



## Connecticut School Breakfast Report Card 2007

**For the third consecutive year, Connecticut ranks last in the nation in the number of schools participating in the federally funded School Breakfast Program.<sup>1</sup>**

This past year, schools have implemented innovative breakfast programs presenting a variety of solutions to increase school breakfast participation in Connecticut. Unfortunately, more than one hundred eligible towns still do not participate in the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Many communities have created successful models for achieving state-wide growth in school breakfast. Let us now take advantage of this opportunity to make an immediate and lifelong impact on the education and health of our children. This updated report card will help you see how well your school and/or community is doing in providing and expanding the breakfast program to low-income children, as well as provide successful techniques for school breakfast expansion. As an additional component, this report includes potential federal dollars each town could have received last year with increased school breakfast participation.

### **Key Report Card Findings:**

- Almost **one in three** Connecticut towns providing school breakfast saw a decrease in participation from the 2006-07 school year.
- Schools in New Britain, Bridgeport, and Stratford participating in an In-classroom Pilot Breakfast Program **increased student participation over 100%** in just a few months.
- Towns serving breakfast in the classroom or as a “grab and go” held some of the highest levels of participation.
- There are **thirteen towns with “severe need” schools\* who do not participate** in the SBP.
- If Connecticut served breakfast to 70% of those low-income students participating in school lunch, we could have received an additional **10 million dollars** in child nutrition program funding.

### **Why Breakfast At School?**

The academic, nutritional, and behavioral benefits of school breakfast creates a win-win situation for all. The information below presents just some of the evidence demonstrating the positive impacts of school breakfast on students, parents, and teachers.

**EDUCATION** Numerous studies prove that nutritional status has an impact on cognitive functions in school, thus enhancing students vigilance and quality of school work. Correspondingly, the amount of time between breakfast consumption and class further impacts the level of academic achievement. A study shows that children who eat breakfast at school perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.<sup>2</sup> Providing breakfast at school benefits those students with long commutes and ensures all students are adequately prepared for school.

\* a school where, in the second prior year, 40% or more of the students received lunches at a free or reduced-price

**NUTRITION** Times have changed; busy morning schedules can make providing children a nutritious breakfast at home a challenge. All schools who participate in the School Breakfast Program must meet federal nutrition requirements, requiring breakfasts to contain no more than 30% of calories from fat and less than 10% of calories from saturated fat. Examples of school breakfast include: egg and cheese on a bagel with milk or yogurt, graham crackers, juice, and milk.

**PSYCHSOCIAL EFFECTS** Hunger can be a huge distraction not only to a child, but for an entire class. Those who have not had breakfast find it difficult to concentrate and tend to cause classroom disruptions by compromising the focus of other classmates. In End Hunger Connecticut!'s *Teachers' Perceptions of the School Breakfast Program Survey*, 71% of the responding teachers noticed an improvement in students' attentiveness/alertness after the implementation of a school breakfast program. School breakfast is a minor investment in guaranteeing all students and teachers the opportunity to make the most of each day.

### **School Breakfast Program: The Basics**

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is administered, at the federal level, by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture and administered at the state level by the Connecticut Department of Education. The federal government provides reimbursements to local school food authorities for each breakfast served.

Schools receive federal reimbursements of:

- \$1.35 for each free breakfast served
- \$1.05 for each reduced-price breakfast served
- \$.24 for each paid breakfast served

“Severe need” schools are eligible for an additional \$.26 in federal funding for each free or reduced-price breakfast served in Connecticut. Grants of \$3,000 are available to “severe need” schools that wish to start a SBP and “severe need” schools may receive up to an additional \$.10 for each free or reduced price breakfast that is served, dependent on available state funds.

Participation in the free or reduced-price breakfast program is determined by household income. Students whose household income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are eligible for free breakfast. Those students whose family income is between 130% (\$22,321 for a family of three) and 185% (\$31,765 for a family of three) of the FPL are eligible for reduced price breakfast. Students who are eligible for free and reduced price meals are low-income.

