

Access to School Breakfast Increases Academic Achievement

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SCHOOL BREAKFAST IS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Childhood developmental opportunities can provide a foundation for children's academic success, health, and general well-being. Public policy should address inequities and provide all children the opportunity to succeed.

Preschool-aged children experience profound biological brain development and achieve 90 percent of their adult brain volume by age 6. This physiological growth allows children to develop functional skills related to information processing, comprehension, language, emotional regulation, and motor skills.

There are many potential policy interventions to improve early childhood education, including (but not limited to) policies related to nutrition. When kids consistently get the morning nutrition they need, they are calmer, more focused and better able to learn.

The School Breakfast Program provides free breakfast to our most vulnerable students and low cost breakfast to others who might not have breakfast at home. Access to school breakfast programs can improve academic achievement and cognition, especially among malnourished or food-insecure children. It can also increase healthy food consumption and improves breakfast nutrition.

Priority Area for Early Childhood Education

*Fully fund the
School Breakfast Program*

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BACKGROUND

The current level of funding for the school breakfast program can increase inequities among children. The School Breakfast Program is a federal and state assisted meal program for public and private schools. While the program is primarily funded by the federal government, the State of Wisconsin provides \$2,510,500 in annual funding for reimbursement to participating schools for each breakfast served. As a result of current funding, Wisconsin schools receive approximately 8-cents per breakfast despite the fact state law calls for a 15-cent per meal reimbursement rate. The combination of a flat state appropriation and continued growth in the School Breakfast Program has resulted in lower reimbursement rates each year for participating schools. States can play a role in establishing policies to strengthen requirements related to the nutritional value of foods served as well as the amount of reimbursement to improve the school food environment. Access to school breakfast programs can improve academic achievement and can increase healthy food consumption and improve breakfast nutrition. Food security and access by all people at all times to have enough food for an active, healthy life - is one factor for a healthy, well-nourished population.

KEY POINTS

- **Participation in the School Breakfast Program in Wisconsin has more than tripled since 2000.** State funding for the School Breakfast Program declined by 10% in 2012 and has remained flat ever since, even as demand for the program has increased.
- **Since the 2008-09 school year, an additional 347 schools are now participating in the School Breakfast Program,** bringing the total to 1,978 schools (including 85% of all eligible public schools and 10% of eligible private schools).
- **This initiative is supported by many organizations,** including: School Choice Wisconsin, Wisconsin Council of Religious & Independent Schools, the Hunger Task Force, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, American Heart Association, Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the School Nutrition Association – WI Chapter.

LEGISLATIVE REQUEST

Please support efforts to fully fund the School Breakfast Program in accordance with state statute. Full funding will alleviate food service budget stress currently experienced by school districts and allow the opportunity to nourish our children to their full potential.