

Interim Study Proposal 2017-033 Summary:

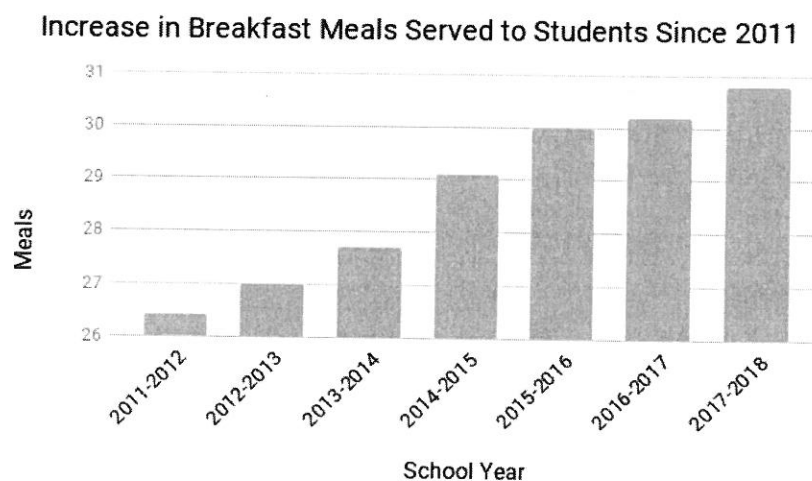
Evaluating the impact of school Breakfast After the Bell on student health and achievement

Need

As of August 2018, 17% of families and 23% of children in Arkansas were identified as food insecure, meaning they did not have consistent access to adequate food. The good news is, the number of food insecure children in Arkansas has dropped significantly from over 200,000 in 2015 to less than 164,000 in 2018 - an 18% reduction - (Feeding America - Map the Meal Gap 2018), due in part to the efforts of Arkansas No Kid Hungry partners in improving kids' access to USDA nutrition programs.



Backed by research showing schools that offered breakfast as part of the school day (not only in the cafeteria before the bell) increased participation and improved student behavior, concentration, attention, and test scores, the campaign has supported school districts since 2011 to offer new breakfast models with growing success. As of fall 2018, 443 school districts in Arkansas have adopted Breakfast After the Bell (BAB) models in their schools, helping drive a 3.8 million increase in the number of breakfast meals served to low-income students since 2011 (AR Dept. of Education).



It is clear that combined efforts to increase access to school breakfast have had a positive impact on participation rates. The purpose of the interim study was to determine whether Arkansas schools offering Breakfast After the Bell programs experience improved student academic outcomes, health, and behavior. Though some evidence points to Breakfast After the Bell's positive impacts on students, more research is necessary to understand their full extent.

Improved Health

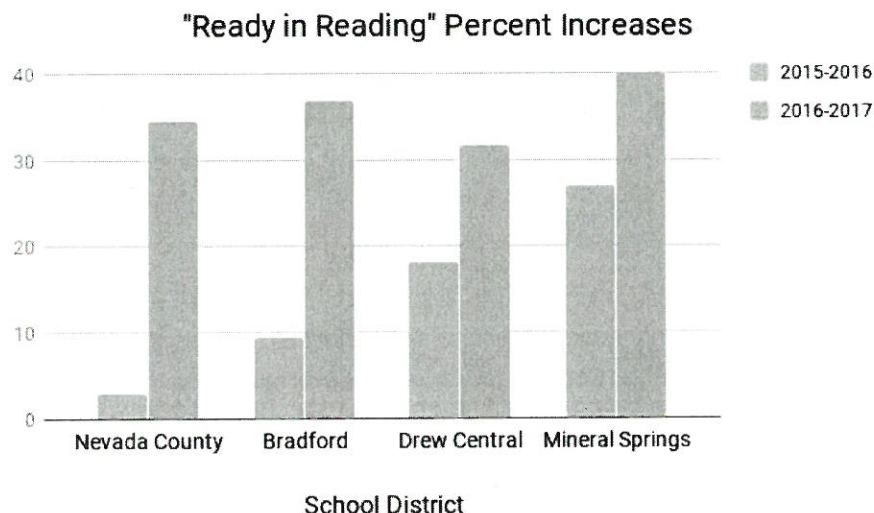
In the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, Arkansas Meals for Achievement (AMFA/Act 383 of 2013) provided grant funding to schools that implemented a universal free alternative breakfast model. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance partnered with students from the Clinton School of Public Service to review the impact of this program. School nurses surveyed reported fewer student complaints of headaches and stomachaches.

