



School Breakfast Programs

Your mother was right: The more we learn about breakfast, the more we realize that breakfast just might be the most important meal of the day.

Despite this, many students do not start their day with a healthy meal and many schools do not offer breakfast for their students. Wisconsin ranks last in the country for the number of schools offering breakfast and next to last for the percentage of low-income children who eat school breakfast.¹

The benefits of breakfast

Eating breakfast:

- increases a child's ability to learn
- improves behavior
- improves the quality of a child's diet
- may decrease the risk of being overweight

Learning:

Eating breakfast benefits children's ability to learn and concentrate. Students who have not eaten breakfast perform more poorly on:

- mathematical tests^{2,3}
- matching activities⁴
- tasks involving memory⁴
- measures of creativity²

Behavior:

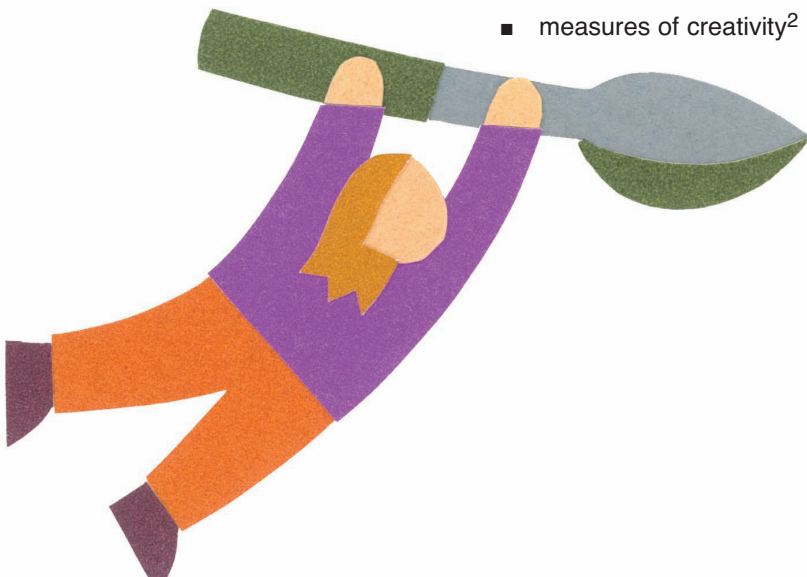
A host of factors contribute to behaviors, but children who do not eat breakfast tend to show more behavioral problems such as hyperactivity, absence from school, tardiness, and are more likely to have seen a psychologist.³

Nutrition:

Whether children eat breakfast at home or at school, they have a better overall diet than children who do not eat breakfast.⁶⁻⁹ When children skip breakfast they are less likely to meet recommended levels for important nutrients including calcium, magnesium, riboflavin, folate, vitamin B-12, and vitamin A compared to children who eat breakfast.¹⁰

Weight:

Adults who eat breakfast generally have lower weights.¹¹ Similarly, children and adolescents who skip breakfast are more likely to be overweight.¹² However, it is difficult to determine whether skipping breakfast caused the children to be overweight or whether they skipped breakfast in an effort to control their weight.



Who eats breakfast?

The number of children eating breakfast has been declining over time. Between 1965 and 1991, eating breakfast declined 5-20% for children 5-18 years old, with the greatest decline in teenage girls.¹³ As children get older, the number who eat breakfast decreases. In fact, while 85% of 6-11 year olds eat breakfast every day, only 14% of 12-19 year olds do so.¹⁴

Based on smaller studies, Wisconsin shows a similar pattern to the national trend. Each school day, 10-30% of students do not eat breakfast.

Groups that tend to skip breakfast more often include:

- females¹²
- African Americans^{6,9,13}
- Hispanics⁶
- teenagers^{9,13,14}

The School Breakfast Program

One option for ensuring that all students have access to breakfast is the federally funded School Breakfast Program. Participating schools include public, private, elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as both urban and rural schools. The decision to participate in the School Breakfast Program is made by the individual school or school district. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service funds the program; however, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction administers the program at the state level.

Offering the School Breakfast Program can reduce food insecurity in families with school-aged children by relieving some of the burden of the cost of food. A child who eats breakfast at school for free, instead of buying breakfast elsewhere or eating at home, could save the family budget approximately \$170 a year, assuming an average breakfast cost of \$1.

Who can participate?

Any child is able to purchase breakfast, if it is available in his or her school. Similar to the National School Lunch Program, some students may receive their breakfast free or at a reduced price. The chart below shows the cost of breakfast for different family income levels. The USDA pays the school back for some of the meal cost, depending on whether or not the meal is considered a free, reduced price, or full price meal.

Nutrition

School Breakfast Program meals must meet the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Breakfasts must provide at least 1/4 of a child's daily requirement for calories, protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C, while providing no more than 30% of calories from fat or 10% of calories from saturated fat.¹⁵ Generally, breakfasts will contain milk, fruit or fruit juice, and a main dish that includes grains and/or meat.

