



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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October 11, 2019

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam  
Governor of Virginia  
Patrick Henry Building, Third Floor  
1111 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.  
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee  
Virginia General Assembly  
P.O. Box 6205  
Williamsburg, Virginia 23188

The Honorable S. Chris Jones  
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee  
Virginia General Assembly  
P.O. Box 5059  
Suffolk, Virginia 23435-0059

The Honorable Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.  
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee  
Virginia General Assembly  
P.O. Box 2  
Mount Solon, Virginia 22843-0002

Dear Sirs:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report that summarizes findings from schools participating in the 2018-2019 school year alternative breakfast service model program.

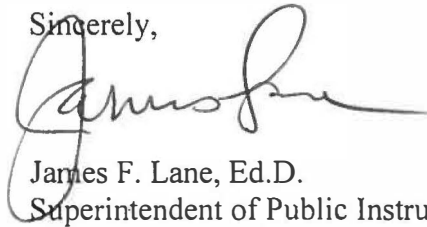
Item 136 C.30.c.1. of the 2019 Appropriation Act provided \$1.074 million in fiscal year 2019 state funds to operate the Breakfast After the Bell model program in eligible elementary schools. Alternative school breakfast service models provide meals to students through a distribution method different from traditional cafeteria service, removing various obstacles that can prevent students from accessing school breakfast. The most effective alternative breakfast models allow students to eat their meal after the official start of the school day, commonly known as "breakfast after the bell."

Through a competitive application process, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provided reimbursements to 325 schools in 66 school divisions participating in the alternative school breakfast service models program, including 170 schools which received state reimbursement for the first time this year. Participating schools were required to evaluate the educational impact of the models implemented and report their findings to VDOE. The enclosed report summarizes those findings.

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam  
The Honorable S. Chris Jones  
The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.  
The Honorable Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.  
October 11, 2019  
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If you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Kent C. Dickey, Deputy Superintendent for Finance and Operations, at (804) 225-2025 or [kent.dickey@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:kent.dickey@doe.virginia.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James F. Lane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

James F. Lane, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

JFL/JPR

Enclosure

c: The Honorable Atif Qarni,  
Secretary of Education



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Report**

# **Report on Alternative School Breakfast Service Models**

**Presented to:**

**The Governor of Virginia  
House Appropriations Committee  
Senate Finance Committee**

**October 11, 2019**

*Virginia Department of Education*

*P. O. Box 2120*

*Richmond, Virginia 23218-2120*

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## **AUTHORITY FOR THE STUDY**

The fiscal year 2019 state budget allotted funds to support schools that provide breakfast meals to eligible students through an alternative breakfast service model. For this appropriation, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is required to collect data from participating schools to evaluate the educational impact of the program and report the results to the Governor and the Chairmen of the House Appropriation and Senate Finance Committees.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Alternative school breakfast service models provide meals to students through a distribution method different from traditional cafeteria service, removing various obstacles that can prevent students from accessing school breakfast. The most effective alternative breakfast models allow students to eat their meal after the official start of school day, commonly known as “breakfast after the bell.” These models may include breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast, or breakfast after first period.

The 2019 Appropriation Act provides \$1.074 million in state funds for the operation of alternative school breakfast service models implemented in the 2018-2019 school year. To receive funds, schools must have more than 45 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced meals. Previously, state funding was only available to elementary schools. For the first time in 2018-2019, secondary schools were also eligible to receive funding. State reimbursement of five cents (\$0.05) in elementary schools and ten cents (\$0.10) in secondary schools per reimbursable meal served was allotted to each approved school in a division (see Appendix A for language from the 2019 Appropriation Act).

For the 2018-2019 school year, 325 schools within 66 school divisions were selected to receive funding. Of the 325 participating schools, 179 schools were elementary schools and 146 schools were secondary schools or centers. In addition, 170 of the 325 participating schools received state funding for alternative breakfast service models for the first time in 2018-2019 and 155 schools received state funding previously.

The VDOE analyzed available administrative data and requested additional data from participating schools to: (1) capture perceptions of the program from division administrators, principals, teachers, and school nutrition staff members; (2) assess the impact of the program on student attendance, discipline, and achievement; and (3) estimate the fiscal impact of the program on first year funded schools.

