School Breakfast Matters

Reach of School Breakfast

School breakfast participation has doubled in just 20 years. By 2019, nearly 15 million children participated in school breakfast every day and 85% of them qualified for free or reduced price meals. One in seven children in the U.S. is food insecure\(^1\) with much higher rates projected due to COVID-19. School breakfast reaches children who are most at-risk for food insecurity,\(^2\) providing them vital nutrition to support mood, attention, and cognition.\(^3\)

\[\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Year} & \text{Daily Participation} & \% \text{Free or Reduced Price} \\
\hline
2000 & 7.6 & 84%* \\
2005 & 9.4 & 82%* \\
2010 & 11.7 & 84%* \\
2015 & 14.0 & 85%* \\
2019 & 14.8 & 85%* \\
\hline
\end{array}\]

*Percent of students who receive free or reduced price breakfast

Looking at the Science

Breakfast is linked with numerous health and educational benefits — including improved academic performance, increased school attendance, more focused classroom behavior, and better dietary intake.\(^4\)\(^-\)\(^7\)

A systematic review of 45 breakfast studies\(^8\) showed that:

Students who eat breakfast have positive outcomes, such as:
- Improved math & memory
- Better satiety, and
- Increased attention in class.

Nutritionally vulnerable children demonstrated the most substantial outcomes on their:
- Verbal skills,
- Memorization, and
- Matching tests.

Breakfast & Brain Activation

Significantly higher brain activation is observed in the pre-frontal cortex when a nutritionally balanced breakfast is consumed. This area of the brain is involved in the control of emotion, mood, expectations, behavior, reward, decision-making, and cognition.\(^9\)\(^-\)\(^10\)

Thus, a child who is fed a nutritious breakfast is likely to be more calm, focused, organized, thoughtful and ready to learn.

Call to Action: Help create awareness of the numerous health and educational benefits of school breakfast and encourage children to participate in the school breakfast program.

©2021 National Dairy Council®
References:


