



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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November 1, 2024

The Honorable Glenn A. Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, Third Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Louise Lucas, Chair
Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
201 North 9th Street, Room 1404
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
201 NORTH 9TH STREET, ROOM 1223
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Youngkin, Chair Lucas, and Chair Torian:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on the alternative breakfast service model program from the 2023-2024 school year, as required by Item 125 C.29.c.1-3, Chapter 2 2024S1 Acts of Assembly. In total, 345 schools participated in the program in 2023-2024, serving more than 13.7 million breakfast meals during the school year.

If you require additional information, please contact Christina Berta, Chief Operating Officer at (804) 239-5876 or Christina.Berta@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa Coons
Superintendent of Public Instruction

LC/c

Report on Alternative School Breakfast Service Models



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AUTHORITY FOR THE STUDY

Item 125 C.29.c.1-3, Chapter 2 2024, Special Session I, Acts of Assembly allotted funds to support public schools that provide breakfast meals to eligible students through “After-the-Bell” breakfast programs. Eligible school divisions must evaluate the educational impact of the models, and the schools participating in the program shall provide school breakfasts to students after the first bell of the school day. Program evaluations must be based on the guidelines developed by the Department of Education, and schools must submit the required report to the Department of Education no later than August 31st each year. Subsequent to this data collection from participating school divisions, a summary report of the results is submitted to the Governor and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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. Many barriers, such as late transportation, inconvenient meal service locations, and social stigma, prevent students from participating in traditional school breakfast processes. Alternative breakfast programs allow students and school divisions to overcome these barriers by providing breakfast after the school day begins. Service models include:

- **Breakfast in the Classroom:** Students eat breakfast in the classroom with their classmates and teacher. Breakfast can be served after the first bell or when students first arrive;
- **Grab and Go:** Students pick up breakfast meals from a central location as they arrive at school and eat in their classroom; or
- **Second Chance Breakfast:** Students receive breakfast during a break in the morning, typically after first period.

The 2024 Appropriation Act provides \$1.074 million in state funds to fund an After-the-Bell Model breakfast programs are available for students on a voluntary basis to elementary, middle, and high schools. To provide programming, a school must have free or reduced lunch rates that exceeds 45 percent for the participating eligible school, and the school must commit to providing

additional reimbursement for eligible meals served in the current traditional school breakfast program at all grade levels in any participating school. 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 local division (see Appendix A Item 125 C.29.c.1-3, Chapter 2 2024 Acts of Assembly). As is required by Chapter 2, the Department of Education collected required data from schools receiving funding for the alternative breakfast service model in program year 2023-2024.

BREAKFAST MEALS SERVED

During the 2023-2024 school year, 345 public schools participating in the alternative school breakfast program provided 13,760,614 meals to K-12 students. Of those, 4,260,562 meals were provided by elementary students, and 9,500,052 meals were provided by secondary students (see Table 1).

Table 1. Eligible Breakfast Meals Served by School Type, 2023-2024 School Year

| <u>School Type</u> | <u>Number of Schools</u> | <u>Total Meals Served</u> |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Elementary | 109 | 4,260,562 |
| Middle/High | 236 | 9,500,052 |
| Total | 345 | 13,760,614 |

EDUCATOR FEEDBACK

Division leaders, principals, teachers, school nutrition directors, and cafeteria managers from participating school divisions were surveyed about their perceptions of student participation in the program. While participating school divisions may implement various breakfast models, most responses (83%) reported using a Grab and Go model, where students pick up packaged breakfasts from carts or kiosks or from the cafeteria and carry them to their classrooms. Most survey respondents (78%) agree that more students are eating breakfast because of the alternative breakfast programs in their schools. Additionally, nearly seventy percent (69.4%) of respondents agree that fewer students are hungry in the morning and that the program reduces stigma around eating breakfast at school (73%).

Nearly half of respondents agreed that the alternative breakfast program improved student academic performance (48.8%) and moved their school closer to achieving its overall wellness goals (45.2%). A plurality of respondents had not opinion on the program's impact on improving student attendance and tardiness (40.2%) or student behavior (43%).

Seventy one percent (71.2%) of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the alternative breakfast program overall, while 15% of respondents reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the program. Among teachers completing the survey, 70.1% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the program. Nearly 79% of school nutrition managers and cafeteria staff completing the survey reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the alternative breakfast program.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

To capture the financial impact of the Alternative Breakfast Service model funding on the participating division's school food program, a survey of division administrators, principals, school administrators, school nutrition managers and cafeteria staff was conducted. Among respondents, 82.4% agreed that Alternative Breakfast Service program funding improves breakfast service delivery. Eighty five percent of respondents agree that receiving funds for the alternative breakfast program improves their ability to fund the school nutrition program.

ADDITIONAL DATA

A study, by No Kid Hungry, provides the [impact of breakfast on chronic absenteeism](#) found that alternative breakfast programs can reduce chronic absenteeism by 6% and improve reading achievement by 1.5%¹. Additionally, in a [survey of principals](#) from schools serving After-the-Bell breakfast across the nation,

- 82% reported increased school breakfast participation,
- 66% reported fewer occurrences of student hunger,
- 21% reported fewer occurrences of absenteeism, and
- 9% reported improved math and reading scores.

¹ **A Study on Chronic Absenteeism and Breakfast After the Bell; No Kid Hungry:**
<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/study-chronic-absenteeism-and-breakfast-after-bell>

These are opportunities for Virginia school divisions to tailor the method by which they distribute breakfast meals to students in an effort to see similar results in school divisions. Examples of the ways in which school divisions distributed breakfast meals include bus delivery to homes, bulk grab and go, and parent or guardian pick up of meals. Virginia public schools continue to work to diminish the number of chronically absent students, and After-the-Bell breakfast programming continues to be a critical tool for educators.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Item 125 C.29.c.1-3, Chapter 2 2024SI Acts of Assembly:

c.1) 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 each year.

