief programs and their removal disrupted the trajectory of food insecurity levels. Although current data shows that the number of food insecure households are down from the all time peaks experienced in May 2020, food insecurity is - as of this writing - higher than it was before the pandemic. Even more troubling, recent data reveals that food insecurity is increasing across the state corresponding with the end of federal benefit programs aimed at providing relief during the pandemic. [5]



[6]

EVEN PRE-PANDEMIC, FOOD INSECURITY LEVELS AMONG HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN IN MASSACHUSETTS WERE OF NOTABLE CONCERN. IN 2019 AN ESTIMATED 1 IN 11 CHILDREN WERE FOOD INSECURE. [8]

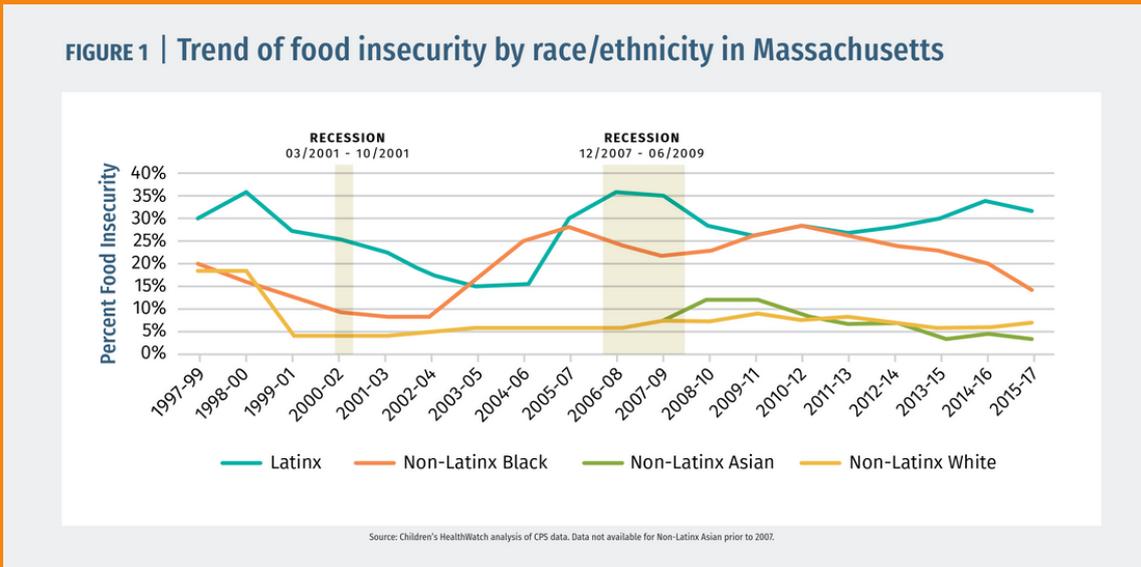
Despite the vast populations that have felt the effects of COVID-19 in their daily lives, the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity has not been experienced equally across different demographics. In particular, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on food insecurity levels among households with children. In the figure below, we can see that as recently as December 2021, households with children were again experiencing levels of food insecurity at near peak levels and with a trajectory indicating a likely increase as more federal relief programs near their end.



[7]

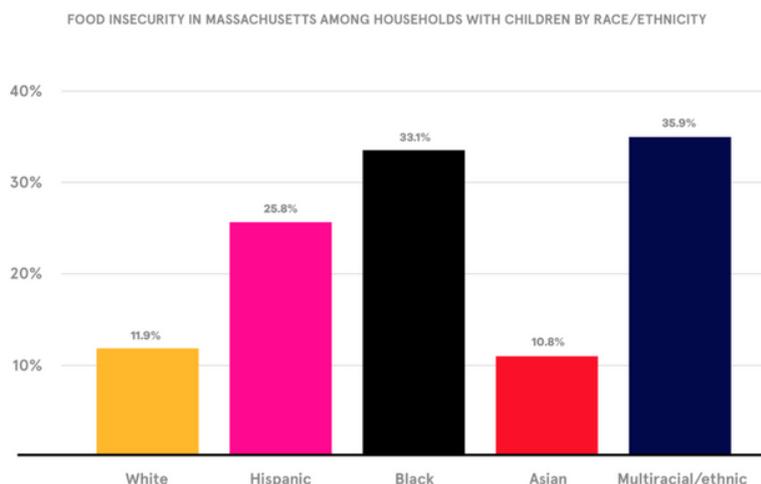
FOOD INSECURITY: RACIAL DISPARITIES

“Across Massachusetts, people who identify as Latinx and Non-Latinx Black have long been disproportionately affected by food insecurity. Based on our analysis, over the 20-year period from 1997 to 2017, state-wide rates of food insecurity were consistently higher among these two communities compared to Non-Latinx white and Non-Latinx Asian residents of the state”[9]



[10]

While food insecurity has seen an overall increase across Massachusetts during the pandemic, not all demographics have been impacted equally. The prevalence of food insecurity increased in BIPOC households from 19.1% in 2019 to 21.7% in 2020. [11] BIPOC households are recovering from the pandemic significantly slower than white households. Between July 2021–December 2021 more than 1 in 3 (33.1%) Black households with children and 1 in 4 (25.8%) Latinx households with children were food insecure, while 1 in 9 (11.9%) white households with children were food insecure (25.8%).[12]



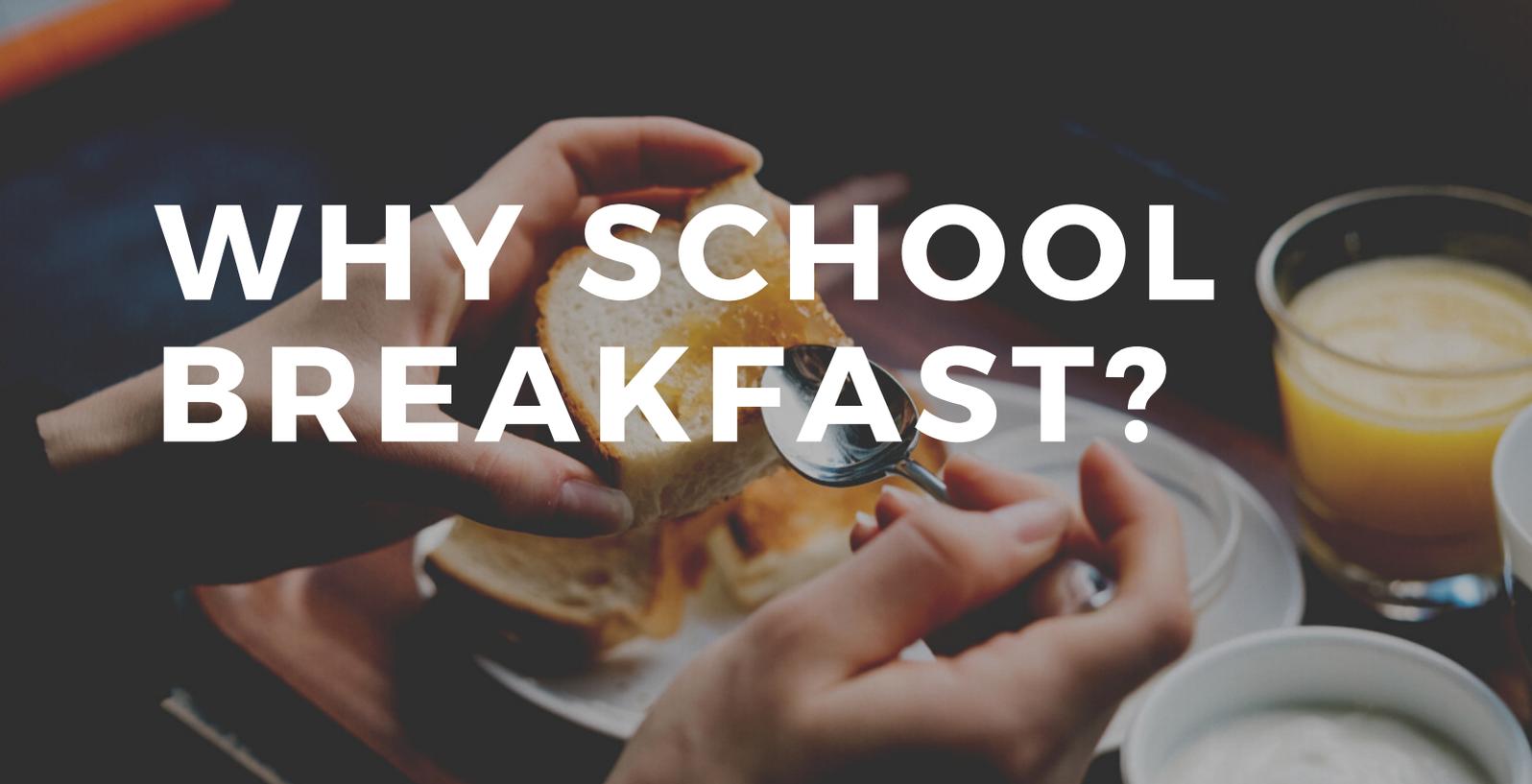
[13]