There are three main findings from this evaluation:

- Schools receiving state funding for alternative breakfast programs increased the average number of breakfast meals served per student in the first year of implementation by eight percent. Schools receiving multiple years of state funding were able to sustain increases in meals served over time.
- Division and school staff were satisfied with the alternative school breakfast models implemented in their schools and perceived positive impacts on student hunger and the stigma associated with school breakfast program participation. Program impact on self-reported student tardiness and office discipline referrals was mixed, but participating schools showed promising improvements in chronic absenteeism and student achievement.
- Based on survey data of program expenditures, the cost per breakfast meal served decreased in most schools following the implementation of the alternative breakfast program, offsetting additional food and equipment costs, and indicating a more efficient use of program staff and resources.

## **GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR STUDY**

Guiding evaluation questions for the 2018-2019 study of alternative breakfast service models are similar to previously completed studies (see Appendix B for a summary of previous studies). This evaluation addresses the following guiding questions:

- *How has additional reimbursement for school breakfast programs increased student breakfast participation?* The VDOE examined administrative data reported from participating schools on breakfast meals served during the 2018-2019 school year and previous years. Division leaders, principals, teachers, school nutrition directors, and cafeteria managers were also asked about their perceptions of student participation in the program.
- *What is the impact of alternative breakfast programs on student attendance, discipline, and academic achievement?* The VDOE compared 2018-2019 attendance (tardiness and chronic absenteeism) and discipline data for participating schools to previous years, when available. In addition, VDOE analyzed school achievement data measured through state assessment results.
- *What is the fiscal impact of alternative breakfast programs on participating schools?* The VDOE surveyed nutrition directors in divisions with participating schools to examine school-level costs on salary, benefits, capital equipment, and small wares and supplies. Program costs per meal

served were calculated for the 2018-2019 school year and years prior for schools when data were available to understand the fiscal impact of the supplemental state funding.

A summary of data collection procedures is available in Appendix C.

## FINDINGS

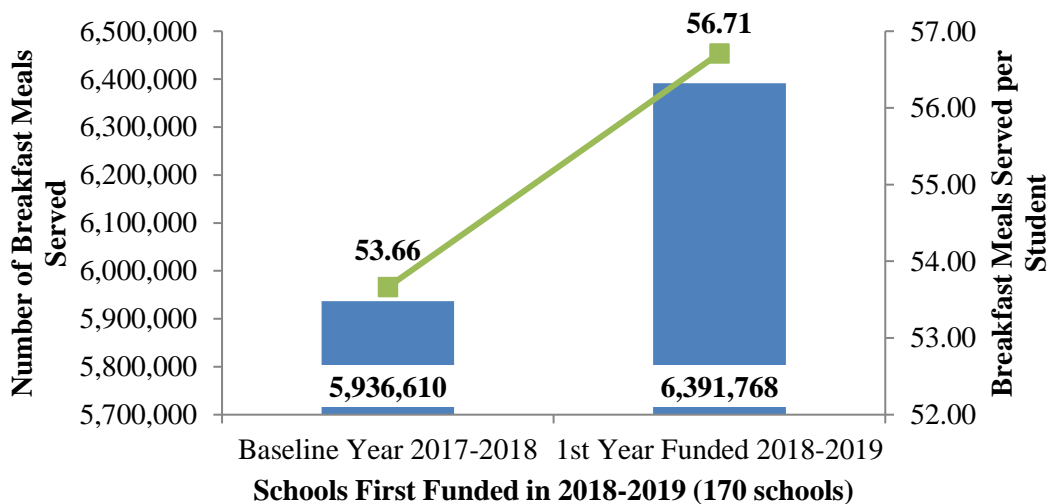
*Finding 1: Schools receiving state funding for alternative breakfast programs increased the average number of breakfast meals served per student in the first year of implementation by eight percent. Schools receiving multiple years of state funding were able to sustain increases in meals served over time.*

### Breakfast Meals Served

The 325 schools participating in the alternative school breakfast program provided 14,446,962 breakfast meals to students during the 2018-2019 school year. Consistent with previous reports, the number of breakfast meals served increased during the first year of implementation, then stabilized but remained above baseline as students' participation in breakfast reached maximum capacity.

