

A History of the School Breakfast Program

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) turns 50 this year, and throughout its history, FRAC has worked to expand the reach of the School Breakfast Program through research, advocacy, and training efforts to make it robust, accessible, and effective at decreasing childhood hunger and undernutrition. Since the creation of the School Breakfast Program, participation has grown to 14.6 million students on an average school day in school year 2018–2019; 12.4 million of whom are low-income. FRAC’s work, in partnership with national, state, and local partners, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state child nutrition agencies, and educators, to identify barriers to participation — and to knock them down — has driven this growth in participation. Below are major milestones in the history of the School Breakfast Program and FRAC’s role in it.

1966 — School Breakfast Program piloted through the Child Nutrition Act of 1966

1975 — Nationwide School Breakfast Program created

1987 — FRAC released *Fuel for Excellence*

This first-ever guide to the School Breakfast Program launched a multi-year expansion campaign with over 70 national partners.

1989 — Child Nutrition Amendments of 1989 created direct certification and school breakfast incentives

FRAC’s research and lobbying were central to the enactment of the Child Nutrition Amendments of 1989. Direct certification has allowed eligible children to be easily certified for free school meals without an application. Incentives for school breakfast expansion have supported increased participation.

1992 — FRAC released the first *School Breakfast Scorecard*

The *Scorecard* found that only one-third of low-income children receiving school lunch ate school breakfast, and that about half of the schools operating the National School Lunch Program also ran the School Breakfast Program. This report set the first national benchmark for school breakfast participation. The report’s release, along with FRAC’s breakfast organizers, contributed to over 25 states passing legislation requiring schools with a high proportion of low-income students to serve breakfast.

2007 — FRAC released *School Breakfast in America’s Big Cities*

The report was the first to analyze school breakfast participation in numerous large school districts, and highlight the role that offering breakfast at no charge and implementing innovative breakfast models, such as breakfast in the classroom, had on increasing school breakfast participation. It has challenged many of the large school districts to take steps to increase participation in their school breakfast program.

2010 — D.C. passed the Healthy Schools Act

D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of FRAC, ushered passage and funding of the Healthy Schools Act — the first legislation of its kind — which required schools to offer breakfast at no charge to all students, and required schools with 40 percent or more students certified for free and reduced-price meals to implement a breakfast after the bell program. Since the bill’s implementation, D.C. has remained in the top four for breakfast participation in the nation.

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2010 — Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom launched

FRAC joined with the National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation, the NEA Foundation, and the School Nutrition Foundation to form the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom to provide technical assistance and funding to implement breakfast after the bell models. With funding from the Walmart Foundation, the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom have worked with more than 500 schools in 70 districts, leading to over 100,000 additional students eating school breakfast since 2010.

2010 — Community Eligibility created through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

The Community Eligibility Provision allows high-poverty schools to offer free school breakfast and lunch and can make it easier for schools to implement breakfast after the bell programs. Evaluations link the provision to increased breakfast participation.

2011 — New Mexico passed the first state breakfast in the classroom legislation

New Mexico Appleseed led the effort, with support from FRAC, to pass Senate Bill 144, which mandated low-income elementary schools to implement breakfast after the bell programs and offer breakfast to all students at no charge. Since the bill's passage, New Mexico has continued to be a leader in school breakfast, and numerous states have followed New Mexico's lead.

2014 — FRAC launched the *Breakfast for Learning Education Alliance*

The Alliance — comprised of AASA: the School Superintendents Association, the American School Health Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Education Trust, the National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation, the National Association of School Nurses, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Education Foundation, the National PTA, the National Rural Education Association, the School Nutrition Foundation, and the School Social Work Association of America — works together to elevate school breakfast's role in improving student achievement and health and to promote best practices to increase participation.

2019 — Oregon legislation made breakfast (and lunch) free for nearly all students

[Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon](#) led an effort to increase the number of high-poverty schools able to implement community eligibility: approximately three out of five children in Oregon will attend a school offering free breakfast and lunch to all students. Children who do not attend a community eligibility school will be able to qualify for free school meals if their household income is 300 percent or below the poverty line. The federal threshold for free school meals is 130 percent. FRAC worked with Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon to support this effort.

2020 — Dramatic gains made, but there's still work to do

In the last 15 years alone, school breakfast participation has grown by nearly 5 million low-income children. States have passed school breakfast expansion legislation to require breakfast after the bell programs, to eliminate the reduced-price copayment, and to encourage the implementation of community eligibility. Just over 28,600 schools are offering free breakfast to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision, and a growing number of schools are implementing innovative school breakfast programs. Because the program reaches just over half of the low-income children who participate in school lunch, there remains much work to do even as we celebrate the tremendous gains in program access.