## **School Breakfast Versatility: Methods and Common Characteristics**

A school breakfast program can operate in many different ways and locations depending on the schools needs. The breakfast service methods listed below are just some of the ways Connecticut schools are finding success with school breakfast.

**Cafeteria Style:** Students receive and consume breakfast in the cafeteria just as a traditional lunch program.

- Accommodates a large number of students with minimal staff
- Method is conducive to serving hot meals
- Activity is contained in one central location

**Grab and Go:** Students pick-up their breakfast in a convenient location as they arrive, such as a main entryway or multipurpose room. Breakfast is eaten on the go, in class, or in a communal area.

- Simple and convenient
- Few operational and supervisory staff needed
- Minimal clean-up

**In-classroom:** Breakfast is served and consumed in the classroom prior to or during early morning activities of the school day. Breakfast is brought to the classrooms by food service staff or student representatives.

- Participation is most often higher
- Serving time is more flexible for inconsistent bus schedules
- Provides an opportunity for students to socialize before class begins

**Breakfast after 1<sup>st</sup> period:** A mid-morning snack is served to students in the classroom or in hallways during passing classes.

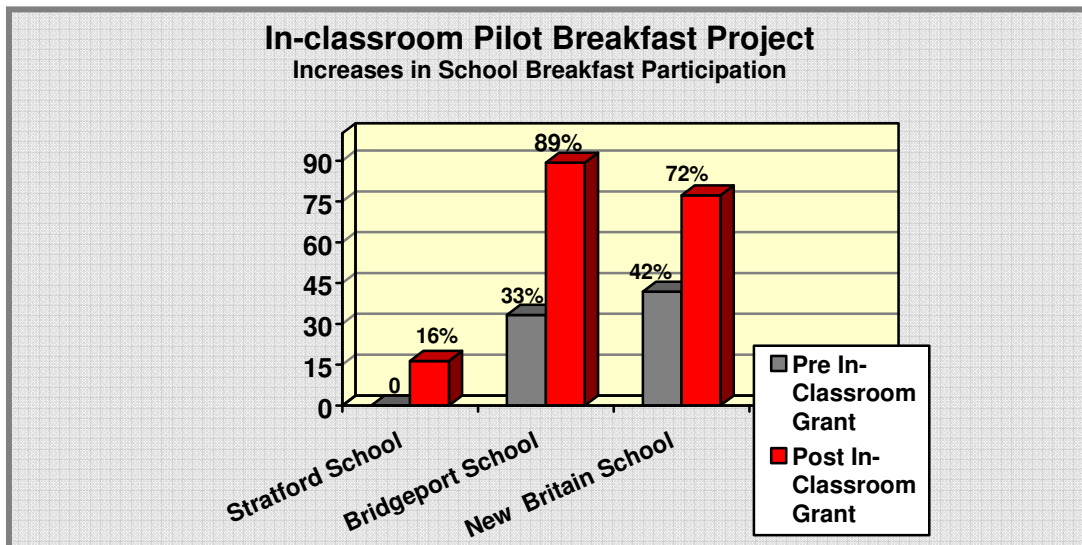
- Service is quick and requires minimal staff
- Children who eat very early due long commutes are given the opportunity to refuel
- A favorable alternative for staggered bus arrivals

**Universal:** Students are provided breakfast free of charge regardless of income. Schools cover the difference in cost between what is receive in federal reimbursement for free and reduced-price breakfast and the cost of providing it to student who do not qualify for free and reduced-price breakfast. Breakfast is often served in the classroom, but can be implemented with other methods.

- Includes the most number of students
- Helps eliminate the stigmas that may be attached to other means of service
- A successful model for schools with high rates of free and reduced-price qualifying students

## Breakfast in the Classroom: A Proven Success

In the 2006-2007 school year, three Connecticut schools participated in a pilot In-Classroom School Breakfast grant aimed at implementing breakfast programs in the classroom. The recipient schools, North End Elementary School of New Britain, Second Hill Lane School of Stratford, and Beardsley Elementary School of Bridgeport found creative ways to make breakfast part of the school day, and as result found tremendous success marked by significant increases in student participation (see graph below). The In-classroom breakfast programs have been embraced within the school communities as an effective and essential tool in ensuring all start the day prepared to learn and succeed. Due to its overwhelming popularity, the model has since been expanded to multiple schools within all three districts. Moving the meal into Connecticut classrooms is now proven to increase the availability and access to school breakfast for students.