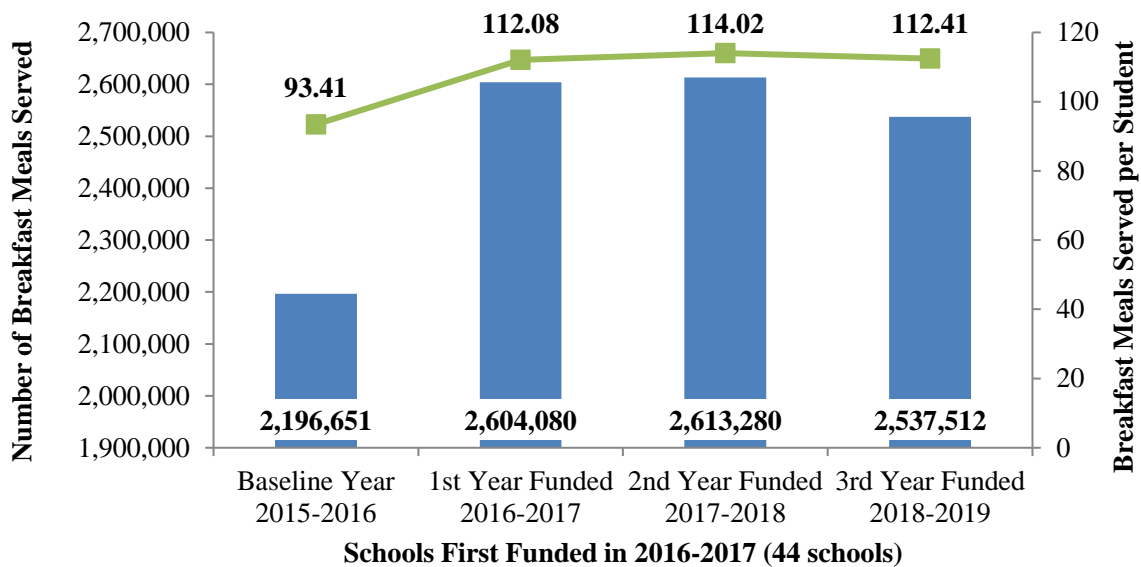
Fifty-two percent of the 325 schools receiving supplemental state funds this year were funded for the first time in 2018-2019 (170 schools). Figure 1 shows that in these schools, the number of breakfast meals served increased by eight percent, from 5,936,610 breakfast meals in 2017-2018 to 6,391,768 breakfast meals served in 2018-2019. The number of meals served per student also increased, from 54 meals per student on average in 2017-2018 to 57 meals per student on average in 2018-2019.

**Figure 1. Number of Breakfast Meals Served for Schools Receiving State Funding for Alternative Breakfast Programs for the First Time in 2018-2019**



Schools that receive consecutive years of state funding demonstrated a sustained increase in the total number of meals served and the average meals served per student. For the 44 schools receiving state funding for three consecutive years, the number of breakfast meals served increased from 2,196,651 in the baseline year to 2,537,512 in the third year of funding (Figure 2), representing a 16 percent increase in meals served since baseline. The average number of meals served per student also increased, from 93 breakfast meals served per student in 2015-2016 to 112 breakfast meals served per student in 2018-2019.

**Figure 2. Number of Breakfast Meals Served for Schools Receiving Three Consecutive Years of State Funding for Alternative Breakfast Programs, Beginning in 2016-2017**



### Alternative Breakfast Service Models Implemented

Table 1 provides a summary of the type of alternative breakfast service models implemented in the 2018-2019 among funded schools. Fifty percent of schools (118 schools) implemented both a traditional breakfast service and an alternative breakfast service model. Eighteen percent (42 schools) indicated they offered only breakfast in the classroom, where breakfast is delivered directly to the classroom and handed out to each student, and 16 percent (37 schools) indicated they offered only “grab and go” breakfast, where students pick up meals from the cafeteria or kiosks before heading to their classrooms to eat.



**Table 1. Distribution of Traditional and Alternative School Breakfast Service Models Offered in Schools Receiving State Funding for the 2018-2019 School Year**

School Breakfast Service Model	Number of Schools Implementing	Percent of Schools Implementing
<b>Total Schools Implementing More than One Model of Breakfast Service</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>(56.0%)</b>
Schools implementing traditional breakfast <u>and</u> one or more alternative breakfast models	118	(50.4%)
Schools implementing <u>more than one</u> alternative breakfast model without traditional breakfast	13	(5.6%)
<b>Total Schools Implementing Only One Model of Breakfast Service</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>(40.6%)</b>
Schools implementing <u>traditional breakfast only</u> , available in the cafeteria prior to the official start of the school day	16	(6.8%)
Schools implementing <u>breakfast in the classroom only</u> , where breakfast is delivered from the kitchen/cafeteria to classrooms in a cart, cooler, or wagon and then distributed to individual students	42	(17.9%)
Schools implementing <u>grab and go only</u> , where students pick up packaged breakfasts from carts or kiosks or from the cafeteria and carry them to their classrooms	37	(15.8%)
<b>Other Models of Breakfast Service Implemented</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>(3.4%)</b>
<b>No Response</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(1.7%)</b>
<b>Total Schools Responding</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>(100.0%)</b>