PROGRAMS LOOKING TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY LEVELS WITHIN MASSACHUSETTS, SHOULD BE PROGRAMS THAT INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY AMONG MULTIRACIAL, BLACK, AND LATINX POPULATIONS AS THOSE GROUPS EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF FOOD INSECURITY WITHIN THE STATE. WHEN LOOKING FOR WAYS TO BOOST PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM, IT'S IMPORTANT TO TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION, AND EXAMINE WHICH GROUPS ARE CURRENTLY BEING UNDERSERVED THROUGH TRADITIONAL BREAKFAST MODELS.

UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS: THIS YEAR ALL MEALS ARE FREE

In an effort to alleviate food insecurity as a result of the pandemic, the USDA has implemented temporary access to school meals, at no charge, to all students at schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). [14] Currently in effect during the 2021/2022 school year, but set to end on June 30th 2022. This access has changed the current landscape of participation and is important to take into account as we look at the current implementation of Breakfast After the Bell programs within the state.





WHY SCHOOL BREAKFAST?

There is an abundant wealth of data showing what many of us understand intuitively: students who experience food insecurity are not adequately equipped to succeed in school. The burden of hunger, if left unchecked, acts as a roadblock on the path to a student's academic pursuits. School Breakfast Programs are a powerful tool for educators to address this.

THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES OF FOOD INSECURE STUDENTS:

In addition to increased risk for mental health issues brought on by food insecurity, (i.e. anxiety, depression, impaired mood control, irritability, and difficulty getting along with their peers), students experiencing hunger also struggle with being engaged in the classroom. [15]

THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES OF FOOD INSECURE STUDENTS:

- **Food-insecure students are more likely to be apathetic, withdrawn, non-responsive, and have decreased motivation in the classroom. [16]**
- **Children experiencing hunger are more likely to be tardy or absent from school. [17]**
- **Students who experience income shocks (i.e., severe fluctuations of income) at home are more likely to become disengaged in the school environment. [18]**
- **Food insecurity is strongly correlated to higher levels of anxiety and irritability among children. [19]**
- **Teens experiencing hunger are more likely to have difficulty getting along with peers, get suspended from school, see a psychologist, have suicidal tendencies, and struggle with depression, as compared to their food-secure peers. [20]**
- **Chronic stress (commonly referred to as toxic stress) among children experiencing chronic poverty and food insecurity can lead to delays in brain development and produce anxiety, impaired mood control, and emotional behavioral disorders [21]**

BREAKFAST FOR HEALTH AND LEARNING

When made available to students, breakfast is proven to provide a wide range of benefits that are significantly relevant to the classroom. Unfortunately, food insecure students face significant disadvantages in the classroom compared to their peers. Starting the day with a healthy breakfast is vital to the success of every student, and students who have access to one are more equipped to learn, less likely to have issues with behavior, and have a stronger projected health outcome.

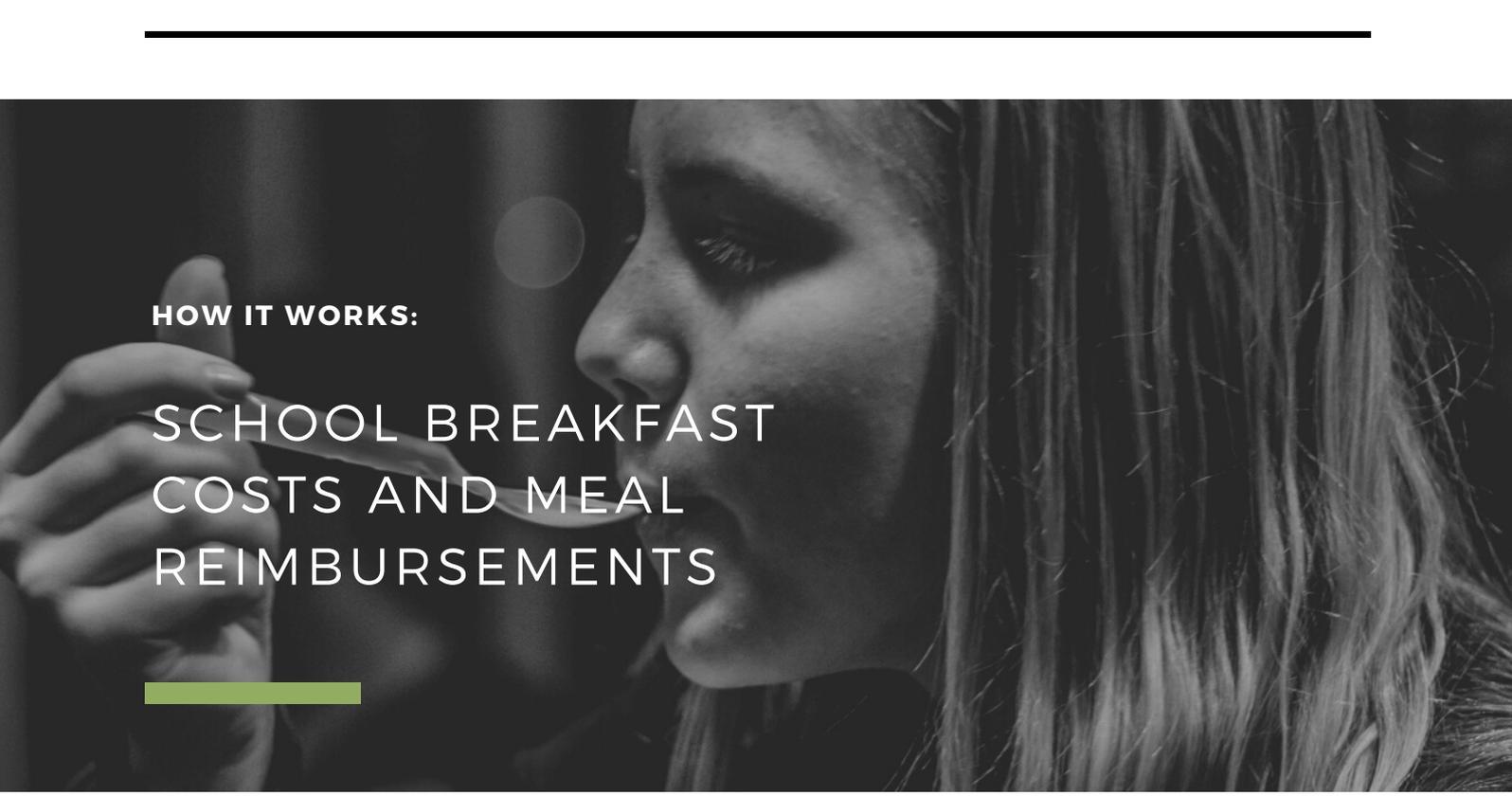
- Students who eat breakfast the morning of a standardized test have significantly higher scores in spelling, reading, and math, compared to those who do not eat breakfast. [22]
- Students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance as well as decreased tardiness. [23]
- School breakfast participants are more likely to consume diets that are adequate or exceed standards for important vitamins and minerals (e.g., vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, phosphorous) [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]
- Children who eat a healthy breakfast are more likely to retain what they learn in class, behave better, and experience better health outcomes. [26]



SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

First started in 1966 as a pilot project, and made a permanent entitlement program by congress in 1975, the School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a meal program operated by public schools, charter schools, non-profit private schools, and residential child care institutions of high school grade level and below. Participating school districts and independent schools are required to serve a breakfast that meets the federal nutritional requirements and receive federal funds for each breakfast served. The SBP is administered at a federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and through the state's department of education or agriculture. Any student that attends a school that operates the SBP may purchase breakfast, or receive it at a free or reduced price depending on eligibility. [27]



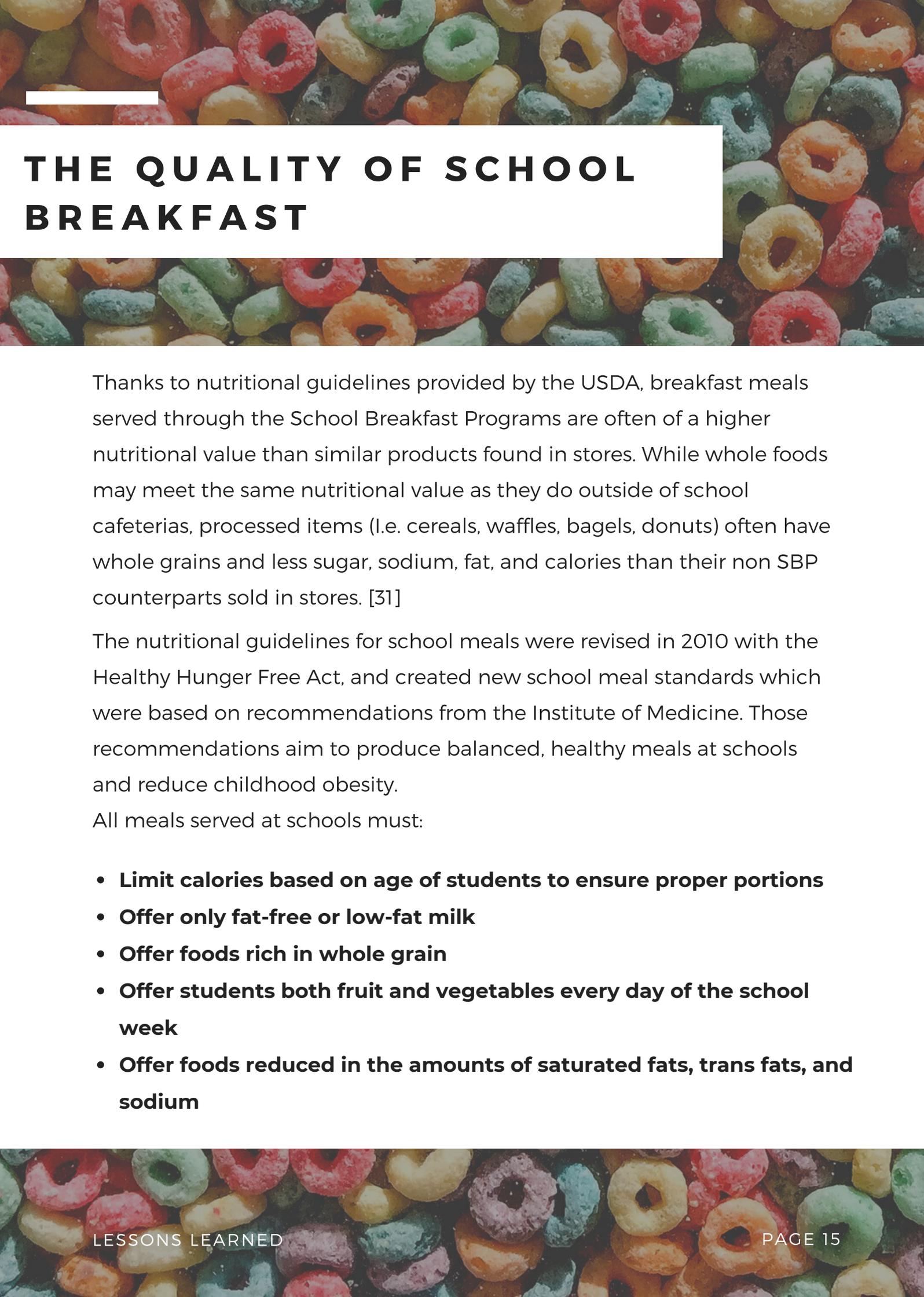


HOW IT WORKS:

SCHOOL BREAKFAST COSTS AND MEAL REIMBURSEMENTS

There are three price points for breakfasts served through the School Breakfast Program. Either the breakfast is full priced (referred to as 'paid meals'), reduced price, or free. How much a student pays for breakfast depends on family income, and schools receive different reimbursement levels from the USDA depending on what price level the student pays. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for free school meals. Children from families with incomes between 130%-185% of the FPL qualify for reduced price meals, and children from families with incomes greater than 185% of the FPL pay are charged the full price set by the school. In some cases, federal or state rules make it possible to offer free meals to all children, or to all children in households with incomes under 185 percent of the FPL, especially in schools with high proportions of students who come from low-income households, either through Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or state legislation around the elimination of the reduced price category. [28]

School Nutrition Directors and cafeteria staff face significant challenges with their work. Staff are tasked with operating school meals across the district on a financially self-sustaining budget, and federal reimbursement rates for meals have a large impact. Feeding America estimates that the average meal cost across the state of Massachusetts is \$3.69. [29] Over the past couple years, districts have had access to reimbursement rates higher than pre-pandemic levels thanks to the ability to be reimbursed for breakfast meals at Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) rates. [30] It's worth acknowledging the effort and strategy contributed by school cafeteria and district staff in order to operate the program in a way that is fiscally viable. In addition to managing the program on a limited budget, staff are tasked with creating meal plans that also accomplish nutritional goals, and appeal to students.



THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Thanks to nutritional guidelines provided by the USDA, breakfast meals served through the School Breakfast Programs are often of a higher nutritional value than similar products found in stores. While whole foods may meet the same nutritional value as they do outside of school cafeterias, processed items (i.e. cereals, waffles, bagels, donuts) often have whole grains and less sugar, sodium, fat, and calories than their non SBP counterparts sold in stores. [31]

The nutritional guidelines for school meals were revised in 2010 with the Healthy Hunger Free Act, and created new school meal standards which were based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine. Those recommendations aim to produce balanced, healthy meals at schools and reduce childhood obesity.

