



THE REACH OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH IN ARKANSAS

During the 2023–2024 School Year

The School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program play a critical role in reducing childhood hunger and supporting good nutrition in **ARKANSAS**. When children participate in school meals, they tap into many benefits: improved health, better test scores, and fewer school absences, visits to the school nurse, and behavioral referrals. Moving forward, implementing proven best practices and expanding access will ensure that every child in **ARKANSAS** has access to the healthy meals they need to get the most out of their school day.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN THE 2023–2024 SCHOOL YEAR



- ▶ Nearly **15.4 million children** participated in school **BREAKFAST**, with just over **12.2 million children** receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast.
- ▶ Free and reduced-price breakfast participation **INCREASED** by just over **900,000 children** (8 percent) when compared to the 2022–2023 school year.



- ▶ Nearly **29.4 million children** participated in school **LUNCH**, with **21.1 million children** receiving a free or reduced-price lunch.
- ▶ Free and reduced-price lunch participation **INCREASED** by just over **1.3 million children** (6.8 percent) when compared to the 2022–2023 school year.

A SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPATION IN ARKANSAS

- ▶ **193,697** children participated in school **BREAKFAST**, with **148,434** children receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast.
- ▶ **310,833** children participated in school **LUNCH**, with **223,448** children receiving a free or reduced-price lunch.
- ▶ **66.4** children received a free or reduced-price school breakfast for every 100 children who received a free or reduced-price school lunch on an average day.
- ▶ If **ARKANSAS** reached 70 children from households with low incomes with breakfast for every 100 children that received a school lunch, it would reach **7,980** additional children and draw down **2,206,426** in federal reimbursement.



BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION INCREASED¹



Boosting Breakfast by Taking It Out of the Cafeteria

Implementing a breakfast-after-the-bell service model has the potential to greatly increase participation in **ARKANSAS** and reduce any stigma associated with eating breakfast at school.

- ▶ **Breakfast in the classroom:** Meals are delivered to and eaten in the classroom at the start of the school day.
- ▶ **“Grab and go”:** Children can quickly grab their breakfast from carts or kiosks in the hallway or the cafeteria line to eat in their classroom or in common areas.
- ▶ **Second chance breakfast:** Children are offered a second chance to eat breakfast after the school day starts.



Maximizing Momentum: Increasing Access to School Breakfast and Lunch Through the Community Eligibility Provision

The data is clear: More children participate in and benefit from school breakfast and school lunch when meals are available at no charge. Maximizing participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is an important strategy for increasing access to school meals. CEP allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch free of charge to all children. In the 2023–2024 school year, **75.9** percent of eligible schools participated in CEP in **ARKANSAS**.

Collaboration among the state child nutrition agency, policymakers, educators, school districts, and anti-hunger advocates will be necessary to ensure all children are able to access these critical school nutrition supports in ARKANSAS.