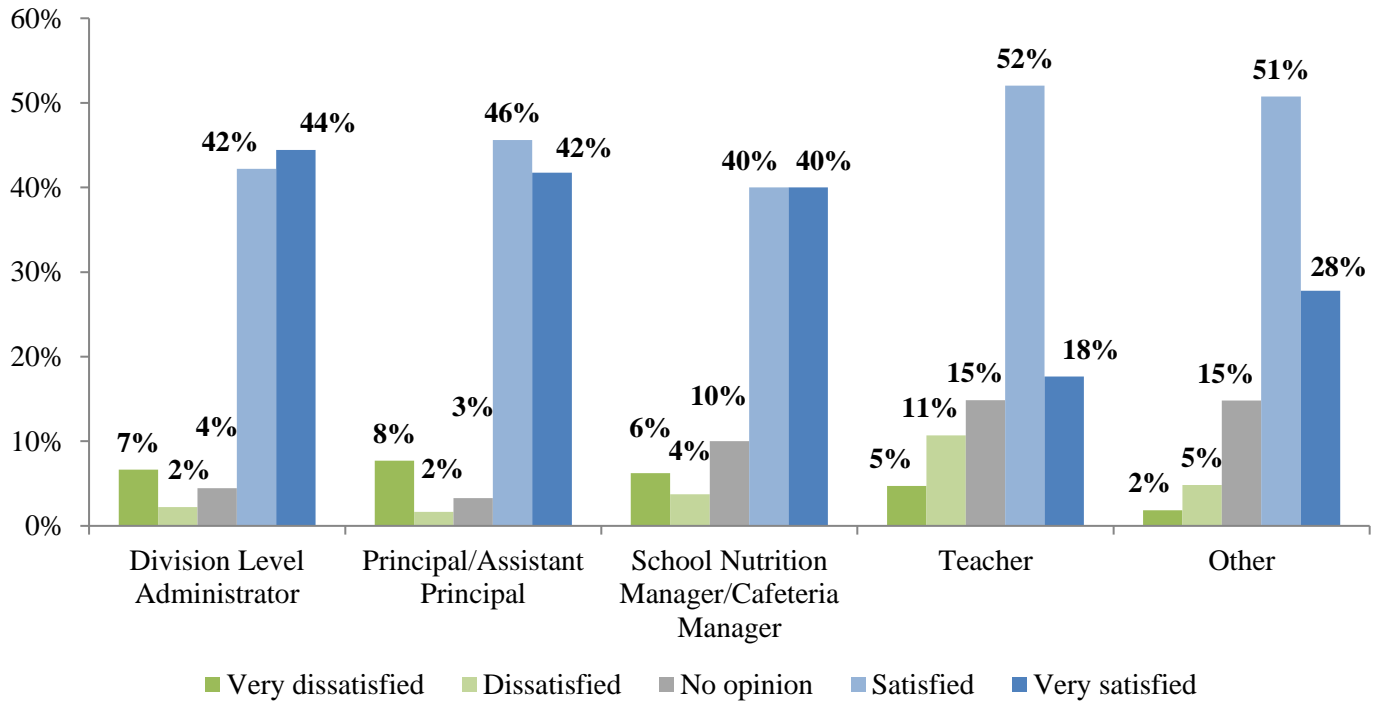
*Finding 2: Division and school staff were satisfied with the alternative school breakfast models implemented in their schools and perceived positive impacts on student hunger and the stigma associated with school breakfast program participation. Program impact on self-reported student tardiness and office discipline referrals was mixed, but participating schools showed promising improvements in chronic absenteeism and student achievement.*

### **Program Satisfaction**

Figure 3 summarizes program satisfaction by type of survey respondent. Overall, 74 percent of all survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the implementation of the alternative school breakfast program. By reported position, 88 percent of principals and 86 percent of division administrators

reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with the program, followed by 80 percent of school nutrition managers/cafeteria managers and 70 percent of teachers.