All meals served at schools must:

- **Limit calories based on age of students to ensure proper portions**
- **Offer only fat-free or low-fat milk**
- **Offer foods rich in whole grain**
- **Offer students both fruit and vegetables every day of the school week**
- **Offer foods reduced in the amounts of saturated fats, trans fats, and sodium**

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Traditionally, breakfast program meals are provided to students, in the cafeteria, before the start of classes. Similar to school lunch, students line up to select their breakfast (which may be hot or cold), complete their purchase at the register and then sit down to eat in the cafeteria. There are many benefits to the traditional breakfast model, especially ones that appeal to those who administer it. Menu planners have a great deal of flexibility, there are reduced packaging considerations for foods served on a tray, allowing students to choose their meal components creates less waste and keeps down meal costs, and eating in the cafeteria makes cleanup an easy to navigate process. [32]

“

Despite the benefits of school breakfast, the program is underutilized – over 22 million kids get a free or reduced-price school lunch on an average school day, yet only 12 million of those kids get free or reduced-price school breakfast. [33]

”

“

Of the more than 400,000 students in Massachusetts who qualify for free and reduced-price meals, only around 40% currently receive breakfast at school. [34]

”

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Multiple barriers prevent students from getting traditional cafeteria breakfast:

- School buses, traffic, and unforeseen events can all cause students to be late and miss breakfast.
- For students who arrive early enough, there is often fear of being negatively perceived by their peers for eating breakfast in the cafeteria before school starts.
- Time to interact with their peers outside of classroom activities is often scarce, and students who have time before class often feel the desire and pressure to socialize instead of attending breakfast.
- Cafeterias are not always conveniently located for students.
- Students may not feel like they have enough time to get breakfast and be in time for class.
- The cost, or the perceived costs, keep students away from the cafeteria line altogether.
- Eligible students may not know that they can access breakfast for free/reduced price. They may also fear participating in breakfast may limit their ability to access lunch.
- Students, especially older middle school and high school students, are not always hungry first thing in the morning.
- Misconceptions from parents who think that by their child participating, it means that a student with a greater need will be denied access.

WHAT IS BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL (BATB)?

“ One of the most effective ways to significantly boost school breakfast participation is to make it part of the school day [35] ”

Breakfast After The Bell (BATB) incorporates an alternative service model that schools can implement for the School Breakfast Program. In contrast to a traditional breakfast model which takes place before the school day begins, Breakfast After The Bell models, when implemented robustly, increase access and participation by being made available to all students after the school day has already begun.

BENEFITS OF BATB

Beyond all of the benefits to health and behavior that traditional breakfast service provides, Breakfast After The Bell stands out in its ability to not only reach more students, but to be accessible to students who could benefit most from the breakfast program. Additionally, school nutrition programs experienced added benefits. The more students that participate in the school breakfast program, the more federal reimbursement the programs receives. These additional funds can be used for other school nutrition program costs (like increasing ingredient variety or bringing on another staff member). In Massachusetts, the Breakfast In the Classroom service model of BATB does not take away from instructional time, and can be counted as Time On Learning (TOL). When breakfast is served in the classroom, time can be used to take attendance, collect homework, or make announcements.

ALTERNATIVE BREAKFAST MODELS: **BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM (BIC)**

In the **Breakfast In the Classroom (BIC)** service model, students eat at their desks either at the very start of class session or during a morning break. Breakfast is delivered to the students either by staff or by a student representative. In the 10-15 minutes it takes for students to eat, many teachers use the time to take attendance, collect homework, deliver announcements, or begin the day's instruction.

BENEFITS:

- Greater participation. About 2 in 5 (42%) students who never participate in the School Breakfast Program say they would participate if offered breakfast in the classroom. [36]
- Students do not need to arrive at school early to have breakfast.
- Normalizes eating breakfast at school. Since breakfast is integrated into the day, stigma is reduced for students who qualify for “free” meals.
- Opportunity for teachers to do a social emotional check-in with their students while students develop interpersonal skills with their peers over breakfast.

EXAMPLE:

In 2016, Hoosac Valley Elementary in Adams, MA began their BIC program with the support of their superintendent, principal, and the school nutrition director. The school received a small grant allowing them to purchase portable coolers to carry refrigerated breakfast items to all classrooms. Making breakfast available during the school day increased participation from 33% to 90%, decreased school nurse visits, and decreased tardiness.



ALTERNATIVE BREAKFAST MODELS: **GRAB & GO (G&G)**

In the **Grab & Go (G&G)** service model, students pick up their breakfast from stations located at easily accessible locations as they enter the building or between classes later in the morning, and eat at locations determined by the school, often in classrooms, lobbies, etc. [37]

BENEFITS:

- Serving breakfast in high-traffic areas rather than the cafeteria increases accessibility.
- Having multiple stations reduces serving time and allows for greater participation.
- Students do not need to arrive at school early to have breakfast.
- Depending on school rules, students may be able to wait to eat breakfast when they are hungry.
- Works well for high school, middle school, and schools that don't have the ability to deliver BIC.
- Flexibility and choice for students when an offer versus serve model is used.

EXAMPLE:

Lowell High School engaged their students in implementing their Grab & Go breakfast program. The Food Service Department worked with a marketing class, which completed a traffic flow analysis to help implement an extensive and effective Grab & Go kiosk system. Kiosks were implemented in the high traffic areas with more streamlined Point of Sale systems. Students in almost every part of the building could pass a kiosk on their way to class, grab a quick breakfast, and eat in their first period classes.



ALTERNATIVE BREAKFAST MODELS: **SECOND CHANCE (SC)**

In the **Second Chance (SC)** service model, breakfast often mirrors a traditional cafeteria model, except that it occurs after instruction has begun, typically during a break or during passing time between morning classes. It also may resemble a Grab & Go model. Schools are encouraged to offer Second Chance breakfast in addition to traditional breakfast service as there may be students hungry before the instructional day begins. Some schools have had success in scheduling a specific time for students to get breakfast after the instructional day has begun. Second Chance can be made available in a cafeteria or at service stations outside of the cafeteria, much like the Grab & Go service model.

BENEFITS:

- Beneficial for late students, or students that are not hungry when they first arrive.
- Students do not need to arrive at school early to have breakfast.
- Does not require additional equipment if served from the cafeteria, but has additional benefits when Grab & Go stations are used.
- Reduced stigma around eating school breakfast when made a part of the school day.
- Successful in increasing participation with more independent middle school and high school students.

EXAMPLE:

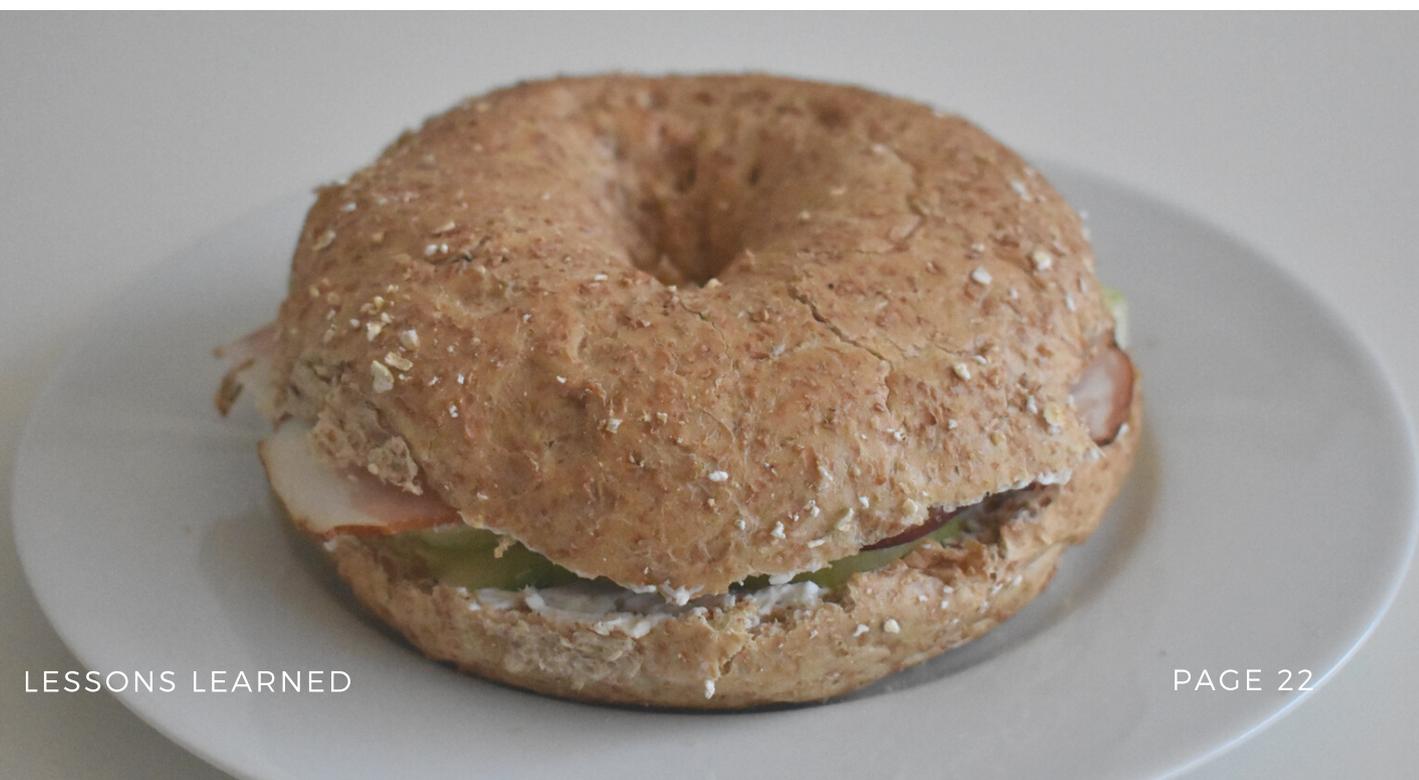
North Attleboro High School started a second chance breakfast during COVID, and now has the highest breakfast participation in the district. Taking advantage of the fact that students were allowed to eat in their classrooms, the food service department worked with the principal to build in a “breakfast period” from 9:10-9:20 am. After homeroom, students grab breakfast from the cafeteria and go to their next class to eat it. It allows students to eat breakfast when they are hungry and helps build a culture of participation in school breakfast helps to reduce stigma school-wide.

ALTERNATIVE BREAKFAST MODELS: **HYBRID MODELS**

Schools may combine elements of different Breakfast After The Bell Models to meet their specific needs. Service stations outside of the cafeteria, which are a common element in Grab & Go service models, can be used strategically as well in Breakfast In the Classroom and Second Chance service models. [38] Schools may need to utilize designated spaces or adapt to various challenges brought on as a result of the pandemic. What's most important, across all BATB, is that breakfast is made available to all students, after the start of instruction.

EXAMPLE:

The Gardner Pilot Academy in Boston Public Schools was facing challenges serving breakfast to their older 5th-8th grade students and their youngest pre-k to kindergarten students. Older students on the 3rd floor of the building did not want to go to the basement in the morning to eat at the cafeteria, while young students could not navigate the hustle of the cafeteria alone. To resolve this, the school implemented a Grab & Go cart at the front entrance to the middle school on the 3rd floor to provide easy access for older students. For the kindergarten schools, they had teaching assistants pick up breakfasts to eat in the classroom each morning. Middle school participation increased drastically, while kindergarteners were happy with their meals in their classrooms. The rest of the students, grades 1-5, were systematically funneled through the cafeteria as they arrived at school, and then had the opportunity to get a Second Chance Breakfast until 9:30 am during their class break.



CURRENT POLICIES AND MANDATES IN MASSACHUSETTS

BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

A current mandate is helping drive the implementation of Breakfast After The Bell within the state of Massachusetts. The mandate is designed to have schools with the greatest need (schools with a 60% or higher percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced-price school meals) adopt a breakfast service model that offers school breakfast after the instructional day has begun. The Act Regarding Breakfast After the Bell was signed into law for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in August of 2020 [39], and the schools that are mandated will be reviewed by the Office of Food and Nutrition Programs (FNP) at DESE to assess compliance beginning in the school year 2022-2023.

“All public schools required to serve breakfast under subsection (b) and where not less than 60% of the students at the school are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program, as determined by the department, shall offer all students a school breakfast after the beginning of the instructional day... .. FNP will be reviewing school compliance and providing technical assistance during Administrative Reviews and during School Year (SY) 2022 – 2023” [40].



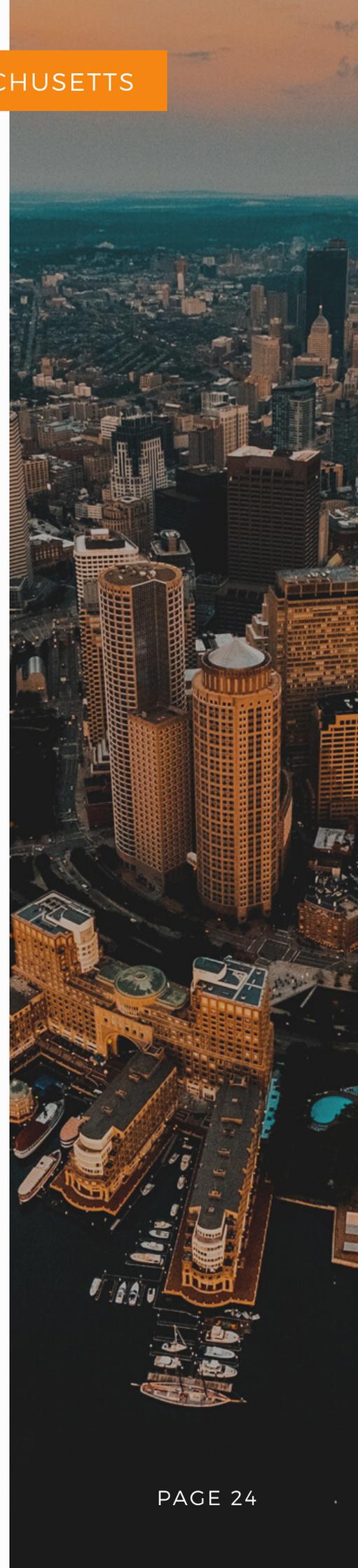
COVID-19 AND EXPANDED ACCESS TO BATB

Currently all school meals are free across the state of Massachusetts until June 30th, 2022 as a result of the programs aimed to provide relief during the pandemic. In addition to that waiver in effect, there are also few federal provisions that have existed prior to the pandemic that allow for high need schools to offer free school meals to all students.

“School districts have several school meal funding options for implementing universal free school meals, including the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), Provision 2, and locally funded universal free meals (“non-pricing”).” [41]

Those provisions however, have never been universally applied to allow all participating schools within the state of Massachusetts to offer free meals for all students. The combination of universal free meals and Breakfast After The Bell provides the greatest impact on breakfast participation, by compounding the benefits of each program, and working to alleviate some of the pressures felt by staff as they administer them. Removing the financial barrier allows for greater access to breakfast and increases breakfast participation, which generates revenue for the school meal programs. Most importantly, it allows for food insecure students who attend schools not participating in universal access provisions such as CEP, to be served breakfast for free.