“The students are feeling better. By the time noon comes around, if they’ve had nothing, they’re hungry, they’re cranky, their head hurts, they’re fidgety, they can’t concentrate, so if they have breakfast in their bellies, then they overall have a better day.”
-School Nurse, AMFA participant school

Improved Academic Outcomes

Evidence also supports the relationship between Breakfast After the Bell and improved academic outcomes in Arkansas schools. Research conducted by the University of Central Arkansas found that in the 2014-2015 school year, standardized test scores in grades 7 and 8 were higher for students in districts with alternative breakfast. Researchers noted, however, that further study is needed to understand this relationship.

Encouraging eligible high-need school districts to adopt the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Breakfast After the Bell can further promote student success. The Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading’s 2018 Progress Report highlights four school districts that adopted CEP, allowing all meals to be served at no charge, and realized significant improvement in student reading scores the following year. The Nevada County School District even saw a 32% increase in third graders scoring "ready in reading" after adopting CEP.

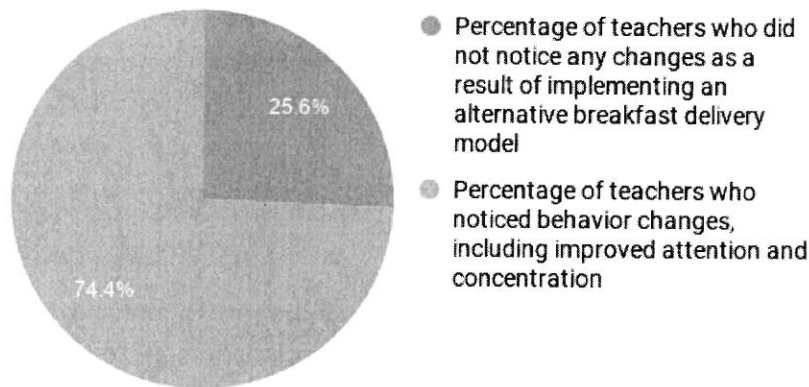


Improved Behavior

There is also evidence that points to the relationship between Breakfast After the Bell and improved student behavior in Arkansas schools. The University of Central Arkansas study found that in 2016-2017, schools that did not provide alternative breakfast were more likely to have higher rates of insubordination, bullying, and in-school suspensions.

Further, the Clinton School AMFA study, which reviewed the impacts of implementing alternative breakfast, found that breakfast participation grew by an average of 84% in participating schools, and 74% of teachers surveyed reported seeing positive changes in classroom behavior.

Teacher Perception of Alternative Breakfast Models



Recommendations

Though links have been established between Breakfast After the Bell and student health, academic outcomes, and behavior, more effort must be put into investigating and strengthening these relationships. Thus, we recommend the following:

- **Continue this interim study** to more widely identify the health and academic impacts of Breakfast After the Bell, to identify best practices among school districts, and to infuse school nutrition into district-level strategic planning as required by the Arkansas Every Student Succeeds Act.
- Make a **grant funding pool** available for schools to pilot Breakfast After the Bell strategies.
- Develop a **school-level nutrition data collection plan** to allow school district administrators and school principals to better identify which school meal program models are successful in their schools.

“By offering breakfast as part of the school day, students are now playing with their friends before school and then heading in afterwards to fuel up on breakfast while learning at their desks. This has doubled our students who now eat breakfast each day.”

-Arkansas school district child nutrition director