2) The Department of Education shall communicate, through Superintendent's Memo, to school divisions the types of breakfast serving models and the criteria that will meet the requirements for this State reimbursement, which may include, but are not limited to, breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast, or a breakfast after first period. School divisions may determine the breakfast serving model that best applies to its students, so long as it occurs after the instructional day has begun. The Department of Education shall monthly transfer to each school division a reimbursement rate of \$0.05 per breakfast meal that meets either of the established criteria in elementary schools and a reimbursement rate of \$0.10 per breakfast meal that meets either of the established criteria in middle or high schools.

3) No later than July 1 each year, the Department of Education shall provide for a breakfast program application process for school divisions with eligible schools, including guidelines regarding specified required data to be compiled from the prior school year or years and for the upcoming school year program. The number of approved applications shall be based on the

estimated number of sites that can be accommodated within the approved funding level. The Department of Education shall set criteria for establishing priority should the number of applications from eligible schools exceed the approved funding level. The reporting requirements must include chronic absenteeism rates, student attendance and tardy arrivals, office discipline referrals, student achievement measures, teachers' and administrators' responses to the impact of the program on student hunger, student attentiveness, and overall classroom learning environment before and after implementation, and the financial impact on the division's school food program. Funded schools that do not provide data by August 31 are subject to exclusion from funding in the following year. The Department of Education shall collect and compile the results of the breakfast program and shall submit the report to the Governor and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees no later than November 1 following each school year.

Appendix B

Appendix B provides previously published studies from FY 2016 through FY 2023.

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 public schools within 52 school divisions received funding for alternative breakfast. Seventeen additional public 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 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 public 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.

Fiscal Year 2019 Study

The Appropriation Act provided \$1.074 million in state funds for the operation of alternative school breakfast service models implemented in the 2018-2019 school year. Three hundred twenty-five public 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.

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. Survey data indicated 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 impacts on self-reported student tardiness and office discipline referrals were mixed, but participating schools showed promising improvements in chronic absenteeism and student achievement.

VDOE also found that 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 Year 2020 Study

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor of Virginia closed public schools statewide March 13, 2020, and schools remained closed through the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. In May of 2020, the Superintendent of Public Instruction issued, and the Secretary of Education approved, an emergency relief measure that waived certain school division reporting requirements for the alternative breakfast service program. This waiver was in accordance with Chapters 1283 and 1289 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly providing the Superintendent of Public Instruction the authority to grant temporary flexibility or waivers for certain deadlines and requirements as provided in the Title 22.1 of the Code of Virginia and Appropriation Act that cannot be met for fiscal year 2020 (school year 2019-2020) or fiscal year 2021 (school year 2020-2021) due to the state of emergency and subsequent school closures. Waived reporting requirements included tardy arrivals; office discipline referrals; student achievement measures; teachers' and administrators' responses to the impact of the program on student hunger, student attentiveness, and overall classroom learning environment before and after implementation; and the financial impact on the division's school food program in its annual program report.

Due to the waived reporting requirements, this report on alternative breakfast models for the 2019-2020 school year is limited to data on number of eligible breakfast meals served, which were collected from August 2020 through April 2021. The truncated 2019-2020 school year does not permit comparisons to previous, complete years of school nutrition program data.

Fiscal Year 2021 Study

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Superintendent of Public Instruction issued, and the Secretary of Education under Governor Northam approved, an emergency relief measure that waived certain school division reporting requirements for the alternative breakfast service program. This waiver was in accordance with Chapters 1283 and 1289 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly providing the Superintendent of Public Instruction the authority to grant temporary flexibility or waivers for certain deadlines and requirements as provided in the Title 22.1 of the

Code of Virginia and Appropriation Act that cannot be met for fiscal year 2020 (school year 2019-2020) or fiscal year 2021 (school year 2020-2021) due to the state of emergency and subsequent school closures. Waived reporting requirements included tardy arrivals; office discipline referrals; student achievement measures; teachers' and administrators' responses to the impact of the program on student hunger, student attentiveness, and overall classroom learning environment before and after implementation; and the financial impact on the division's school food program in its annual program report.

Due to the waived reporting requirements, this report on alternative breakfast models for the 2021-2022 school year is limited to data on number of eligible breakfast meals served. The truncated 2021-2022 school year does not permit comparisons to previous, complete years of school nutrition program data.

Fiscal Year 2022 Study

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Superintendent of Public Instruction issued, and the Secretary of Education under Governor Northam, approved an emergency relief measure that waived certain school division reporting requirements for the alternative breakfast service program. This waiver was in accordance with Appropriation Act, providing the Superintendent of Public Instruction the authority to grant temporary flexibility or waivers for certain deadlines and requirements as provided in the Title 22.1 of the Code of Virginia and Appropriation Act that cannot be met for fiscal year 2021 (school year 2020-2021) or fiscal year 2022 (school year 2021-2022) due to the state of emergency and subsequent school closures. Waived reporting requirements included tardy arrivals; office discipline referrals; student achievement measures; teachers' and administrators' responses to the impact of the program on student hunger, student attentiveness, and overall classroom learning environment before and after implementation; and the financial impact on the division's school food program in its annual program report.

Fiscal Year 2023 Study

Wide variation in the availability of in-person instruction during the 2022-2023 school year and flexibilities in federal requirements allowed school divisions to tailor the methods by which they distributed breakfast meals to students. Examples of the ways in which school divisions

distributed breakfast meals include bus delivery to homes, bulk grab and go, and parent or guardian pick up of meals.

As is required by Appropriation Act, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) collected required data from schools receiving funding for the alternative breakfast service model in program year 2022-2023.