Massachusetts School Nutrition Directors (SNDs), when interviewed about their breakfast programs between October 2021 and February 2022, explained that access to Universal School Meals bolstered their efforts to implement or transition to a Breakfast After The Bell service model.



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS WITH BATB

Implementation of Breakfast After The Bell programs can present challenges:

CONFUSION ABOUT QUALIFYING PROGRAMS

Regardless of the service model a school chooses to implement: Breakfast In the Classroom, Grab & Go, Second Chance, a school can consider themselves to be participating in Breakfast After The Bell as long as breakfast is made available to all students after the bell. If a school operates Grab & Go breakfast, but stops serving breakfast once the first bell rings, it does not qualify as a BATB program.

Unfortunately, language regarding the instructions for Breakfast After The Bell is sometimes confusing for staff and evaluators of the program to interpret. In discussion with School Nutrition Directors, we encountered districts that utilized Breakfast In the Classroom or Grab & Go, but breakfast at their school was only made available to students as they entered class before the instructional day had begun, which does not meet the after the bell mandate.

It's important to clarify that breakfast must be available to all students, after the bell, so that misconceptions and misinterpretations of the mandate don't lead to the implementation of programs which aren't providing after the bell access to all students. If a breakfast service begins before the bell, it must also continue to be served for a period after the bell.

Late students arriving minutes after the bell would need to request a meal from their teachers or staff, and sometimes would need to be escorted to a principal's office to receive a breakfast. When Breakfast after the bell is only made available to late students, it also does not meet the mandate. Despite using an alternative breakfast service model, the school in this example maintained the same barriers to access as a traditional breakfast model.

COVID-19 EFFECTS AND POLICIES

Evident in discussions, are the effects the pandemic has brought on across the state. Many districts have found difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels and supply chain disruptions are a significant challenge. Delivery interruptions affect menu plans, and add extra pressures onto cafeteria staff. Additionally, districts have had to adapt as understandings of the pandemic and preventative measures have evolved. However, school policies regarding the pandemic have not been uniform across the state, and neither are the effects. Schools where cafeteria gatherings are banned and students are required to eat in classrooms, have found less difficulty implementing a Breakfast In the Classroom program. Conversely, for schools which require students to remain masked in their classrooms at all times, BIC is simply not an option.

COUNTING MEALS

Implementation of a BATB program requires administration to often account for meals outside of the cafeteria line, and finding an efficient system that works well for staff can be a point of difficulty. For schools that implement a BIC service model, teachers often feel the burden of responsibility to count meals while distributing breakfast, and nutrition staff have experienced trouble with discrepancies in numbers of breakfasts served versus the numbers marked as consumed. Preventing students from eating two breakfasts is a USDA regulation, and this concern can be an obstacle for districts as they seek to distribute breakfast en masse to students. Though there are many districts who have established successful methods for counting breakfasts, it remains an obstacle for many others.

EQUIPMENT AND FUNDING

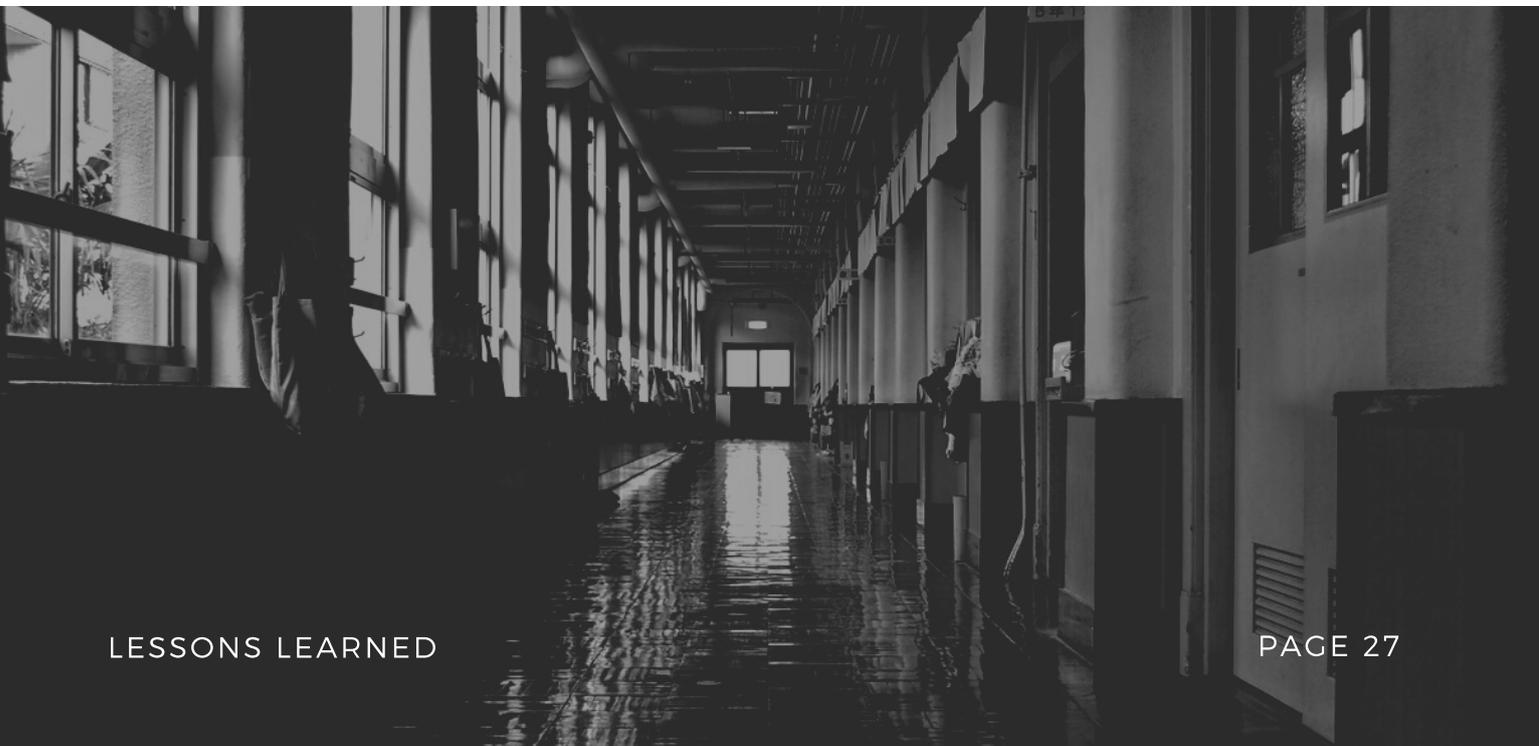
BATB often requires equipment outside of what is required for traditional breakfast. For example, Grab & Go benefits from the use of multiple service stations in high traffic areas. Schools need to find ways to obtain the carts and temperature controlled containers necessary for those stations to operate. In order to utilize the Breakfast In the Classroom service model, where meals are delivered to classrooms, delivery equipment and additional funding for the required staff may be needed. While grants, like those through Project Bread and New England Dairy, help districts gain funding and equipment, they take time and planning to acquire. The inability or difficulty acquiring the necessary equipment can result in a barrier for schools from implementing BATB.

