



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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November 1, 2025

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 report on the alternative breakfast service model program from the 2024-2025 school year, as required by [Item 125 C.29.c.3](#), Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly. In total, 334 schools were funded to participate in the program in 2024-2025 and served more than 12 million breakfast meals during the school year. In alignment with the reporting requirements, we have included data on the following: 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.

If you require additional information, please contact Christina Berta, Chief Operations Officer at (804) 225-2025 or Christina.P.Berta@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Anne Gullickson".

Emily Anne Gullickson, M. Ed., J.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

EA/lf

cc: The Honorable Aimee Rogstad Guidera
Virginia Secretary of Education

REPORT ON THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL BREAKFAST SERVICE MODELS

Item 125 C.29.c.3, Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly

November 1, 2025



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SUMMARY

Nationally, Breakfast After the Bell and other alternative service models help address barriers to school breakfast, increase student access to breakfast, improve the classroom learning environment, and alleviate student hunger. [Research](#) also shows that serving breakfast as part of the school day is a powerful tool for reducing chronic absenteeism, with one study indicating that absenteeism may decrease by an average of 6 percentage points after schools adopt Breakfast After the Bell.

State funding was first appropriated in FY2016 and Virginia's Breakfast After the Bell initiative has been a critical component of the ALL In Virginia campaign and has supported a 26 percent reduction in chronic absenteeism statewide over the past two school years. Since the 2015-2016 school year, Breakfast After the Bell and alternative service models have been widely accepted and implemented in Virginia as best practice. School breakfast has been linked to student success and serving breakfast after the bell is anecdotally an effective approach in Virginia, most notably in this report with schools having the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

As required by Chapter 725 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly, the Virginia Department of Education (the Department) collected data from schools receiving funding for alternative breakfast service models in program year 2024-2025.

AUTHORITY

Chapter 725 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly allocated funds to support schools providing breakfast meals to eligible students through an alternative breakfast service model, commonly called Breakfast After the Bell. The Department 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 Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

OVERVIEW

Many barriers, such as late transportation and inconvenient meal service locations, have historically prevented students from participating in traditional school breakfast. Alternative breakfast service models, or Breakfast After the Bell, help overcome these barriers by providing breakfast after the school day begins, in the classroom, or in other ways designed to increase student participation and support learning.

The implementation and expansion of Breakfast After the Bell programs is an essential component of the Department's strategy for reducing chronic absenteeism, increasing classroom engagement, and improving overall student wellness. The most effective Breakfast After the Bell models may 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.

- **Second Chance:** Students receive breakfast during a break in the morning, typically after first period.

The 2025 Appropriations Act provided \$1.074 million in state funds for the operation of Breakfast After the Bell models implemented in the 2024-2025 school year. To receive funds, schools must have more than 45% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. The state reimburses five cents (\$0.05) per reimbursable breakfast served in funded elementary schools and ten cents (\$0.10) in funded secondary schools in participating school divisions (Appendix A).

As is required by Chapter 725 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly, the Department collected required data from schools receiving funding for the Breakfast After the Bell model in program year 2024-2025 on program impact and other student measures.

BREAKFAST MEALS SERVED

The 334 schools that received Breakfast After the Bell funds provided 12,047,955 breakfast meals to students during the 2024-2025 school year. Of those, 4,486,616 meals were provided by elementary schools, and 7,561,339 meals were provided by secondary schools (Table 1). Of the 66,092,636 breakfast meals served in the 2024-2025 school year, 18.2% were served to students in a school that received Breakfast After the Bell funds (Figure 1).

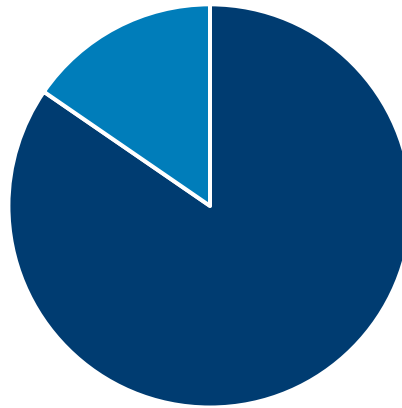
While school divisions may implement various breakfast models, the most common are:

- Traditional - 35.5%
- Grab and Go - 40.3%
- Breakfast in the Classroom - 12.8%
- Second Chance - 6.0%

Table 1. Breakfast Meals Served in Breakfast After the Bell-Funded Schools by School Type, 2024-2025 School Year

School Type	Number of Schools	Total Breakfast Meals Served
Elementary	115	4,486,616
Middle/High	219	7,561,339
Total	334	12,047,955

Figure 1. Proportion of Breakfast Meals Served that Received Breakfast After the Bell Reimbursement, 2024-2025 School Year