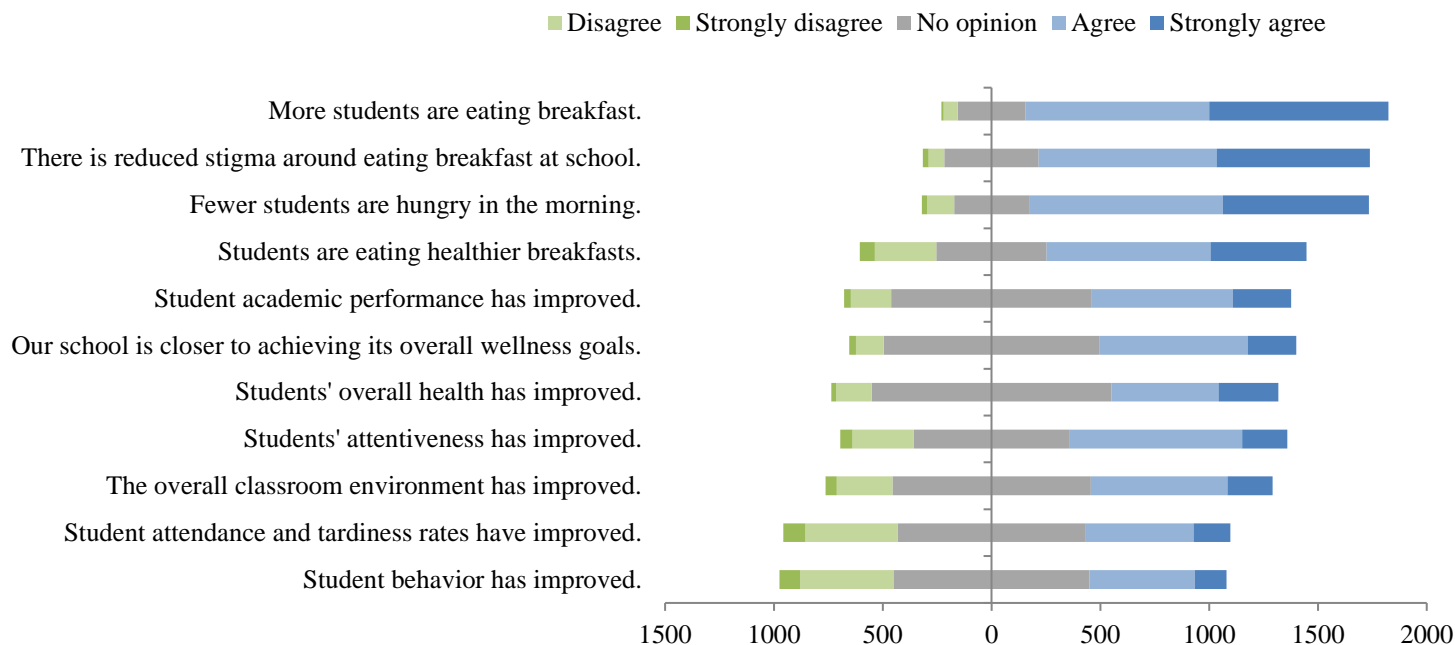
**Figure 3. Program Satisfaction by Respondent Type for Schools Receiving Supplemental State Funding for Alternative Breakfast Programs in the 2018-2019 School Year**



### Perceptions of Program Impact

Following implementation of the alternative school breakfast service model, 81 percent of survey respondents agreed that more students were eating breakfast than with the traditional breakfast service model only. Additionally, 76 percent and 74 percent agreed that fewer students were hungry in the morning and there was reduced stigma around eating breakfast at school, respectively. Figure 4 visualizes participant responses by perceived impact.

**Figure 4. Perceived Program Impacts for Schools Implementing the Alternative School Breakfast Program in 2018-2019 School Year**



### Program Impact on Tardiness and Office Discipline Referrals

The VDOE analyzed the impact of alternative breakfast programs on student tardiness and office discipline referrals based on data self-reported from participating schools. Table 2 summarizes the number of schools that reported increases, decreases, or stable rates of average daily tardiness and office discipline referrals. For average daily tardiness, 56 percent of schools reported an increased rate and 44 percent of schools decreased or maintained rates of student tardiness. For office discipline referrals, 52 percent of school decreased or maintained rates and 48 percent reported an increase in office discipline referrals following program implementation compared to a baseline year.

