

School Breakfast: Understanding the Basics

What is the School Breakfast Program?

The [School Breakfast Program](#) (SBP) is a federally assisted meal program founded by the Child Nutrition Act in 1966 as a pilot project and was made permanent in 1975. The School Breakfast Program provides nutritious meals to students in participating schools and residential institutions. The School Breakfast Program is usually administered by state education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with local school food authorities.

[Student participation](#) in the SBP is growing. In 1989, 3.7 million students nationwide participated in the program on a given school day, and a total of 658 million breakfasts were served. In 2016, 14.5 million students participated in the program and a total of 2.4 billion breakfasts were served nationwide. In Ohio, 450,000 students participated in the program in 2016 with a total of 73.2 million meals served. ([Child Nutrition Tables](#))

Background

What are the meal requirements for school breakfasts?

School breakfasts must meet the [meal pattern and nutrition standards](#) based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. As required by the [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#), changes to the SBP's meal pattern began in SY 2013-14. In addition to appropriate calories designed for individual grade levels and sodium and fat restrictions, all grains must be whole-grain rich, fruit must be offered and vegetables must include dark-greens, red-orange, starch and beans/legumes for each week. All school breakfasts must meet [USDA meal requirements](#), though decisions about which specific foods to serve and how they are prepared are made by local school food authorities.

What about food waste?

Some ways to reduce food waste include cutting up fresh fruits and vegetables so they are easy to eat, provide plenty of time for students to eat their meal and donate excess wholesome food to food pantries. Some schools have implemented a share table that students can place pre-portioned or packaged foods to share. Check with your school district to learn more about school policy and procedures, as well as state and local health department regulations. Schools can participate in the [US Food Waste Challenge for K-12](#) to learn how to implement programs and activities to reduce food waste.

What is Offer versus Serve?

[Offer versus Serve](#) (OVS) is a concept that applies to menu planning and the meal service. OVS allows students to decline some of the food offered in a reimbursable lunch or breakfast. OVS gives students flexibility by permitting them to choose the foods they want to eat. Depending on how menus are planned in the school, a set number of food groups are offered. At breakfast a student must be offered at least four food items and must select at least three food items. Students are required to take 1/2 cup of fruit or vegetable under OVS.

Do nutrient standards address added sugar?

[Nutrition standards](#) for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program are based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines. The [Healthy, Hunger-Free Act of 2010](#), also addressed nutrition standards for foods sold outside of the meal program. Snacks and entrees sold outside of the meal program must contain less than or equal to 35% sugar by weight. Many schools have adopted the [Smart Snack](#) criteria for sugar and plan menus that include reduced added sugar in cereals and other foods. The release of the [2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines](#) address added sugar, which may impact future updates of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program nutrition standards.

Serving School Breakfast

How is breakfast served at school?

There are many ways to serve breakfast at school. Traditionally, breakfast is served and eaten in the cafeteria. However, there are [new service models](#) that make breakfast participation convenient by serving it in places where students can easily access the meal - in classrooms, hallway kiosks or even later in the morning. Students who have easy access to breakfast at school are more likely to eat breakfast, which may [enhance food security](#) for time-constrained families and among families at the margin of food insecurity.

In Ohio, schools have the option of offering students breakfast in the classroom as part of the school day. Section 3313.813, Food programs - outdoor education centers, 3 (e) states that any school district board of education or chartered nonpublic school that participates in a breakfast program may offer breakfast to students in their classrooms during the school day.

Do foods sold outside of the school breakfast program, like in vending machines and ala carte, need to meet nutrition guidelines?

All foods and beverages sold throughout the school campus during the school day including a la carte, fundraisers, school stores and vending machines must meet [Smart Snack Standards](#). Schools can use a [product calculator](#) to determine if the beverage, snack, side or entrée item meet the [Smart Snack Standards](#).

How much reimbursement do schools get?

Most of the support USDA provides to schools in the [School Breakfast Program](#) comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each breakfast served. USDA reimbursement varies for full price, reduced price and free meals. The current basic cash reimbursement rates for non-severe need from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018 are:

Paid: \$0.30

Reduced Price: \$1.45

Free: \$1.75

For the latest reimbursement rates go to www.FNS.USDA.gov/School-Meals/Rates-Reimbursement

Is school breakfast only available to students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals?

The [School Breakfast Program](#) is for all hungry students, regardless of income level. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the [federal poverty level](#) qualify for free, and those with incomes between 130% and 185% qualify for reduced-price breakfast.

Are schools required to make menu substitutions for children who cannot eat the regular lunch or breakfast?

Federal law and the regulations for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program require schools to make [accommodations for children](#) who are unable to eat the school meal as prepared because of a disability that restricts a child's diet. Accommodations to a child's diet must be supported by a [State licensed healthcare professional](#) who is authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law, such as a licensed physician, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant.