STAFF CONCERNS

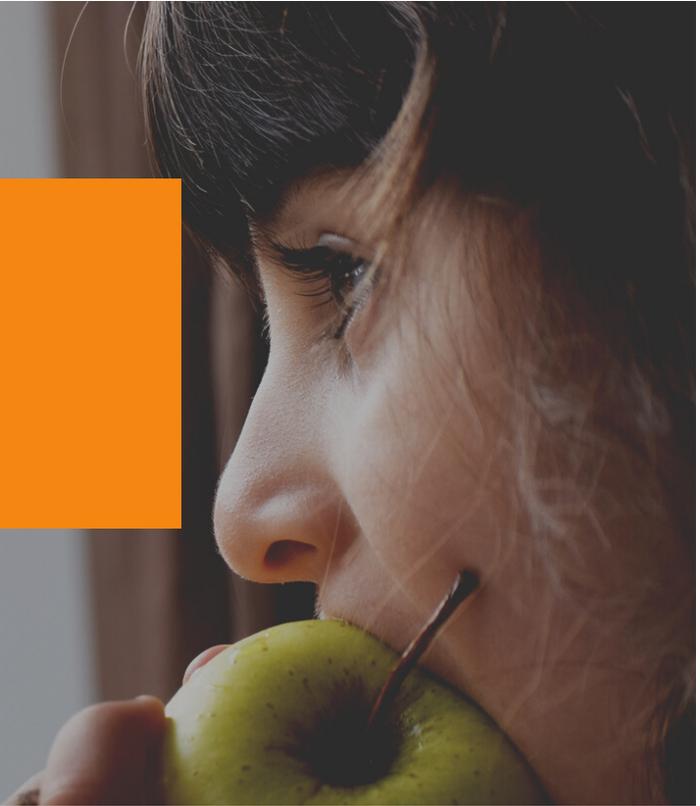
A successful BATB program takes support of staff across the school, and unclear understandings of the additional responsibilities creates hesitancy among staff. For example, districts have found their custodial staff have concerns about additional clean up outside of the cafeteria. Teachers, and their unions, express concerns about staff extending themselves beyond their job descriptions with breakfast meal counting and classroom cleanup. Kitchen staff have to work out the logistics of meal delivery. Many of these concerns were able to be resolved within a few months of successful BATB implementation, but without staff buy-in it is extremely difficult for School Nutrition Directors to begin a new breakfast service in their districts.

LOW PRIORITY FOR ADMINISTRATION

Many schools seeking to start the program receive pushback from their school administration. Even with the mandate, and continued success of BATB where it is implemented, many School Nutrition Directors expressed the sentiment that breakfast, or school meal service, was not a priority for school leadership. Unfortunately, beyond the pressures of the mandate, for schools with non-supportive administration, there aren't many pathways for those who wish to adopt an alternative breakfast model. Schools that fall below the threshold of the mandate, with less than the necessary 60% free and reduced school meal eligible students, have even less likelihood of adopting the model without support from district and school administration, and as a result many food insecure students across the state will continue to go without the benefits of the program.



KEYS TO SUCCESS



UNIVERSALLY FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Price is a barrier for many students when it comes to school breakfast, regardless of whether it takes place before or after the bell. Serving universally free school meals removes that barrier and increases the effectiveness of a BATB program. Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a way for schools to provide free school meals to all of their students, and enrollment in free and reduced price eligibility provides access to many students, but universal access to free school meals helps ensure that no students fall through the gaps. Schools often have students who do not qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast, but remain without the financial means to purchase breakfast each day. Students experiencing food insecurity who are otherwise unable to participate in breakfast have much greater access to breakfast when universal school meals are in effect. Universal access also helps administrators of BATB distribute breakfast more efficiently by reducing the time it takes to process meal counts. Faster processing time for meals is incredibly consequential to the success of BATB programs.

“Universal School Meals makes meal service so much quicker, it reduces stigma, and there is less paperwork. I’m a huge proponent. If anyone is against it, just come down to one of our schools, see it in action and look at our participation numbers.”

Heather Baril, Director of School Nutrition

SUPPORT FROM LEADERSHIP

School leadership holds great influence over the success of BATB programs. Schools where leadership prioritizes students' access to breakfast have the strongest programs and the greatest student participation. In our conversations with SNDs, we found that the success of a BATB program was closely linked to the principal's enthusiasm or reluctance to integrate the program into the day. Leadership with strong ties to staff also have greater success easing staff anxieties about the program.

“BATB is a great model because you can keep it simple and teachers don't have to take on a lot.

Yeshiva Achei Tmimim

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LOCAL CHAMPIONS

Programs with an individual or group acting as a champion for BATB, advocating for its implementation, have a much higher likelihood of successful implementation. Champions facilitate conversations to understand staff concerns, and then find solutions to address them. While champions can come from any department, they must have strong working relationships with leadership that is willing to help accomplish program requirements. Champions already in a leadership role are well equipped to create a successful BATB program.

“You have to get everyone on board. Have to have huge meetings with all the departments. Every time they have a staff meeting it gets brought up and addresses issues.

Athol-Royalston Public Schools

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STATEWIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

The Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread dedicates time for outreach with all Massachusetts schools that are mandated or interested in operating BATB or interested in expanding their school breakfast program. Child Nutrition Outreach team members help schools navigate the rules and best strategies for the program, while also helping equip BATB champions with the resources they need through grants and marketing material. They are available to call, visit programs on-site, and actively reach out to School Nutrition Directors to understand their needs. DESE understands the benefits of the support that Project Bread provides and equips the organization with funding to provide outreach support for School Breakfast Programs. When DESE recognizes a district is in need of additional assistance they work closely with Project Bread to provide that support.

“ If it wasn’t for the help and support of Project Bread we wouldn’t have been so successful in our program.

It’s not just about breakfast, there’s so many areas that Project Bread is available for. There’s so much that Project Bread has to offer, and to be able to pick up the phone and call someone and ask questions, say ‘hey’, vent, talk, it makes such a difference.

Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School

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ASSESSMENTS

Third party assessments have proven an incredibly valuable tool in establishing successful BATB programs. Project Bread’s ability to listen to SNDs, create a safe space for them to express their frustrations or questions, allows for honest reviews of the program. Many programs are having success, but aren’t fully meeting the BATB mandate. With guidance and small changes those programs can have huge impacts on accessibility, and having a third party analysis and consulting is helpful. Project Bread has a wealth of expertise and resources they offer districts, and SNDs are quick to celebrate the partnership. Assessments help get a better understanding of what’s really happening on the ground, identify best practices, and build programs that reach more students.

GRANTS

Grants provide an injection of much needed resources, and motivate schools to get their programs together. Deadlines help provide clear objectives, and help translate a sense of urgency and importance to leadership that may otherwise be slow to act. Grants address a range of needs experienced by sites. They help provide financial means to increase staff, especially in positions like marketing, that make a large impact, but are difficult to prioritize. Some grants, like those for smoothie machines, introduce equipment that increases menu appeal for students. Some sites who received grants from Project Bread used the funds to purchase tablets for counting school meals at remote Grab & Go stations. Through discussions with SNDs, it appears that districts which received grants appear to have a higher likelihood of success with their BATB program, but the success may also be a result of a SND that is engaged in creating a better program.

STRATEGIC AND COMMITTED ROLLOUTS

Apparent in the conversations revolving around different BATB programs was the connection between a successful program and one that was approached with full commitment and thoughtful implementation by the staff. Successful Grab & Go sites often implemented multiple stations in high traffic areas, while programs with a single station or which were located in non-ideal placements lacked participation. Districts reported different creative approaches to enhancing their BATB programs. One school enlisted the help of students, by creating a marketing project where students researched, surveyed their peers, created material, and offered recommendations to increase breakfast participation. Thoughtful, strategic implementation, and a commitment to the launch of BATB was present in nearly every successful scenario.

