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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Policy Brief: Access to School Breakfast: A Key Strategy for Improving Children's Health, Education, and Well-Being*

Low-income children far less likely to eat school breakfast than lunch -- Rhode Island ranks 33rd in the U.S. for participation in the School Breakfast Program.

Implementing key strategies such as the Community Eligibility Program, Universal School Breakfast, and "Breakfast After the Bell" can increase participation.

Providence, RI (May 21, 2019): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Access to School Breakfast: A Key Strategy for Improving Children's Health, Education, and Well-Being* at a policy roundtable on Wednesday, May 22, 2019 from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI.

Featured speakers will include Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Elizabeth Burke Bryant, First Gentleman Andy Moffit, Azade Perin from the Rhode Island Department of Education, Jennifer Surmeian from Winters Elementary School in Pawtucket, and Ellen Shalvey from Sodexo in Woonsocket. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Deputy Director Stephanie Geller will share findings from the *Policy Brief*.

School Breakfast is crucial for academic success and healthy development

Food-insecure families often do not have sufficient food to provide nutritious breakfasts every morning, and children in these families are at risk of falling behind their peers physically, cognitively, academically, emotionally, and socially. Children who are undernourished are more likely to have poorer cognitive functioning when they miss breakfast.

"Hunger and lack of regular access to food are linked to serious physical, psychological, emotional, and academic problems in children and can interfere with their growth and development," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Over time, this contributes to disparities in children's chances for success. The School Breakfast Program helps ensure

that the nation’s most vulnerable children start their day off with a healthy meal and can narrow the gaps in child outcomes.”

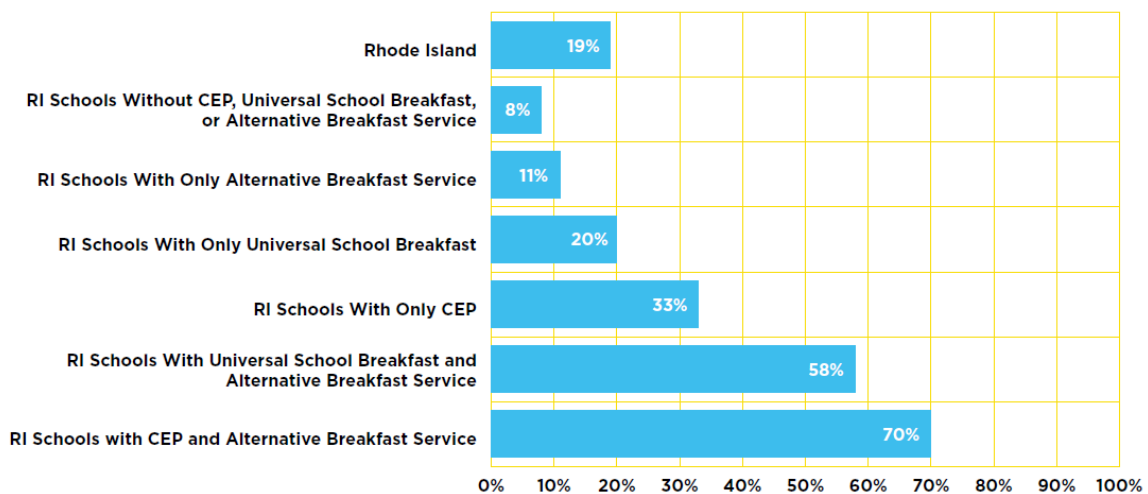
School Breakfast is reaching Rhode Island children through a variety of strategies.

There are several strategies for increasing breakfast participation.

- The federal **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** allows schools and districts with 40% or more students identified as low-income or at-risk to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students and offers higher reimbursements.
- **Universal School Breakfast Programs**, which provide free breakfast to all children regardless of income, increase participation by removing the stigma often associated with school breakfast and can reduce the administrative burden for schools.
- **Alternative breakfast service:** Making breakfast part of the school day is another proven strategy for increasing participation, reducing stigma, and increasing convenience. During the 2018-2019 school year, several Rhode Island school districts offered alternative breakfast service, including breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go” breakfasts, bagged breakfasts, or breakfast on a cart in all or some of their schools.

Data included in the *Policy Brief* clearly show that CEP, universal school breakfast, and alternative breakfast models increase school breakfast participation:

CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM, RHODE ISLAND, OCTOBER 2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2018.

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* provides key recommendations to support increased School Breakfast participation across Rhode Island:

- * Pass legislation requiring districts and individual schools that are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to participate in this program or apply for a waiver if participation is not financially viable.
- Encourage all schools to offer breakfast at no charge to all students using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) if eligible or by implementing Universal School Breakfast if they are not.
- * Pass legislation requiring that high-poverty districts and schools provide “breakfast after the bell” as a key strategy for increasing school breakfast participation.
- Encourage all schools to offer “breakfast after the bell” through “breakfast in the classroom,” which is most effective at the elementary school level, or through “grab and go” or “second chance breakfast” models, which may be more effective at the secondary school level.
- * Provide funding to support districts and schools implementing alternative breakfast service so they can purchase equipment and supplies like meal carts and tablets that make alternative breakfast service work more efficiently.
- Raise awareness about how increasing school breakfast can be part of a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce chronic absence, improve grade-level reading, reduce childhood hunger and obesity, and improve children’s emotional well-being.

*These recommendations are included in the Governor’s proposed FY 2020 budget as part of the No Student Hungry Initiative.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.