



Breakfast Blueprint

Breakfast After the Bell
Programs Support Learning

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“Every student in my class looks forward to eating breakfast in the classroom. Some students do not have time or food to eat before they get to school. Students were complaining of stomachaches, but now with breakfast in the classroom, there is less complaining.” — Elementary school teacher, California



The American Federation for Teachers (AFT) and the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) are committed to strategic partnerships at the school, district, state and national levels to advance children’s health and well-being. We especially value collaborative approaches to address children’s food security. One way the AFT and FRAC work together is to ensure that all children, especially those struggling with hunger, have access to healthy school meal programs.

Thanks to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, federally funded school breakfasts and lunches are more nutritious than ever. The law ushered in requirements that school meals include more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, less sodium, no trans fats, and limits on

saturated fat and calories. Nearly all of the nation’s schools are meeting these new, health-based guidelines.

Research shows that hungry students are at a significant disadvantage in the classroom, while students who eat breakfast at school are more attentive, less likely to act out, less prone to becoming overweight or obese, and better academic performers. As documented in FRAC’s *“School Breakfast Scorecard”* and addressed in the AFT’s resolution *“Healthy and Hunger-Free Schools,”* many children miss breakfast when it is served before school starts. According to FRAC’s *“School Breakfast Scorecard,”* for every 100 low-income students who participate in school lunch programs, only 56 participate in school breakfast.

What does the research say about...

Hunger's impact on learning in the classroom?
Children who are hungry are more likely to:

- Be hyperactive, absent or tardy.¹
- Experience behavioral, emotional and academic problems.²
- Repeat a grade and have lower math scores.³

The educational and health benefits of school breakfast? Children who eat school breakfast:

- Demonstrate improved concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory and learning.^{4, 5, 6}
- Show improved attendance, behavior and standardized achievement test scores.^{7, 8}
- Are more likely to consume diets that meet or exceed standards for important vitamins and minerals.^{2, 3, 9}

The operation and logistics of school breakfast programs significantly impact their reach. Timing of meal service, hectic morning schedules, late bus arrivals, students' desire to socialize with friends, the financial burden of co-payments for families who qualify for reduced-price school meals and the social stigma associated with participation can hinder students from eating school breakfast. To address these challenges, schools may consider a variety of strategies, including morning schedule adjustments, increased collaboration with families or breakfast after the bell programs.

The *"Breakfast Blueprint"* is a guide focused on breakfast after the bell programs—such as breakfast in the classroom, "grab and go" breakfast and second chance breakfast—because they are increasingly popular, are well-researched and have successfully helped schools and districts improve students' access to nutritious foods. These innovative models shift breakfast service from before the school bell to after, making morning meals available to more students. Combined with providing breakfast at no cost to all students regardless of income, breakfast after the bell eliminates stigma and increases convenience for students.

¹ Murphy JM, Wehler CA, Pagano ME, Little M, Kleinman RF, Jellinek MS. (1998) "Relationship Between Hunger and Psychosocial Functioning in Low-Income American Children." *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37:163-170.

² Kleinman RE, Murphy JM, Little M, Pagano M, Wehler CA, Regal K, Jellinek MS. (1998) "Hunger in Children in the United States: Potential Behavioral and Emotional Correlates." *Pediatrics*, 101(1):E3.

³ Alaimo K, Olson CM, Frongillo EA Jr. (2001) "Food Insufficiency and American School-Aged Children's Cognitive, Academic and Psychosocial Development." *Pediatrics*, 108(1):44-53.

⁴ Grantham-McGregor S, Chang S, Walker S. (1998) "Evaluation of School Feeding Programs: Some Jamaican Examples." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 67(4):785S-789S.

⁵ Brown JL, Beardslee WH, Prothrow-Stith D. (2008) "Impact of School Breakfast on Children's Health and Learning." Sodexo Foundation.

⁶ Morris CT, Courtney A, Bryant CA, McDermott RJ. (2010) "Grab 'N' Go Breakfast at School: Observation from a Pilot Program." *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 42(3):208-209.

⁷ Murphy JM. (2007) "Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review." *Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science*, 3(1):3-36.

⁸ Basch, CE. (2011) "Breakfast and the Achievement Gap Among Urban Minority Youth." *Journal of School Health*, 81 (10):635-640.

⁹ Pollitt E, Cueto S, Jacoby ER. (1998) "Fasting and Cognition in Well- and Undernourished Schoolchildren: A Review of Three Experimental Studies." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 67(4):779S-784S.

“Breakfast in the classroom can be done properly when all structures and routines are put in order by the school.”

— Elementary school teaching methods coach, Missouri

Given the critical role school breakfast plays in children’s well-being and overall academic performance, the AFT and FRAC conducted research to uncover best practices and strategies for successfully operating a breakfast after the bell program. Nearly 600 teachers, paraprofessionals, food service staff, school health professionals and custodians from California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia shared their perspectives in surveys, focus groups and structured interviews. Several common themes emerged:

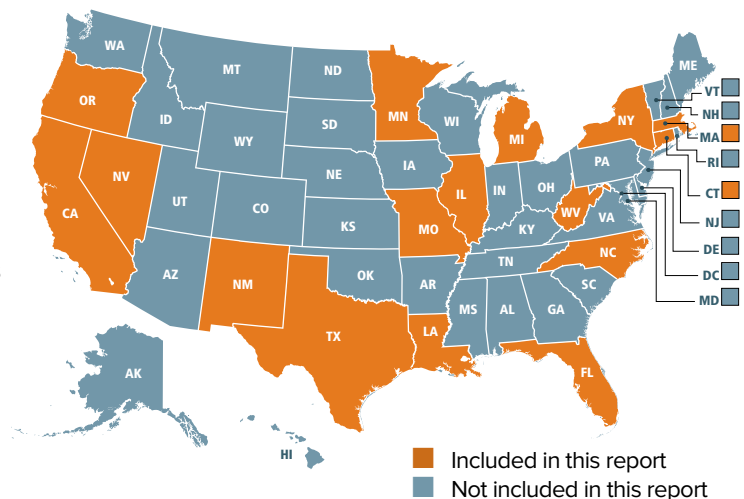
- School personnel value the benefits of healthy breakfast for their students, especially the opportunity to promote social relationships and serve vulnerable children. They want students to have the healthiest meals possible, and many would like to increase the use of fresh, local, scratch-cooked foods.
- Top-down implementation and non-inclusive planning frustrate faculty and staff. Further, these approaches can undermine program sustainability. School personnel wish to be included in planning and improvement processes.
- Many educators are eager to share their ideas on how schools can improve students’ access to nutritious foods. For example, they advocate for consistent use of simple packaging to better serve students with disabilities and culturally familiar items to boost student satisfaction among ethnically diverse populations.
- At times, the logistics of breakfast after the bell programs do not fully account for the time required of custodial, instructional and food service staff to

complete all their responsibilities. For teachers, there is often a tension between the time needed to facilitate breakfast service and the expectation to teach “bell to bell.” Educators call on administrators to provide more training and to be more explicitly supportive of the new routines and activities that are being integrated into morning schedules to ensure a smooth start to the day.

- For successful implementation, many programs need resources like cleaning supplies and appropriate equipment to store, transport and dispose of foods.

Based on this research, the AFT and FRAC developed the “*Breakfast Blueprint*.” This series offers strategies on how to plan, execute and improve breakfast after the bell programs. We hope the content spurs constructive dialogue among typical decision makers, including food service directors, union presidents and school superintendents, as well as frontline staff who implement the programs, including teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians and cafeteria workers.

States engaged for this report.





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