**Table 2. Student Tardiness and Office Discipline Referrals in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019**

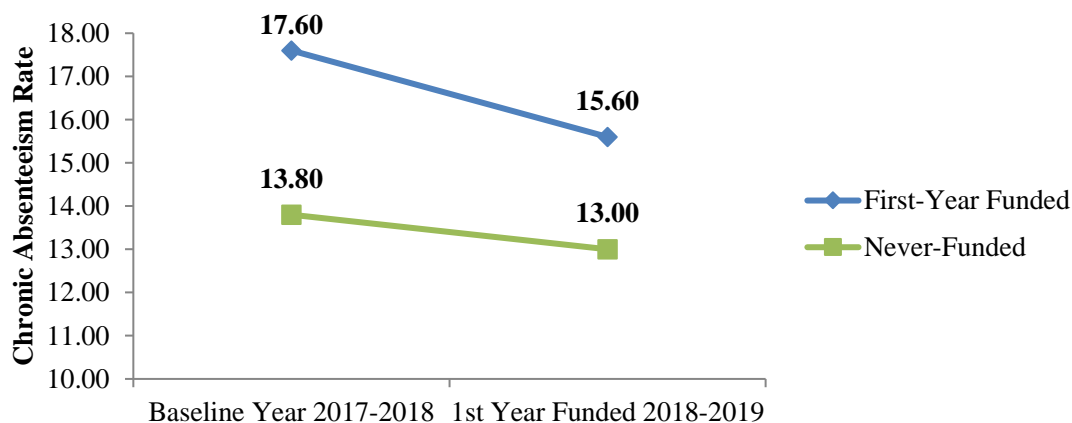
Metric (Number of schools reporting data)	When Compared to the 2017-2018 School Year	
	Schools that Decreased or Maintained Rate (Percent of Schools)	Schools Reporting an Increased Rate (Percent of Schools)
Average daily tardiness (n = 170)	75 44%	95 56%
Average daily office discipline referrals (n = 172)	89 52%	83 48%

## Program Impact on Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year, and is prorated based on the number of days a student is enrolled. For a 180-day school year, a student would be considered chronically absent if she missed 18 or more days. Using administrative data, VDOE calculated chronic absenteeism rates for each participating school funded for the first time in 2018-2019 and for a comparison group of schools that met the eligibility criteria but have never received state funding.

While chronic absenteeism rates are higher in schools funded for the first time in 2018-2019, those schools also experienced a sharper decline in chronic absenteeism from the 2017-2018 baseline year compared to similar schools that have never received funding. As shown in Figure 5, the decrease in chronic absenteeism among participating schools was 11.4 percent, compared to a 5.8 percent decrease among the comparison group.

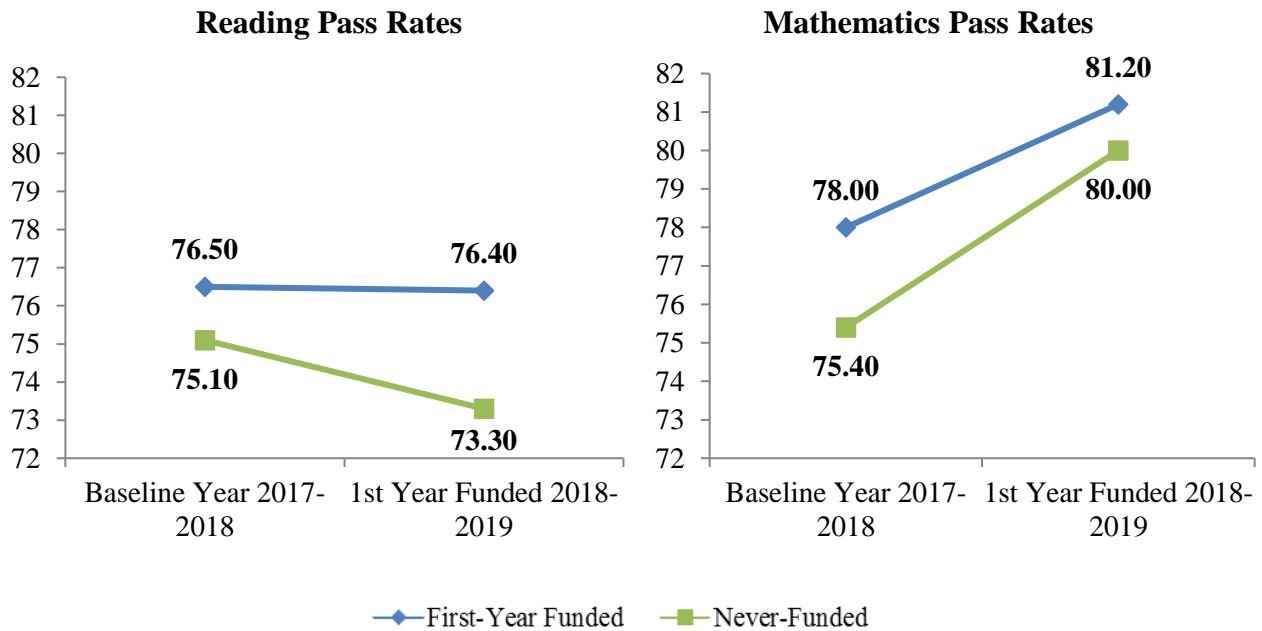
**Figure 5. Chronic Absenteeism Rate for Schools Receiving State Funding for Alternative Breakfast Programs for the First Time in 2018-2019**