“ I've always wanted to work in school nutrition it's something I'm very passionate about. ”

Triton Public Schools





OUTCOMES

INCREASED STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Participation is the biggest indicator in understanding if the BATB program is successful. Because of the current temporary access to universally free school meals across the state, we can best identify the effects of BATB by looking at participation levels before and after implementation of BATB, at schools where all students previously had access to universally free school meals (through CEP). Comparing school breakfast participation data provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, we can see that there was an increase in breakfast participation at schools once they implemented BATB.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS

School Nutrition Directors across the state reported that their programs were more financially successful with the increased participation as a result of implementing BATB. With the additional supply chain constraints and staff shortages, districts benefited from the flexibility that the increase in revenue from breakfast provided. SNDs from these districts also communicated that they had increased ability to consider enhanced menu items and scratch cooking because of the increased revenue.



The BATB program has saved our district financially. If we're not serving breakfast we're missing out on making our students lives better, and the districts are missing out on funding.

Pioneer Valley



We have always been a breakeven program, but now we are actually making money we can put back into food services. We can fix equipment and get better ingredients, make higher quality steak sandwiches, serve nicer chicken

Hudson Public Schools



FEWER NURSE VISITS

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of the BATB mandate, besides increased participation, is the effects on students who have the greatest need. SNDs reported that School Nurses had noticeably less students coming to their offices with hunger related pains after implementing BATB. By increasing access to all students, schools with BATB ensure more of their students are benefiting from a healthy breakfast. Those meal programs are better positioned to address racial disparities in food insecurity, and provide greater racial equity to their students.



Our nurses are really happy with the BATB program, they notice a lot less kids coming to the office hungry. You know that's a big issue so they've been very happy about it.

Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School



SUPPORTIVE STAFF

Many School Nutrition Directors expressed the sentiment that the mandate was a helpful tool in implementing the program when there was reluctance from leadership or school staff. Where SNDs have otherwise had trouble designing the program, with the mandate to implement BATB staff from across different departments were receptive and helped work through concerns. Knowing that BATB was not optional, staff worked to find solutions to their concerns instead of objecting to the program because of them.



Schools were scared to death to start it, but after a month or two it was easy.

Lawrence Public Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

EXTEND UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS

The temporary access to universal free school meals has been largely responsible for the increase in breakfast participation and should be continued in the future. In conjunction with BATB, universally available school meals allow for the greatest access to participation. Students who are food insecure but don't fall into the free or reduced eligibility categories have access to healthy school meals. BATB is designed to increase access, because school breakfast is proven to make a significant impact in a student's ability to perform well. Removing all barriers to school breakfast is an impactful way to help students learn. By doing so, schools reduce the institutional barriers that disproportionately affect BIPOC and Latinx students the most. The combination of universally available school meals and BATB has a tremendous impact on food insecurity. Schools no longer have to stress about reimbursements and can focus on driving participation through meal planning and marketing.

“This program has been particularly great for the kids who didn't eat in the past, because they didn't quite qualify or didn't submit a meal application.”
Hudson Public Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

INTEGRATE BREAKFAST INTO THE SCHOOL DAY

Breakfast has the greatest participation when it's integrated into the school day. Schools where there is a set time for breakfast reap the benefits of different service models. BIC typically achieves the greatest participation, but Second Chance also works well with middle school and high school students who instead benefit from having breakfast later in the morning. Allowing BIC to take place 20 minutes after the start of class, gives late students time to participate without being singled out, embarrassed, or forced to perform extra steps to access breakfast. Staff don't always have the ability to hold onto extra food for potential late students, and can lead to other problems. Pushing back the start time of BATB, allows more students to participate. If meals aren't delivered and instead a grab and go model is used, staff at the service stations should stay open for a time window that extends for a sufficient period beyond the bell, or reopen at the nearest passing period. Going a step beyond that and setting aside time specifically for breakfast, instead of extending a passing period ensures access and reduces many of the barriers faced by students. The goal of a breakfast after the bell program is to make breakfast available to all students, after the bell. The schools who put an effort into achieving this goal by integrating breakfast into the school day have the greatest participation.



It really has to be a scheduling thing. Every school in America should have 20-30 minutes between 8-9 for breakfast.

Dedham Public Schools

If other districts asked what works, I'd say the built in second chance is super effective.

School District in Western Massachusetts

Set times reduce stigma, the stigma is almost completely removed now at the high school.

North Attleboro Public Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND BATB MANDATE TO MORE SCHOOLS

The BATB mandate should be expanded to apply to schools with less than 60% free or reduced price eligible students. Since the rules regarding the mandate use percentages of students (60% or higher free and reduced price eligible students), schools with higher populations may not be mandated, despite having a greater number of free and reduced eligible students than smaller schools with larger percentages. This creates an opportunity for many students facing food insecurity to fall through the cracks, and be denied the benefits of BATB that are experienced by their peers at other schools. BATB mandates are effective, and they encourage school administrators to make access to breakfast a priority.



What's most important is that kids eat. BATB is a win-win, BIC is a win-win.

Revere Public Schools

It's a great thing, anything we have to do or change is difficult but when you look back you see it wasn't that bad and it makes a big difference.

Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School



ENSURE ACCESS TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

DESE's partnership with Project Bread is an essential component in the success of BATB in the state of Massachusetts. By empowering an organization to facilitate strategy, implementation and education, schools can gain access to valuable information and support. State agencies could establish an internal department to facilitate outreach, but using a nonprofit helps create strong ties to the community and allows for better flows of information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONDUCT ASSESSMENTS

An assessment should be performed at every mandated site, and if found to not qualify, an outreach team should be consulted to help meet requirements. Without a detailed assessment and review, BATB mandates can be ineffective and maintain the same barriers to access as traditional breakfast models.

EDUCATE ABOUT BREAKFAST

District and school staff need to be educated on the importance of breakfast to help understand the intentions and reasoning behind a BATB program. Staff that understand the benefits of breakfast, and how BATB reduces barriers, are better equipped to become champions of the program.

“

I know what it's like to be hungry in the morning, I'm glad for the mandate.

Employee of a School District in Western Massachusetts

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IMPROVE LANGUAGE REGARDING QUALIFYING PROGRAMS

The language used in a BATB mandate should be easy to understand to ensure administrations understand what is, and is not, a qualifying program. Utilizing an alternative breakfast service model does not guarantee that a school will address the barriers to access that a correctly and strategically planned BATB program does. Making clear the necessary requirement to make breakfast available to all students after the bell, and considering the needs of students who arrive late, will improve a schools ability to self assess their program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE ACCESS TO EQUIPMENT

Schools should have greater access to equipment. Not only essential equipment, like refrigerators and warmers, but also equipment that lets them provide creative menus that appeal to students. Not every school has the same staff bandwidth to look for opportunities to acquire equipment through grants. School Nutrition Director's time and energy are better focused on driving participation in their programs and supporting staff. Increasing access to funding and financial support for equipment would help provide greater opportunity across all school districts.

REQUIRE MARKETING

Clear communication to students and their families helps drive participation. Providing schools with the communications and marketing tools should be a necessary component to a BATB program. Students and their families may not know that the school is participating in a program meant to ensure access to breakfast. Communicating that information helps not only the students, but their families better plan around school meals, and helps ensure the success of the program.



CONCLUSION

In conversations with representatives of schools across the state of Massachusetts, I have found that the BATB mandate is a helpful tool to establish Breakfast After The Bell programs, which reduce barriers to access and increase participation in school breakfast. The mandate is particularly effective when combined with Universal School Meals and when there is an outreach team who can provide guidance for implementation of the program. States looking to help students combat food insecurity should consider implementing a mandate, for all schools, not just those with 60% or greater need. Mandates help schools overcome the anxiety of a new program, and equip SNDs with the authority to make BATB happen. Integrating breakfast into the school day either through a delayed BIC, extended Grab & Go, or Second Chance helps normalize breakfast for all students. With strategic implementation and clear communication surrounding the program, school staff are better equipped to champion the cause, and families are empowered to plan around participation.





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