### **In-Classroom School Breakfast Pilot Highlights**

- Increases in participation of **over 100%** in each school.
- **Hot and cold** breakfasts were both successfully served in the classroom.
- Principals observed **reduced tardiness rates**.
- Teachers encountered **less behavior issues and trips to the nurse**
- Meal distribution method varied from school to school
- **Minimal additional labor** was needed for operation in schools with an established breakfast program.
- Successful models were observed in both **urban and suburban settings**.

*The In-classroom breakfast program is running smoothly; it's become part of our daily routine. If students don't receive a good breakfast at home, it interferes with their learning all morning. It is one less concern when [teachers] know the students have the energy needed to get through a rigorous morning.*

*-Mrs. West, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher  
Northend Elementary School, New Britain*

## 2007 Connecticut School Breakfast Champion



Megan Kingston, Stratford School Food Service Director

Due to Meg's positive outlook and determination, the Stratford In-classroom breakfast pilot has morphed into a district-wide program. With the support of Stratford Superintendent, Irene Cornish, and energetic staff, the one school pilot has been expanded to breakfast programs in all thirteen Stratford Public Schools. In only a few months, Stratford Public Schools has **increased breakfast participation over 150% and serves over 600 breakfasts each day**. When Meg was asked how schools should approach the classroom breakfast concept, she responded

*"Don't over think the classroom idea, it's not complicated. GO FOR IT! Participation is clearly higher with In-classroom breakfast."*

Congratulations Meg!

### **"School Breakfast Report Card": The Findings**

The School Lunch and Breakfast programs serve the same population; therefore school lunch is used as the standard to compare participation in the School Breakfast Program. The Report Card's SBP participation rate indicates how many children receive free & reduced price school breakfast per number of children who receive free & reduced price school lunch in any given town through the public schools. The percent change in SBP participation compares these rates over time, from 2005-06 to 2006-07.

As an additional reference, this report includes a column indicating the potential additional federal dollars each town could have received last year if they served breakfast to 70% of those low-income students participating in school lunch. This calculation includes free and reduced price children; and assumes relative proportions of these would occur at higher levels of participation. Extra "severe-need" meal reimbursements or grants are not taken into account. As a whole, if Connecticut served breakfast to 70% of low-income students participating in lunch, we could **benefit from an additional 10 million dollars in federal child nutrition funds**.

In the 2006-07 school year **only 40% of Connecticut towns (68 towns), including only one regional district (17)**, participated in the School Breakfast Program. Almost one third of all towns providing school breakfast saw decrease in participation.

In contrast, school breakfast participation increased over 25% or more in 11 Connecticut towns, with the highest increase observed in Stratford (150%). These towns include:

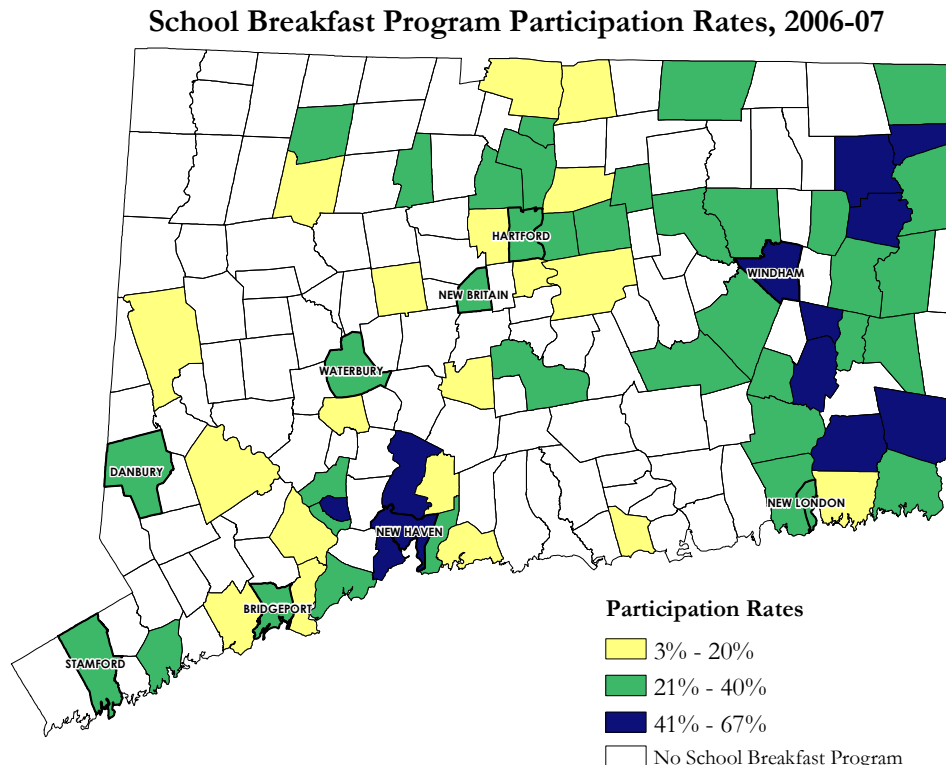
**Canterbury, Enfield, Griswold, Lisbon, Stratford, North Haven, Plainfield, South Windsor, Vernon, Branford, and Milford.**

Towns implementing In-classroom or "grab and go" breakfast have maintained high levels of participation at or above the state-wide average of 34.6%. Examples of towns include:

**Bridgeport, New Britain, Norwich, New London, Waterford, and Ansonia.**

## Districts with One or More “Severe Need” Schools NOT Participating in School Breakfast

**Bristol, East Haven, Enfield, Greenwich, Groton, Manchester, Meriden, Naugatuck, Norwich, Plymouth, Scotland, Torrington, and Waterbury**



Prepared by Douglas Hall, Ph.D., Connecticut Voices for Children  
Source: End Hunger Connecticut!, 2007

## School Breakfast Program: National Rankings

The Food Research and Action Center’s (FRAC) annual “School Breakfast Scorecard” analyzes school breakfast participation in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine state-by-state rankings and follow trends in participation. In FRAC’s most recent “Scorecard”, released in December 2007, Connecticut for the third year in a row ranked dead last in the nation in the number of schools participating in the SBP.

Across the nation, School Breakfast Program participation continued to increase in the 2006-07 school year; each day, 8.1 million low-income children ate a school breakfast resulting in a 5% increase over last year. Nationwide, more than 84% of the schools that offered a school lunch also participated in school breakfast. In Connecticut, just over half (55.5%) of schools that offered a school lunch also served breakfast, indicating a 4% decrease in the number of schools serving breakfast from 2005-06. Alas, as the national trend shows an increase in participation, Connecticut continues to reach less of our most vulnerable children.

The FRAC “Scorecard” highlights the amount of federal funding states forgo as a result of low participation rates. Currently Connecticut serves only 34.6 low-income students breakfast, for every 100 low-income students that eat lunch, a minor increase from last year (34.0). **If Connecticut schools with breakfast programs served 60 low-income students breakfast for every 100 low-income students that eat lunch at schools the state would receive an additional \$7.8 million dollars in federal funding.**

## Common Misconceptions

Introducing a new school program can come with opposition and presumed obstacles, many of which have been disproved. The following claims are just few of the more common fallacies followed by clarification. For additional responses to school breakfast myths and proven research, contact End Hunger CT! at (860) 560-2100 ext. 14.

### The Bottom -Line

One of the biggest barriers to implementing a breakfast program is the belief that the program is too costly for the school. Eighty-eight percent of schools nation-wide that operate a School Lunch Program also operate a School Breakfast Program <sup>3</sup> and find the federal reimbursement enough to cover costs. Higher student participation directly increases the financial stability of the program by increasing the amount of federal reimbursement. Connecticut also assists severe-need schools with annual start-up grants of \$3,000 as well as up to \$.10 in additional per meal reimbursements.