## Program Impact on Student Achievement

The VDOE examined performance on Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in reading and math for schools receiving state funding for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year and for a comparison group of schools that never received state funding. Figure 6 displays the trends in pass rates for reading and math assessments.

**Figure 6. Reading and Mathematics Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessment Pass Rates for First-Year Funded Schools Compared**



Schools receiving state funding for alternative breakfast programs for the first time in 2018-2019 demonstrated higher and more stable reading pass rates between baseline and implementation years, compared to a two percent decrease in pass rates among comparison schools. For mathematics, funded schools increased pass rates by four percent compared to six percent over the same time period for comparison schools.

*Finding 3: Based on survey data of program expenditures, the cost per breakfast meal served decreased in most schools following the implementation of the alternative breakfast program, offsetting additional food and equipment costs, and indicating a more efficient use of program staff and resources.*

### **Fiscal Impact**

The VDOE surveyed school nutrition directors on labor, food, and equipment costs of alternative breakfast programs to determine fiscal impact in schools receiving state funding for the first time in 2018-2019. Survey data were used to calculate per breakfast meal served costs as the sum of staff, food, and equipment costs divided by an annual number of meals served.

<b>Average per School for First-Year Funded Schools</b>					
	Costs			Meals Served	Costs Per Meal
	Labor	Food	Equipment/ Other		
<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	\$21,465	\$31,012	\$3,950	34,381	\$1.88
<b>Post-Implementation</b>	\$20,985	\$32,441	\$4,274	36,398	\$1.74

On average, schools implementing alternative breakfast programs had higher food and equipment costs, but lower labor costs. Prior to implementation, schools expended on average \$56,427 on breakfast service. During the first year of implementation, costs increased to \$57,700. Schools expended additional funds on increased food costs for the additional meals served, and increased equipment costs, including carts, kiosks, and coolers. However, the per meal costs decreased after implementation, partially driven by a large increase in meals served and a moderate increase in program costs. Schools in their first year of alternative breakfast program implementation reported a \$0.14 reduction in the costs per meal.

## **SUMMARY**

Consistent with previous studies, schools and divisions implementing alternative breakfast programs are satisfied with the overall program and perceive positive benefits from increased breakfast participation and decreased hunger. In this study, participating schools saw a steeper decline in chronic absenteeism and stable performance in reading compared to a similar group of non-participating schools. Impacts on office discipline referrals and tardiness remain inconclusive, also consistent with findings from previous studies. Finally, schools did report an increase in program costs, but a decrease in the cost per breakfast meal served. The decrease in cost per breakfast reflects the higher volume of students having access to breakfast through the program. Based on the results of this study, in combination with previous studies, VDOE recommends continued financial support for the implementation of alternative breakfast service models in schools.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

*Item 136 C.30.c.1, 2019 Appropriation Act:*

Out of this appropriation, \$1,074,000 the first year and \$1,074,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to fund an After-the-Bell Model breakfast program available on a voluntary basis to elementary, middle, and high schools where student eligibility for free or reduced lunch exceeds 45.0 percent for the participating eligible school, and to provide additional reimbursement for eligible meals served in the current traditional school breakfast program at all grade levels in any participating school. The Department of Education is directed to ensure that only eligible schools receive reimbursement funding for participating in the After-the-Bell school breakfast model. The schools participating in the program shall evaluate the educational impact of the models implemented that provide school breakfasts to students after the first bell of the school day, based on the guidelines developed by the Department of Education and submit the required report to the Department of Education no later than August 31, 2019 for the 2018-2019 school year and no later than August 31, 2020 for the 2019-2020 school year.

