



SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024

Massachusetts School Breakfast Report Card

# Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms



Expanding After the  
Bell Breakfast to Fuel  
Student Learning

# KEY FINDINGS



In May 2023,  
Massachusetts  
passed a law  
providing  
**FREE** school  
meals for all  
K-12 students

— YET —



**Only 48% of students in our  
high-poverty schools receive  
school breakfast daily**

## Bright Spots

**Springfield Public Schools are  
serving 85% of students breakfast  
in the classroom each day, even in  
the high schools!** (as of April 2024)



## The Goal

**If all high-poverty schools  
reached 80% of kids  
with breakfast...**



**150,000**

more low-income students  
would receive a nutritious  
meal each day



**\$67M**

USDA reimbursements  
each year would come into  
school districts collectively

*\* High-poverty schools are defined as those with 60%+ of the student population qualifying for free/reduced meals.*

## Significant Drop

Number of high-poverty schools serving breakfast to 80%+ of students declined from school years 2019/20 to 2023/24\*

School Year 19/20

169

School Year 23/24

109

## Losing Ground

**58%** of kids in high-poverty schools received breakfast in SY 19/20, but only...

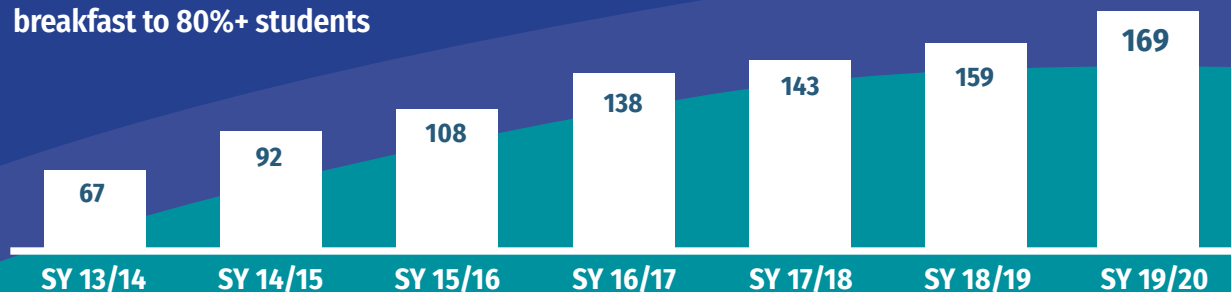
**48%** in SY 23/24

High-poverty out-of-district charter schools only serve **41%**



## We've done it before...

History of high-poverty schools serving breakfast to 80%+ students



... and we can do it again!

\* All data from October of each academic year



# After the Bell (ATB) school breakfast is a game changer.

## Introduction

Did you know that every student in Massachusetts' K-12 schools qualifies for a free breakfast? The federal government and the state of Massachusetts jointly fund programs that allow every child to eat every meal for free in our public schools. Yet despite this, far too many children who desperately need a nutritious breakfast are not getting fed.

In Massachusetts, nearly a quarter of households include children who are facing food insecurity according to Project Bread,<sup>1</sup> but only 48% of children attending our high-poverty schools are receiving school breakfast. Our research shows that if all high-poverty schools reached 80% participation in free breakfast programs, another 150,000 students would receive a nutritious meal, and this would bring an additional \$67 million in federal funds to those schools from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA School Nutrition Program has long existed as a nutritional and scholastic safety net, providing

essential nourishment that low-income children cannot always get at home. Studies have shown that low-income kids often get 50% of their nutritional calories from school meals.<sup>2</sup> It means that if they go without breakfast, they are likely getting inadequate nutrition.

**Only 48 percent of children attending our high-poverty schools are receiving school breakfast.**

Fortunately, we have an easy solution: After the Bell (ATB) Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC). Springfield Public Schools, for example, has been providing BIC for nearly 10 years and currently, 85% of their students eat breakfast every day. It is a game changer for academic achievement, behavioral issues, and health. So, let's work to expand After the Bell Breakfast in the Classroom across the state. While this report focuses on the highest poverty schools and districts, every school can and should avail itself of this opportunity. [Click here to see how your school is doing.](#)



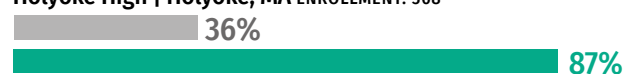
**Examples of the increase in breakfast participation when served After the Bell**

■ Before School Breakfast in the Cafeteria  
■ After School Breakfast in the Classroom