Cost of breakfast and USDA reimbursement rates for different income levels for the 2006-07 school year

	Income for a family of four	Student breakfast cost	USDA reimbursement to the school
Free	<\$26,000	\$.00	\$1.31
Reduced price	\$26,000-\$37,000	\$.30 (or less)	\$1.01
Full price	>\$37,000	Usually \$.80-\$1.20	\$0.24

Here are some tasty examples of school breakfasts!

Cold

- milk, peach slices, yogurt, mini bagels
- milk, juice, cold cereal

Hot

- milk, juice, egg and cheese burrito
- milk, juice, pancakes

How many students use the School Breakfast Program?

During the 2005-06 school year, over 93,000 Wisconsin students at 1,520 schools participated in the program each day. While 97% of public schools participate in the National School Lunch Program, only 58% of these participate in the School Breakfast Program.¹ Unfortunately, this is well below the national average of 83%.

Only 29% of students who obtain free or reduced price lunches in Wisconsin also eat school breakfast, compared to 45% nationally.¹ This ranks Wisconsin last in the United States for the percentage of low-income children served breakfast at school.

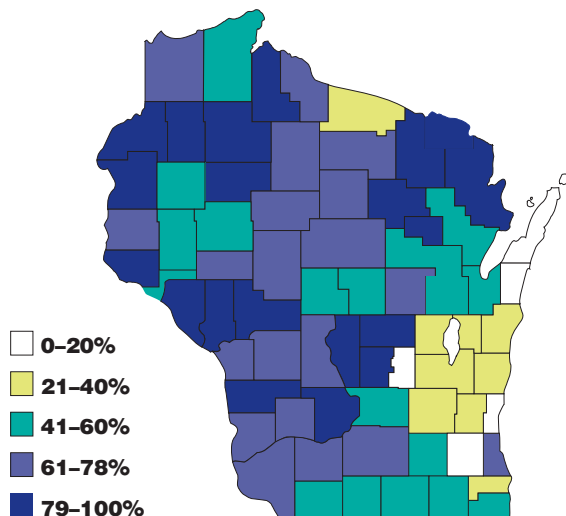
Most students participating in the School Breakfast Program are eligible for free meals.

Recently, Wisconsin has seen large increases in participation in the School Breakfast Program. For the 2005-06 school year, Wisconsin had the largest increase in school (24%) and low-income children participation (14%) in the U.S. This is due to a number of state and local efforts. These include support for the program from state political leaders—such as Governor Doyle, State Superintendent Burmaster, and Senator Kohl—who have made funds available from the federal government for schools wishing to start or improve their breakfast program. In addition, DPI and UW-Extension are working together to raise awareness and increase schools' ability to implement a program. The Milwaukee Public School System is also trying to provide free breakfast in the classroom at some of its schools.



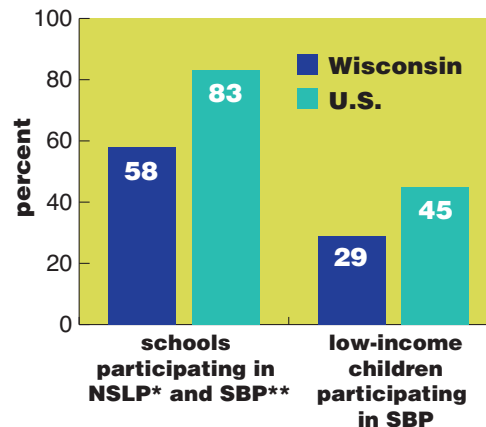
School participation in the School Breakfast Program

Percent of schools offering both the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program in the 05-06 school year.



Participation in the School Breakfast Program

Percent of schools and students participating in the School Breakfast Program for Wisconsin and the United States during the 2005-06 school year



*National School Lunch Program, **School Breakfast Program

How does Green County fare?

Participation in the School Breakfast Program varies from county to county. Data represented here is an average for the county and may differ between the school districts within a county. This, and similar, county-level data can be found at the Wisconsin Food Security Project website at www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/cfs/index.cfm.

Participation data is an average of daily participation in the program for the 2005–06 school year. County rank is from among 72 Wisconsin counties.

School Breakfast Program availability

	Green County	Wisconsin	U.S.	County rank*
Percent of schools participating in both the SBP* and the NSLP*	43%	57%	83%	53
Percent of high poverty+ schools participating in both the SBP and the NSLP	0%	80%	NA	56
Percent of low-income** students with access to the SBP	68%	78%	NA	46

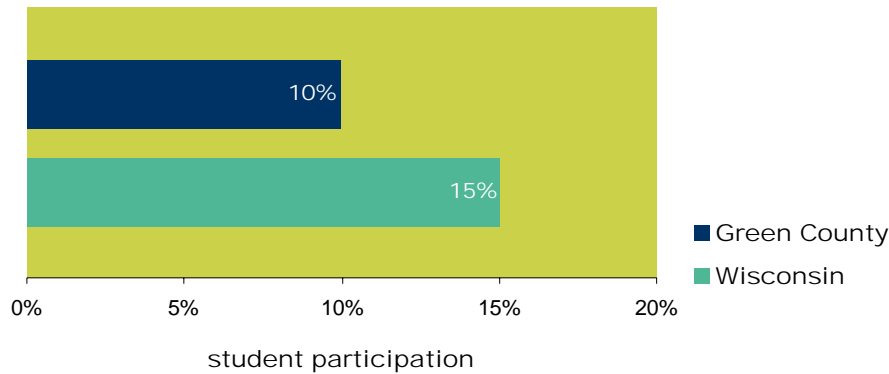
*National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