## Appendix B

### **Fiscal Year 2016 Study**

In July 2015, VDOE released Superintendent's Memo #172-15 announcing the first year of applications for an alternative school breakfast service pilot or expansion of traditional breakfast service model supported by \$537,297 in state funds. For the 2015-2016 school year, 226 schools within 52 divisions received funding for alternative breakfast. Seventeen additional schools were selected to expand their traditional school breakfast programs.

Participating schools provided an additional 1,266,555 meals to students during the pilot year, a 13.6 percent increase from the previous year. School staff reported few challenges during implementation of the alternative school breakfast program, and the implementation costs for most schools were minimal. In addition, 54 percent of participating schools showed an increase in breakfast meals served in conjunction with an increase in one or both state standards of learning (SOL) assessment pass rates in reading or math.

### **Fiscal Year 2017 Study**

In fiscal year 2017, \$1,074,000 in state funds were available through a competitive application process to support implementation of alternative breakfast service models or expand traditional breakfast service. More than 750 schools applied for funds, and 463 schools across 84 divisions were selected to receive funding.

Schools participating in the 2016-2017 school year provided an additional 1,435,256 breakfast meals to students compared to the 2015-2016 school year, and an additional 3,159,846 breakfast meals to students compared to the 2014-2015 school year. This represents nearly a 19 percent increase in breakfast meals served since state funds were available. School-level outcome metrics showed small but statistically significant decreases in attendance and increases in school nurse visits. Most schools that received two years of funding showed greater growth in meals served and pass rates on state assessments in the first year of implementation and were able to maintain those gains through the second year.

### **Fiscal Year 2018 Study**

The 2017 Appropriation Act provided \$1.1 million in state funds for the operation of breakfast after the bell programs in fiscal year 2018 in eligible schools. Seven hundred sixty-four schools applied for funding and 450 schools across 83 school divisions were selected to receive funding in school year 2017-2018.



Schools implementing alternative breakfast service models in the 2017-2018 school year saw an increase in the number of breakfast meals served per student and reported a decrease in student hunger in the morning. The majority of schools examined for fiscal impact demonstrated decreased meals costs after implementation, indicating a more efficient use of staff and resources.

## Appendix C

### Data Collection

Data summarized in this report are from four sources:

- *Administrative Data.* Schools receiving state funding to implement alternative breakfast models were required to submit to VDOE monthly breakfast meals served for reimbursement. In addition, participating schools were required to maintain reporting for the School Nutrition Program, including meals served by type (free, reduced, and paid) and local, state, and federal reimbursements. The VDOE also accessed student absenteeism and assessment data for all participating schools through existing administrative collections.
- *Alternative School Breakfast Service Models Feedback Report.* This six-item feedback survey collected anonymous data from division leaders, principals, teachers, and school nutrition staff at participating schools on their level of satisfaction with the program, including perceived support for the program and perceived impact of the program. School divisions were asked to distribute the link to the online survey to appropriate staff in each participating school. The VDOE received 2,211 responses to the online survey. Of the respondents, approximately 70 percent were teachers, nine percent were principals/assistant principals, four percent were school nutrition/cafeteria managers, two percent were division level administrators, and 15 percent were other school personnel (not specified).
- *Alternative School Breakfast Service Models School Report.* Principals at participating schools were required to provide data for the 2018-2019 school year and previous years, if available, on average daily tardiness counts and average daily office discipline referrals. Of the 325 schools funded for alternative breakfast programs, 238 responded to the survey (73 percent response rate).
- *Alternative School Breakfast Service Models Fiscal Impact Survey.* School nutrition directors in divisions with schools receiving funding for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year were asked to complete a fiscal impact survey. The survey ascertained financial data on revenue sources for alternative school breakfast programs and any costs incurred for program implementation in salary, benefits, capital equipment, or small wares and supplies. Of the 170 schools receiving state funding for the first time in 2018-2019, 128 were able to report requested costs before and after program implementation (75 percent response rate).