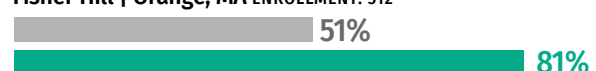
**Brookfield Elementary | Brockton, MA** ENROLLMENT: 479



**Holyoke High | Holyoke, MA** ENROLLMENT: 368



**Fisher Hill | Orange, MA** ENROLLMENT: 512



# Understanding Breakfast in the Classroom

## Background

Since 2013, the Eos Foundation has provided grants to schools to launch After the Bell breakfast programs, focusing primarily on Breakfast in the Classroom. When done right, BIC typically feeds over 80% of students. Breakfast fuels students to start their day ready to learn, yet often students miss this important meal when it is served before school starts. Making breakfast available after the start of the school day eliminates one of the barriers and ensures that students have access to food. Recognizing this, in February 2015, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) issued guidance that breakfast served in the classroom could count towards [Time on Learning](#). This was furthered in October 2020 when Governor Charlie Baker signed into law [An Act Regarding](#)

[Breakfast After the Bell](#), requiring that all high-poverty Massachusetts K-12 public schools offer breakfast after the beginning of the instructional day or after the bell. High-poverty schools are those with Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARM or F/R) populations of 60% or higher.

In May 2023, Governor Maura Healey signed into law [School Meals for All](#) making Massachusetts the eighth state in the country to provide free breakfast and lunch to any child in the K-12 system.









Even before Massachusetts provided free school meals for all, high-poverty schools in the Commonwealth could serve free meals to their entire school population by adopting the USDA Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

## Massachusetts State Legislation Milestones

- 2015** **Breakfast can officially take place during learning time**  
The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) issued guidance that breakfast served in the classroom could count toward **Time on Learning**.
- 2020** **Governor signs an act mandating ATB Breakfast in all high-poverty schools**  
The Governor signed into law **An Act Regarding Breakfast After the Bell** requiring that all high-poverty schools (60% or higher free and reduced meals) offer breakfast after the instructional day begins (after the bell).
- 2023** **All students eligible for free meals**  
The Governor signed into law **School Meals for All** making every meal for every Massachusetts student free.

### RESEARCH-BASED BENEFITS OF BREAKFAST

When children eat school breakfast:

-   **Test scores**
-   **Dietary intake**
-   **Tardiness & absences**
-   **Visits to nurse**

✓✓✓ **Healthy outcomes improved** including lower body mass index

# An Opportunity to Access \$67M for Students

High-poverty schools are required to provide access to breakfast after the instructional day begins (ATB). The legislation does not specify how breakfast is to be provided, only that it be made available. Even though ATB became effective in the academic year 2022, we have not seen the impact that was expected.

The level of participation at the 813 high-poverty schools has worsened from previous years. Most noticeable, the number of high-poverty schools to achieve 80% or greater dropped significantly from 27% in 2019 to 13% in 2023, and the number of high-poverty schools who fed less than 50% of their students increased from 40% to 56%.

Breakfast Participation Levels at Massachusetts Schools 2019 vs 2023

BREAKFAST Participation	Oct. 2019	Oct. 2023
Number of high-poverty schools	629	813
Number of students	324,218	423,491
Average breakfast participation	58%	48%
80% or greater breakfast participation	27%	13%
70-79% breakfast participation	12%	7%
50-69% breakfast participation	20%	23%
<b>Subtotal schools above 50%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Below 50%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to the rounding error.

Not only does ATB breakfast improve health and student academic outcomes, it can also bring revenues into the district, supporting efforts to improve school nutrition budgets. School nutrition programs are highly regulated and operate on thin margins because labor and food costs are high. Moreover, the reimbursement rate per school meal, which is also regulated, is low. The more meals served, the greater the reimbursements.

