



IMPACT OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND LEARNING

An Analysis of the Scientific Research: Executive Summary

The body of evidence, drawn from more than 100 published research articles, provides the scientific basis for concluding that the School Breakfast Program (SBP) is highly effective in terms of providing children with a stronger basis to learn in school, eat more nutritious diets, and lead more healthy lives both emotionally and physically. Participation in the SBP is also economically desirable for our nation, the research shows.

While no single study necessarily provides a uniquely definitive assessment of the SBP's benefits, and while some studies occasionally reach differing conclusions, the combined and quite consistent message of this body of research is that **servicing breakfast to those schoolchildren who don't get it elsewhere significantly improves their cognitive or mental abilities, enabling them to be more alert, pay better attention, and to do better in terms of reading, math and other standardized test scores.** Children who eat breakfast also are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, stomachaches and earaches, and do significantly better than their non-breakfasted peers in terms of cooperation, discipline and inter-personal behaviors.

Protecting the ten million low-income children who are eligible for the SBP, but who do not receive it, is a goal that the nation can achieve. Funding is not an impediment since Congress provides reimbursement to local school districts who offer the program. Moreover, facilities and equipment pose no hurdles since virtually all school districts in the nation already offer the

National School Lunch Program. **Achieving more participation by schools in the SBP is the key challenge.**

Full utilization of the SBP in U.S. school districts also increases cost efficiency. **When schools do not provide breakfast to children, the loss of return on educational investment becomes a hidden tax paid by the local district and community.** Some states, for example, lose tens of millions of dollars a year in federal funding by not fully utilizing the SBP. Altogether, states lose an estimated half a billion dollars annually in school breakfast funding from Congress.

A second hidden tax that is paid when schools do not provide children with a school breakfast comes in the form of poorer educational outcomes. America pays an estimated \$90 billion annually when some of its people go hungry; money that comes in the form of more illness, lethargy, lost productivity, and poorer educational outcomes on the part of children. * Of this amount, nearly \$10 billion represents the costs of poorer education-related outcomes such as greater absenteeism and more grade retention related to hunger. More than \$65 billion of the \$90 billion total is paid for poorer health and psychosocial dysfunction, a significant proportion of it for conditions among children from households that do not get enough to eat.

The researchers conclude that the scientific evidence indicates that full participation by all U.S. school districts in the federally funded SBP would be a win for children and a win for the nation.

* Brown JL, Shepard D, Martin T, Orwat J, "The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger: Estimated Annual Burden to the United States," 2007, available through www.SodexoFoundation.org.

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