The school food authority must provide a reasonable modification to Program meals when the school food authority receives a medical statement by a State licensed healthcare professional that is requesting a meal modification to accommodate the child's impairment.

General health concerns, such as a preference that a child eat a gluten-free diet because a parent believes it is better for the child, are not disabilities and do not require accommodation. For guidance and questions and answers on accommodating disabilities, go to [USDA Accommodating Disabilities](#) at www.fns.usda.gov

Health and Wellness

Do students that participate in the School Breakfast Program have better diets?

Children who participate in the School Breakfast Program are more likely to eat breakfast in the morning and consume important vitamins and minerals, which contributes to [better diets](#). Eating breakfast regularly is linked to greater intake of fiber, calcium, iron and vitamin C and lower intake of fat, cholesterol and sodium. Children who eat breakfast have better intake of B vitamins and vitamin D. Levels of these micronutrients among students who eat breakfast are 20% to 60% higher than students who skipped breakfast. ([Today's Dietitian](#))

Are students at risk for obesity when they eat at home and again at school?

A March [2016 study in Pediatric Obesity](#) found that students who regularly consumed breakfasts at school - including double breakfast eaters - were more likely to exhibit a healthy weight trajectory. In fact, the risk of obesity doubled among students who skipped breakfast or ate it inconsistently.

What is the relationship between school breakfast and obesity?

School Breakfast participation is associated with lower body mass index, lower probability of being overweight and lower probability of obesity. Children and adolescents who eat breakfast have more favorable weight-related outcomes (e.g., lower BMI, lower waist circumference, lesser likelihood of being chronically obese, decreased risk for obesity) in the short term and long term than those who skip breakfast. ([JAND](#)) ([JHR](#)) ([NALD](#)) ([JAMA](#)) ([JAND](#))

What are the health consequences of students that skip breakfast?

According to the [2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) by the Center for Disease Control, 63.7% of Ohio teens do not eat breakfast on a daily basis. Students who skip breakfast and experience hunger are more likely to encounter behavioral, emotional and academic problems. The School Breakfast Program is cited by the [Healthy Policy Institute of Ohio](#) as a recommended evidence-based approach to address [food insecurity](#).

Academic Achievement

What is the link between breakfast and academic achievement?

Students who eat breakfast consistently show improvement in general tasks of academic achievement and cognitive functioning. *National Institute of Health, Pub Med* ([NIH](#))

Enhanced Cognitive Function

A study among adolescents suggest that breakfast consumption enhances cognitive function when compared to breakfast skippers. *Science Direct, (Physiology and Behavior)*

Academic Performance

Students who participate in breakfast at school have improved concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory and learning. *Food Research & Action Center, (FRAC)*

Improved Standardized Tests

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. ([FRAC](#))

Better Behavior

Researchers found that students with consistent breakfast consumption had better classroom behavior and vigilance, which facilitates learning. Children may give up more easily if they are feeling the negative effects of skipping breakfast. [Breakfast and Learning, \(FRAC\)](#)

Higher Rates of Attendance

Studies show that universal school breakfast program participation is associated with higher rates of attendance and declines in tardiness. ([FRAC](#)) ([NIH](#))

Lower Rates of Tardiness

Schools with increased participation in school breakfast have decreased tardiness among students. ([Share Our Strength](#))

Breakfast Resources

State Breakfast Resources

American Dairy Association Midwest
www.Drink-Milk.com

Children's Hunger Alliance
www.ChildrensHungerAlliance.org

School Nutrition Association of Ohio
www.SNAOhio.org

Ohio Department of Education
www.Education.Ohio.gov

Ohio School Breakfast Challenge
www.OhioSchoolBreakfastChallenge.com

National Breakfast Resources

Action for Healthy Kids
www.ActionForHealthyKids.org

Alliance for a Healthier Generation
www.HealthierGeneration.org

Food and Nutrition Services, USDA
www.fns.usda.gov

Food Research and Action Center
www.frac.org

National Dairy Council
www.NationalDairyCouncil.org

National Institute of Health
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

School Nutrition Foundation
www.SchoolNutrition.org

**School Nutrition Foundation:
Breakfast in the Classroom**
www.BreakfastInTheClassroom.org

**School Nutrition Foundation: Beyond
Breakfast Blog**
www.BeyondBreakfast.org

**Share Our Strength No Kid Hungry, School
Breakfast Resources**
www.NoKidHungry.org

Tufts University, Childhood Obesity 180
[www.ChildObesity180.org/Initiatives/
Breakfast-Initiative](http://www.ChildObesity180.org/Initiatives/Breakfast-Initiative)