+Schools with greater than 40% of students qualifying for free or reduced price school meals

**Students who qualify for free or reduced price school meals

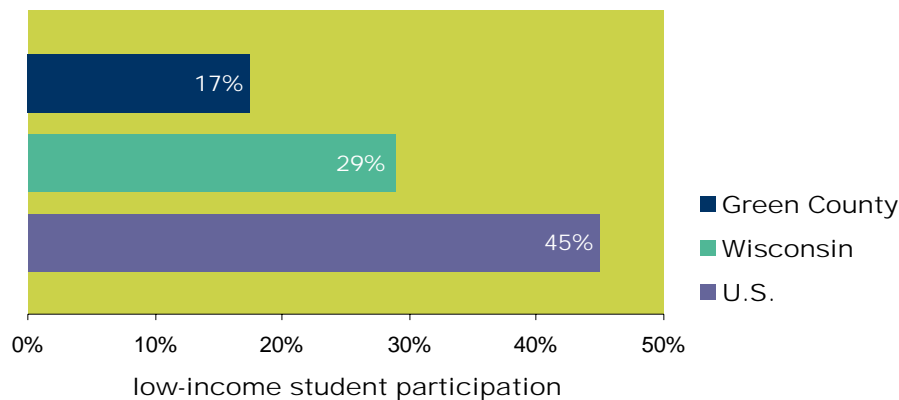
School Breakfast Program participation

Average percent of students participating in both the SBP and the NSLP



Out of a total 23 schools in Green County, 10 offer the School Breakfast Program.

Average percent of low-income students participating in both the SBP and the NSLP



Why is participation so low in Wisconsin?

Lack of access to the School Breakfast Program contributes to the low participation rate. Less than 6 out of every 10 children has access to the program in Wisconsin. However, even in schools that offer breakfast, school personnel say that the School Breakfast Program is underutilized, despite seeing hunger in their schools.¹⁵ Reasons these individuals believe student participation rates are low are a lack of time in the morning for schools to serve breakfast, issues surrounding transportation (e.g. bus schedules), and student food preferences.

When parents of Wisconsin elementary school students were asked in a survey why their children do not participate in the program, preliminary findings indicate that most parents say children prefer to eat at home. Other reasons given by parents for not participating in the program are that the child does not get to school in time to participate, they did not know about the program, or that they felt breakfast at home was healthier.



How can you help?

There are a number of things you can do in your community to help children and adolescents start their day off with a healthy breakfast. Here are some ideas for you:

- **Find out what is currently going on in your community.**
Where do students eat breakfast? What are they eating for breakfast? Why are they choosing these behaviors?
- **Be a role model.**
Eat a healthy breakfast yourself. Children learn from adults. If you interact with children or students, share breakfast with them.
- **Visit the school.**
If breakfast is being served at the schools in your community, go and visit the program and see how it runs.
- **Talk to school personnel.**
If the schools in your community don't offer breakfast, talk to the principal or food service staff and find out why this is the case. Express your desire to have the School Breakfast Program as an option for students.
- **Get creative.**
Breakfast is more than just sausage and eggs or cold cereal. Try something new. There are many fun and healthy things to eat for breakfast.
- **Be flexible.**
Breakfast doesn't have to be eaten first thing in the morning. Some teens aren't hungry when they get up. Try a mid-morning nutrition break.
- **Schedule time for breakfast.**
Make sure there is enough time for students to eat breakfast. This may mean altering the schedule to make time for breakfast.
- **Bring breakfast to the students.**
Offer breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go bags so that students can eat where they want.



Resources

There are a number of resources with information on both breakfast and the School Breakfast Program.

USDA Food and Nutrition Services

This site provides the official regulations and legislation with respect to the School Breakfast Program.

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/Default.htm

UW-Extension

This site has research-based information and resources for promoting the School Breakfast Program.

www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/food/schoolbreakfast/

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

This is an especially useful resource for schools.

www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/fns/sbp1.html

National Dairy Council

This site has tips and information to help people to eat breakfast.

www.nutritionexplorations.org/parents/breakfast-first.asp

Your local county

UW-Extension office

The Family Living and Nutrition educators at your local county Extension office can be a resource for education and outreach on the topics of breakfast and the School Breakfast Program. To locate your local office, consult

www1.uwex.edu/ces/cty.



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School Breakfast Programs continues the series *Wisconsin Families and the Communities Where They Live and Work*. You will find a complete list of titles in this series on the UW-Extension Family Living website at: www1.uwex.edu/ces/flp/demographics.

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