*"In some schools, we're serving more breakfast than lunch."*

*-Maura O'Malley  
Bridgeport School Food and  
Nutrition Director*

### No Time

The lack of time due to bus or school schedules can be an obstacle in starting or sustaining a breakfast program. Rearranging school schedules to allow for five to ten extra minutes can allow sufficient time to operate a grab and go or in-classroom breakfast program. Serving breakfast after 1<sup>st</sup> period overcomes barriers of time and accessibility by offering breakfast mid-morning to all students.

### Waste of Class Time

Some hold the misconception that school breakfast, particularly in the classroom, wastes learning time and delays the start of the day. In fact, just the opposite is true, ensuring a complete morning meal for every child increases the productivity of students throughout the morning and has been shown to increase students' attendance and achievement, and reduce school nurses visits and classroom discipline problems.<sup>4</sup>

*We have seen a large increase in our high school breakfast participation. With the help of Dr. Irene Zytka, principal of BHS, breakfast hours were extended and the students are embracing the change."*

*-Timothy Cipriano, Bloomfield  
Food Service Director  
On Bloomfield High School  
Breakfast Program*

## School Breakfast ACTION steps

### **Legislators**

- Support mandates that require all "severe need" schools operate a school breakfast program.
- Support start-up grants to make it easier for schools to implement a successful program.
- Stand behind legislation for breakfast programs that serve during the school day to all students, free of charge.

## Superintendents and Principals

- Make breakfast a priority by requiring the School Breakfast Program in your school(s).
- Inquire with the district school food service director and ask what you can do to support the launch or expansion of school breakfast.
- Maintain open communication with food service employees, teachers, and parents for program feedback and modifications.
- Help promote the breakfast program to ensure all parents are informed and aware of your support for the importance of eating a nutritious breakfast each morning.

## School Food Service Directors

- Connect with neighboring school food service directors who participate in the School Breakfast Program for tips on implementation.
- If considering starting a breakfast program, start small with a pilot program and address each concern as it arises.
- Conduct a school or district-wide survey to assess the breakfast needs and desires of the school community.
- Use National School Breakfast Week (March 3-7 2008) to promote your breakfast program.

## Parents and Teachers

- Advocate for school breakfast at your school by contacting your principal, food service director, local wellness committees, or PTA/O; share this report and personal rationale for starting or expanding a school breakfast program.
- Organize a group of school personnel, parents, physicians, or nutrition experts for a school breakfast meeting with school administrators.
- Utilize End Hunger CT! and its resources to support school breakfast efforts.

## School Breakfast Program: Conclusion

It is time for Connecticut to assume responsibility for ensuring all students are prepared to achieve and accomplish at their maximum potential. Fortunately, we have the know-how; making breakfast part of the school day has been proven, both statistically and observably, to be the most effective way to reach more children.

End Hunger Connecticut! is committed to working with communities to start and expand school breakfast programs and has a variety of tools for schools including; parent and student surveys, articles, and school breakfast research. Please contact Dawn Crayco at (860) 560-2100 ext. 14 for more information on making sure every child has the opportunity to make it a great day, everyday.

*"We are extremely grateful for the breakfast program. In a district where over 30% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, this program is critical in making sure students have a proper meal and nourishment as they start their academic day. While our primary focus is academic achievement, we cannot forget that we work with the whole child and need to meet their academic, physical, and emotional needs to accomplish our goals."*

*- Irene Cornish  
Superintendent of Schools  
Stratford, CT*

<sup>1</sup> Food Research and Action Center, "School Breakfast Scorecard: 2007." <http://www.frac.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Vaisman N, Voet H, Akivis A, Vakil E. "Effects of Breakfast Timing on Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students." *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 1996 150:1089-1092.

<sup>3</sup> End Hunger Connecticut! Inc. "Teachers Perceptions of the School Breakfast Program 2003 Study." 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Food Research and Action Center, "School Breakfast in America's Big Cities." <http://www.frac.org>.