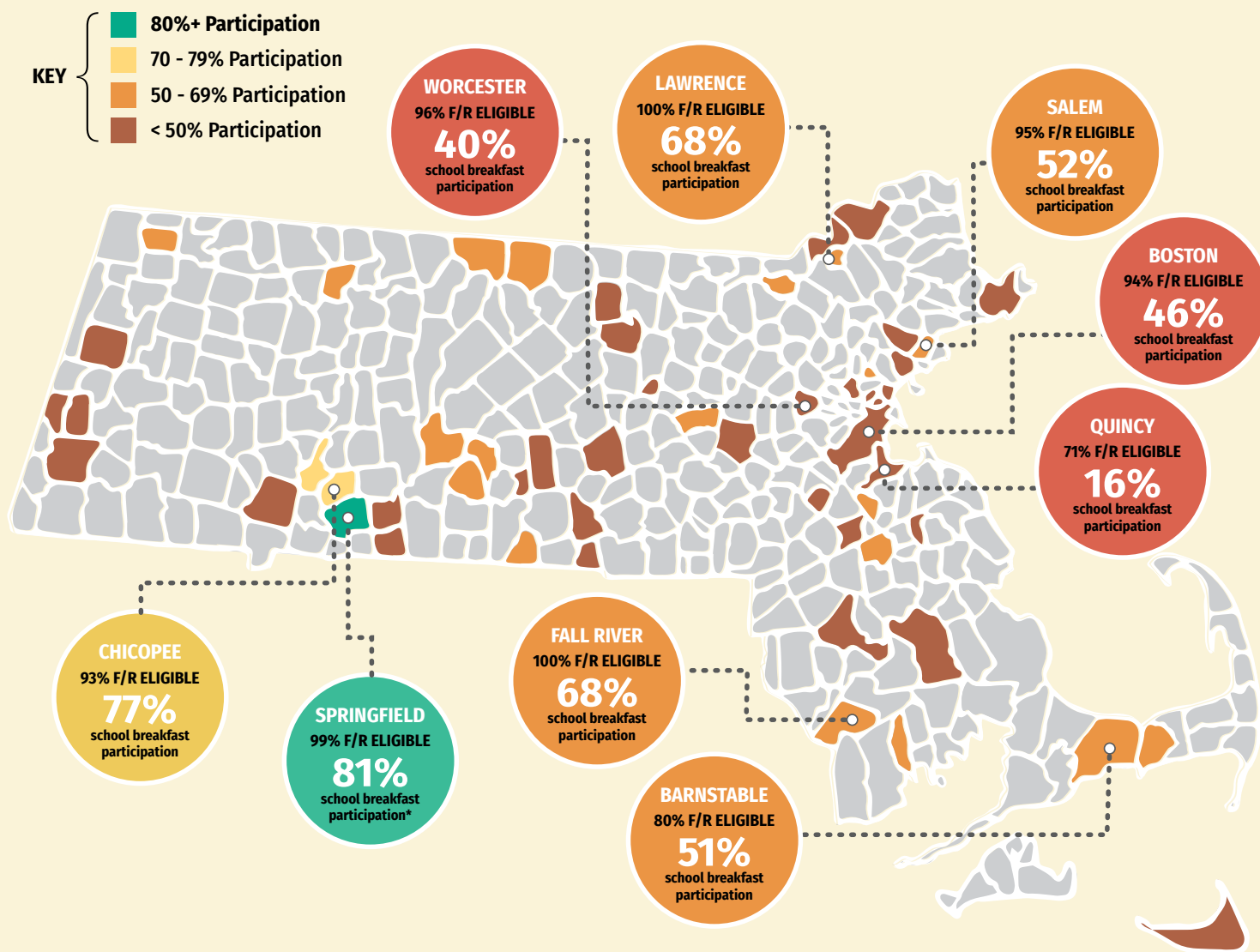
If all 813 high-poverty schools in Massachusetts launched effective ATB programs and reached 80% participation rates, collectively they would draw down nearly \$67 million in USDA reimbursements each year – money currently forfeited due to low breakfast participation.

When all high-poverty schools reach 80% of their school population with breakfast, ~150,000 more low-income students would receive a nutritious meal each day and \$67M in USDA reimbursements would be available to these schools.

There are various models for serving ATB breakfast, but the gold standard of models continues to be breakfast in the classroom. Springfield Public Schools is the perfect example: they serve breakfast in the classroom at every school and have a district-wide breakfast participation rate of 85% as of April 2024.

# Where Is the Need?

## Mapping student participation and free/reduced meals eligibility among high-poverty districts



School breakfast participation data as of October 2023.

\* Springfield's participation was 81% in October 2023. The district self-reported a participation increase to 85% in the month of April 2024 which is referenced throughout this report.

# School Breakfast by the Numbers

## Ranking by Breakfast Participation Rates in High-Poverty Districts (1,000+ Students)

Data as of October 2023

Rank	School District	Total Enrollment	% FARM Across the District	Average Daily Breakfast Participation Across District	Total Additional Revenues if All Schools Served 80%+
1	Springfield	23,659	99%	81%*	\$686,486
2	Chicopee	6,833	93%	77%	\$515,479
3	Holyoke	4,922	100%	71%	\$246,191
4	Greenfield	1,631	90%	68%	\$125,400
5	Fall River	10,612	100%	68%	\$1,130,220
6	Lawrence	13,041	100%	68%	\$1,370,515
7	Brockton	15,145	100%	67%	\$1,411,792
8	North Adams	1,227	100%	63%	\$125,798
9	Dennis-Yarmouth	2,910	83%	61%	\$269,370
10	Quaboag	1,075	76%	60%	\$94,121
11	Lowell	14,306	95%	60%	\$1,908,106
12	Athol-Royalston	1,673	89%	59%	\$155,315
13	New Bedford	12,709	100%	57%	\$1,957,738
14	Randolph	2,723	99%	56%	\$377,395
15	Ware	1,120	96%	55%	\$138,440
16	Southbridge	1,864	100%	54%	\$241,277
17	Marlborough	4,107	92%	53%	\$542,773
18	Salem	3,820	95%	52%	\$570,024
19	Winchendon	1,201	90%	52%	\$132,066
20	Malden	6,367	97%	52%	\$888,451
21	Barnstable	4,850	80%	51%	\$770,993
22	Webster	1,707	98%	47%	\$226,535
23	Everett	6,982	100%	47%	\$1,205,404
24	Boston	49,373	94%	46%	\$8,600,974
25	Taunton	8,090	90%	45%	\$1,428,146

\* Springfield's participation was 81% in October 2023. The district self-reported a participation increase to 85% in the month of April 2024 which is referenced throughout this report.



Rank	School District	Total Enrollment	% FARM Across the District	Average Daily Breakfast Participation Across District	Total Additional Revenues if All Schools Served 80%+
26	Pittsfield	4,990	92%	45%	\$959,704
27	Revere	7,296	100%	44%	\$1,265,355
28	Leominster	5,980	87%	43%	\$1,135,562
29	Chelsea	6,007	95%	42%	\$1,177,394
30	Fitchburg	5,196	100%	41%	\$876,166
31	Worcester	27,537	96%	40%	\$5,618,668
32	Haverhill	7,721	97%	40%	\$1,426,043
33	Lynn	15,985	94%	39%	\$3,660,439
34	Spencer-East Brookfield	1,415	73%	38%	\$200,878
35	Gloucester	1,863	78%	38%	\$373,746
36	Framingham	9,360	80%	37%	\$1,729,744
37	West Springfield	4,015	83%	37%	\$764,676
38	Milford	4,348	80%	34%	\$752,113
39	Westfield	4,619	83%	33%	\$978,177
40	Waltham	5,376	84%	32%	\$1,081,936
41	Agawam	3,050	68%	30%	\$561,080
42	Somerville	4,803	72%	29%	\$1,094,058
43	Rockland	2,149	81%	27%	\$422,023
44	Berkshire Hills	1,206	70%	26%	\$223,218
45	Methuen	6,458	78%	26%	\$1,446,044
46	Oxford	1,441	70%	25%	\$272,306
47	Norwood	3,174	63%	25%	\$591,844
48	Middleborough	2,992	63%	24%	\$516,666
49	Stoughton	3,567	65%	23%	\$685,199
50	Clinton	1,984	78%	23%	\$445,486
51	Medford	3,637	69%	20%	\$746,228
52	Peabody	4,867	82%	17%	\$1,178,504
53	Quincy	9,641	71%	16%	\$2,260,443
54	Nantucket	1,702	66%	13%	\$382,651

# Case Study

## Springfield Public Schools: A Model for All Schools and Districts

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) has consistently had the highest school breakfast participation rate in the state, currently at 85% as of April 2024.

But it wasn't always that way. In SY 15/16, it was 44%. Then, Superintendent Daniel Warwick required all schools to roll out Breakfast in the Classroom over the following two years. They were the first district in the state to roll it out in a high school.

With the increased revenues from the school breakfast reimbursements, SPS opened a 62,000 square foot Culinary Nutrition Center (CNC) in 2019. This facility employs over 350 people, many of whom live in Springfield. The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art machinery, enabling the preparation of a wide array of dishes like meatballs, breakfast pockets, chicken sausage, and dinner



rolls. 60% of meals are made from scratch, and the entire building can be run by a generator. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CNC served over 9 million meals at 18 sites to SPS students and families.

## Taking Action What Can You Do?

**School leaders** including Superintendents, Principals, Teachers, Nurses, School Nutrition Directors, and School Committee Members

- Adopt After the Bell programming
- Visit a school operating After the Bell breakfast and talk with your peers in that district about their experience.
- Identify school-based teams to develop an implementation plan in each high-poverty school in your district.
- Look into the available grant dollars and technical support to launch your After the Bell program.

**Parents and Caregivers**


- Advocate for After the Bell breakfast.
- Volunteer to help launch or operate After the Bell programs in your child's school.

**Legislators**


- Ask your school leaders if they offer free After the Bell breakfast at all schools, including high schools.

# FAQs


## What foods are served in school breakfasts?

 8 oz Low-Fat Milk

+

 1 cup Fruit / Vegetable

+

 2 oz Grain

OR

 1 oz Grain & 1 oz Meat / Meat Alternative



## ? Won't ATB breakfast make my classroom a mess?

Most schools already have snacks in the classroom. ATB breakfast is no different. Teachers establish routines and cleaning protocols for eating breakfast after the bell in their classrooms. Students learn their roles and clean up after themselves. Custodians are also involved in identifying school-specific clean-up protocols. With the need to clean the cafeteria between breakfast and lunch eliminated, custodians have time to remove classroom trash.

## ? Is ATB breakfast healthy?

The 2010 Healthy, [Hunger-Free Kids Act](#) significantly updated nutrition standards for meals served in schools. Today, breakfasts include whole grain cereals, yogurt, warm egg sandwiches, juice, milk, and fresh fruit. Increasing variety is available for ATB programs, including cafeteria-baked muffins made with local and school garden-sourced ingredients.

## ? What about pests?

Schools have not reported an increase in pests due to breakfast eaten in the classroom.<sup>3</sup> Teachers establish cleanliness routines and teach students to follow them. One teacher found that ATB breakfast eliminated rodents in her room because she no longer had to keep snacks in her drawers for hungry students, which the mice would get at when the class was empty.

## ? How can we handle food allergies?

Managing food allergies in the classroom is no different than managing food allergies in the cafeteria. School nutrition staff work with school nurses and teachers to ensure allergies are identified and appropriate steps are taken, such as special labels on the meals for students with allergies.

# Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms

MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL BREAKFAST REPORT CARD SY 2023 - 2024

The Eos Foundation is a private philanthropic foundation which supports systemic solutions aimed at fighting hunger and promoting gender and racial justice in Massachusetts. Since 2013, the foundation has been a funder of After the Bell breakfast programs providing start-up grants of \$10,000 to help schools launch After the Bell Breakfast in the Classroom. In addition, Eos celebrates school breakfast excellence with a \$500 grant to schools with 80% participation rates in breakfast at an annual Healthy Start Awards event. For more information about the Eos Foundation please visit [www.EosFoundation.org](http://www.EosFoundation.org).



## Resources

There are many resources available, including grant opportunities to assist in initiating and/or improving school breakfast programs. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website is a good place to start. On its website it compiles a list of training, grants, and overall general information to assist districts and schools. [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu). Also make sure to visit [Project Bread](#) and [Child Nutrition Program Resources](#).



[Download a PDF link to this report](#)

## Technical Notes

Data in this report was obtained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as submitted by districts for school meal reimbursements for the month of October. October is considered a baseline month in analysis because school year enrollment has stabilized and there are fewer days off. For October 2023, our dataset consists of 1,861 schools participating in the National School Breakfast Program across 369 districts.<sup>4</sup> This dataset does not include private or residential

schools but does include vocational and charter schools that submit as a standalone district.

Of these schools, 813 are deemed high-poverty.<sup>4</sup> Since schools in Massachusetts closed for the pandemic in March 2020, SY 20/21 and SY 21/22 are considered gap years in regards to typical breakfast operations and data for those years is not covered in this report.

To view charter, vocational, and other schools, please visit our [website](#).

## References

- 1 "Food insecurity doubled during the pandemic." Project Bread. <https://projectbread.org/hunger-by-the-numbers>
- 2 Haynes-Maslow, Lindsey and Jeffrey K. O'Hara, "Lessons from the Lunchroom: Childhood Obesity, School Lunch, and the Way to a Healthier Future." 2015.

- 3 Eos Foundation, Survey of Teachers in Massachusetts. 2015.
- 4 Schools with a student population of 60% or higher free and reduced-price meals are considered high-poverty.