

School Breakfast Program

Overview

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a federally assisted meal program that operates in 1,568 public and private schools in Wisconsin, serving breakfast to 93,000 students. Many different types of schools serve breakfast, elementary through high school, rural and urban. The SBP operates very similarly to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Both programs allow children to qualify for free or reduced priced meals, based on their family's income. The program operates in 72,000 schools and institutions, serving a daily average of 8.4 million children. It is administered at the Federal level by FNS. State education agencies administer the SBP at the State level, and local school food authorities operate it in schools.

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) was established in 1966 as a two-year pilot project to provide grants to schools serving breakfasts to "nutritionally needy" children. In 1973 the reimbursement structure was replaced by a system of per-meal reimbursement. It was permanently authorized in 1975 and made available "...in all schools where it is needed to provide adequate nutrition for children in attendance." The SBP provides cash assistance to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions.

Eligibility

USDA publishes a household size-income scale and this scale is sent with the annual contract materials. Participating school agencies must distribute information to households and to the news media. This information explains how households can apply for free and reduced price meal benefits. Eligibility determinations are made by an official designated by the school or institution. Direct certification allows school agencies to obtain a list of households that are categorically eligible for free meal benefits. A child institutionalized in a residential child care institution is considered to be a household of one. Personal income available to the child to pay for meals is the only income source. In most cases, they would be eligible for free meals.

Access/Participation

School Participation. DPI reports that 1,568 schools/sites participated in SBP during the 2005-2006 school year. This is 62% of the school sites participating in NSLP.

Student Participation. An average of 93,000 students were served daily in the SBP. Of these 68,904 were low-income students - representing three-fourths (74%) of all participants. However this represents only 31% of the low-income participation in School Lunch and just 23% of all low-income students attending schools with NSLP.

Benefit Details

The USDA reimburses schools at a higher rate if they are "severe need" (40% or more of students receiving NSLP are low-income). Wisconsin also provides a supplement to the federal payment. Combined federal & state payments in 2005-2006 totaled \$1.34 for each free breakfast (\$1.58 for severe need); \$1.04 for each reduced-price breakfast (\$1.28 for severe need) and 30 cents for each full price breakfast. The monthly value of meals is estimated at \$27/month for

FSC Topic Paper - Federal Nutrition Programs

free breakfast (\$32/month for severe need); \$21/month for reduced-price breakfast (\$26/month for severe need) and \$6/month for full-price breakfasts.¹ During the 2005-2006 school year schools served 15,686,660 breakfasts to students worth \$17,939,679 dollars. Nearly three-fourths of these meals were served to low-income students.

Program Impact

Breakfasts served provide excellent nutrition and are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Research has established that the School Breakfast Program has been shown to

- Improve the quality of children's diets
- Enhance academic performance and student behavior
- Improve the learning environment through improved behavior and attentiveness
- Reduce visits to the school nurse

Positive Developments and Trends

- Average daily participation increased 30% during the 2005-2006 school. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) reports that Wisconsin's rate of growth in participation was the highest in the nation.
- Many schools use direct certification to automatically establish eligibility for free meals for students living in households that participate in FoodShare and W-2.
- Wisconsin schools receive over \$1 million in state funds annually to supplement the federal reimbursement. This payment is currently about 7 cents per breakfast served.
- In the past several years Congress has provided additional funds to schools that start or expand SBP. This has significantly increased the number of participating schools.
- Paper work has been reduced for schools as a result of the Department of Public Instruction's development of a web based claim and contract submission process.

Concerns, Problems, Negative Trends.

- FRAC ranks Wisconsin last in the nation on measures of low-income student participation. Only 31% of low-income students who participate in NSLP also participate in SBP.
- FRAC ranks Wisconsin second to last in the nation on measures of the availability of the program. Only 62% of schools that offer School Lunch also offer SBP.
- Wisconsin could receive an additional \$14 million in federal dollars if participation rates matched those of the highest performing states.
- The state supplement is no longer sufficient to give schools the 10 cents per meal intended.
- Even when SBP is available, many eligible low-income students do not participate. This can be due to stigma, conflicts with bus schedules, insufficient time to eat, and community sentiment that breakfast should be eaten at home.
- A relatively small number of meals are served in the classroom even though research shows this approach substantially increases SBP participation.

¹ Based on a student attending 20 days per month at a non-high risk school.

FSC Topic Paper - Federal Nutrition Programs

- Universal Free SBP is a provision that allows schools with high poverty rates to provide meals to all children without distinction. Reimbursement rates are based on the number of low-income children qualifying for meals in previous years. Even though Universal Free can dramatically reduce stigma and increase participation, implementation rates are low.

School Breakfast would be more effective if...

- Federal reimbursement was increased.
- The state per meal supplement to the federal reimbursement was increased.
- More students attending schools with SBP participated in the program.
- More schools offered SBP to their students.
- More schools with SBP served in-classroom meals.
- More eligible schools implemented Universally Free meals.
- Higher federal reimbursements were available for schools providing meals in classrooms.
- Schools and communities increased their efforts to ensure that all students ate breakfast.