

Increasing School Breakfast Participation in Michigan Schools

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Research Question

What are the barriers and affordances to increasing participation in School Breakfast Programs across Michigan? What are the alternative models and their implications? Why is expansion important?



“The troubling fact is that one out of four children in America faces the challenges of hunger and food insecurity.”

Background

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) has been around since 1966 and was created as a pilot project intended to provide grants to students deemed nutritionally destitute. The first enactment stipulated that priority was to be given to schools situated in areas of poverty or in zones where kids needed to travel far in order to get to school. In order to incentivize high need schools to participate, Congress approved an increase in federal payments from schools located in areas greatly affected by poverty. During its principal year, the SBP provided meals to around 80,000 kids across the United States. The program continued to expand and switched from providing categorical grants to per-meal reimbursements in 1973. Congress decided that the program should be accessible to all schools where greater child nutrition is needed and began to provide higher reimbursements for schools in need.

NOT ENOUGH KIDS ARE EATING SCHOOL BREAKFAST.

21 MILLION

U.S. kids get free or reduced-price school lunch



Only 1/2 of those kids get breakfast, even though they're eligible

Significance

Countless studies prove that eating breakfast in the morning results in myriad benefits on a child's wellbeing. Students who eat breakfast have a greater probability of:

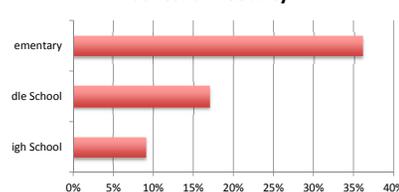
- Higher academic achievement
- Increased test scores, higher grades
- Better behavior
- More participation and alertness in school
- Less absenteeism and tardiness
- Reduced health related issues and illnesses

In 2014, 15.3 million children lived in food insecure households. Unfortunately, many children show up to school every day without having eaten breakfast. Less than 25% of students in America participate in School Breakfast Programs. Increasing these participation rates is important for increasing the overall wellness of our children. The SBP also helps struggling families by providing free and reduced price meals to students who qualify.



“Studies show that children who skip breakfast are more likely to repeat a grade, have lower math scores, have poorer cognitive functioning and have slower memory recall than students who regularly eat breakfast”

Breakfast Utilization Averages in Washtenaw County



Barriers:

What causes such low participation in school breakfast programs given all the many benefits?

Over 50% of students who qualify for free breakfast don't utilize the program. A lot of times this is related to transportation logistics. Students don't get to school early enough, bus schedules run late, etc. There is also a negative stigma associated with eating breakfast at school. Students who participate in the program are labeled as “poor” by other students. This is especially true for middle schools and high schools, that, on average, have significantly lower breakfast participation rates. Some students would also rather play or talk in the halls before school, instead of eat breakfast or are just simply not hungry in the morning. Despite these barriers, there are alternative models that are proven to significantly increase breakfast participation rates in schools.

Alternative Models

Breakfast in the Classroom is a model where students are served breakfast every morning directly in their homeroom class. This method has been proven to dramatically increase breakfast participation by reducing the barriers of stigma and transportation.

Grab'N Go is another model where students receive prepackaged breakfast foods directly when they get to school to eat before class starts.

Second Chance Breakfast – students have the option of eating breakfast after first period, during break. This decreases the barrier of students not being hungry first thing in the morning.

Breakfast Vending is a model where students can get nutritious breakfast foods out of vending machines in the morning. These vending machines can have the capability of offering free and reduced price meals. A barrier here is cost.

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