



## **Breakfast After the Bell: A Simple Tool to Address Chronic Absenteeism**

Schools across the nation are focused on finding ways to reduce chronic absenteeism, but they may not realize they already have access to an effective, powerful tool—school breakfast. Student academic outcomes and rates of chronic absenteeism can be improved by changing when and how school breakfast is served. Think of breakfast as a school supply as important as desks and textbooks—when students start their day with a nutritious meal, they can focus on learning rather than being distracted by hunger. Research has shown that students who eat school breakfast see improved standardized test scores, absenteeism rates and graduation rates.

Unfortunately, there are common barriers that prevent all students from having equal and easy access to the school breakfast program. These common barriers include the time breakfast is served; stigma that school breakfast is only for students from low-income families; and bus or carpool schedules that don't align with when breakfast is served. Also, some students may not be hungry first thing in the morning. Breakfast After the Bell (BAB) is an innovative serving method that focuses on meeting the needs of students, therefore increasing participation in school breakfast, and helping students achieve more and reach their full potential.

How does BAB work? BAB changes when and where breakfast is served so that it's more easily accessible for students. This means offering breakfast after the official start of the school day (aka after the bell) and moving breakfast from the cafeteria to where students are, like classrooms and common areas. There are three common and effective BAB models:

- Breakfast in the Classroom: breakfast is served in the classroom and eaten in the classroom.
- Grab and Go: breakfast is served from one or more central locations (like an entryway or hallway) and consumed in the classroom or a common area.
- Second Chance Breakfast: breakfast is served later in the morning, usually via Grab and Go to the classroom or common area, or by reopening the cafeteria and allowing students time to eat before they return to class.

Research has shown that BAB can improve chronic absenteeism rates. A recent study conducted by the University of California Santa Barbara on behalf of No Kid Hungry showed that BAB, as part of a regular school breakfast program, can reduce chronic absenteeism by an average of 6 percentage points. For context, holding all other factors constant, a school where 22% of students are chronically absent (the average in the schools studied) could see that drop to 16% after implementing BAB. Furthermore, the researchers found that BAB led to improvements in reading achievement and “internalizing behaviors,” such as anxiety, loneliness and sadness among students.

While schools and school districts can unilaterally decide to implement BAB, many states have passed legislation to encourage or assist schools in adopting these innovative breakfast serving models. For example, some states, including [Colorado](#), [Nevada](#), and [Illinois](#), have passed legislation requiring high-need schools to adopt BAB. Similarly, recognizing the many benefits of school breakfast, [West Virginia](#) passed legislation requiring all public schools to implement BAB. Other states, including [Arkansas](#), [California](#), and [Tennessee](#), have provided supplemental state funding to incentivize schools to adopt BAB or provide grants to cover technology or equipment costs associated with transitioning from traditional breakfast service to BAB models.

Schools serving BAB ensure more of their students begin the day with the nutrition they need for focus, attendance, health and emotional wellness. Serving breakfast as a part of the school day is also an effective way to build increased equity in schools. When all students start the day with breakfast, including those with the fewest resources and the highest hurdles to education, it can help level the playing field. With the right policies, states can vastly expand use of BAB in schools, resulting in lower rates of absenteeism and better outcomes for students.

### **ABOUT NO KID HUNGRY**

Share Our Strength is a nonprofit organization committed to ending hunger and poverty in the United States and abroad. Through our [No Kid Hungry](#) campaign, we help end hunger and food insecurity in America by connecting children and families to the federal nutrition programs for which they are eligible. We believe that every child deserves equal opportunity to grow up healthy and achieve their full potential.