- Total breakfast meals served
- Breakfast After the Bell meals served

IMPACT SURVEY

To assess the impact of Breakfast After the Bell funding, a survey was administered to school nutrition directors and cafeteria managers in divisions that received funding in 2024-2025 but not in the prior year. The survey focused on three areas:

- Student participation in school breakfast
- Student food security
- Perception of stigma

Overall, 79.41% of respondents reported that more students are now eating breakfast because of the alternative breakfast programs in their schools. Additionally, 79.41% of respondents indicated fewer students are hungry in the morning, and 64.71% responded that the program reduces stigma around eating breakfast at school. 94.12% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the alternative breakfast program. School nutrition directors and cafeteria managers provided the following quotes on how Breakfast After the Bell funds increased student breakfast participation and improved the School Breakfast Program (Table 2).

Table 2. Quotes from School Nutrition Directors and Cafeteria Managers of Schools that Received Breakfast After the Bell Reimbursement, School Year 2024-2025

Theme	School Nutrition Directors and Cafeteria Managers Quotes
Increased student breakfast participation	“The funds allow us to come up with more ways to increase breakfast participation and to improve student experience.” “A huge increase in breakfast participation.”
Improved the School Breakfast Program	“Breakfast After the Bell funds greatly strengthened our school nutrition program by allowing us to expand healthy meal options, improve food quality, and ensure more students have access to nutritious meals that support their well-being and academic success.

Theme	School Nutrition Directors and Cafeteria Managers Quotes
	Funds also help to offset inflation, which has risen at a higher/faster rate than federal reimbursements.” “These funds have allowed us to provide a better variety of products.” “The awarded funds allowed us the opportunity to provide our students with more choices for the meal that starts their day.” “The additional funds helped to fund additional staffing at breakfast and improve our breakfast meal selections.”

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM, AND STUDENT DISCIPLINE DATA

In the 2024-2025 school year, 316 regular public schools and 18 public centers or other institution types received state funding to participate in the Breakfast After the Bell program. The 316 regular schools reported school-level data on chronic absenteeism and student behavior/discipline through the Department’s annual Student Record Collection (SRC) and Student Behavior and Administrative Response Collection (SBAR). Student assessment data was obtained from the assessment vendor and made available through the Department.

The 18 public centers or other institution types received state funding to participate as serving entities, but their data was reported indirectly through their affiliated public schools or school divisions, which serve as the official reporting entities.

This quantitative analysis focuses on the 108 elementary schools, 106 middle schools, and 97 high schools that received Breakfast After the Bell funding (Table 3). One combined school and four prekindergarten schools were excluded due to small sample sizes that would not support meaningful comparisons.

Table 3. Breakfast After the Bell Funded and Non-Funded Schools by Economic Disadvantaged Quartile and School Type

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	School Type	Non-Funded schools	Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools
1	Elementary	286	5
	Middle	76	4
	High	78	2
2	Elementary	252	4
	Middle	67	28
	High	76	32

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	School Type	Non-Funded schools	Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools
3	Elementary	258	27
	Middle	42	45
	High	39	42
4	Elementary	238	72
	Middle	50	29
	High	40	21

To account for demographic differences, Virginia public schools were divided into four quartiles based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students using 2024-2025 fall membership data. Quartiles divide schools into four equal groups, from the least to most economically disadvantaged:

- Quartile 1: Lowest percentages of economically disadvantaged students (more affluent schools).
- Quartile 2 and Quartile 3: Moderate concentrations of economically disadvantaged students.
- Quartile 4: Highest percentages of economically disadvantaged students (most disadvantaged schools).

This stratification enables comparisons of outcomes such as assessment pass rates, chronic absenteeism, and behavior incidents between Breakfast After the Bell schools and their non-funded peers within comparable socioeconomic contexts. While non-funded schools do not receive additional alternative breakfast funding, schools may provide alternative breakfast service models similar to Breakfast After the Bell schools.

The alternative service model breakfast funding has been provided to varying applicant schools each year since 2015-2016. Many of the previously funded schools continued the alternative service models after the initial funding period. Breakfast After the Bell and other alternative breakfast models have helped to stimulate and sustain significant student participation increases along with other associated outcomes, in both funded and non-funded schools statewide. Because comparisons of currently funded Breakfast After the Bell schools and non-funded schools lack a true control group, any analysis should be viewed as descriptive rather than causal.

Current Breakfast After the Bell funded schools have a higher proportion of students who are economically disadvantaged when compared to non-funded schools (Table 4). Only 3.8% of Breakfast After the Bell schools fall into the lowest quartile of economically disadvantaged schools (i.e., more affluent schools) whereas 29.26% of non-funded schools fall into the same quartile. Nearly 39% of Breakfast After the Bell funded schools fall into the 4th quartile of economically disadvantaged schools (i.e., most disadvantaged schools) compared to 22.14% of non-funded schools fall into the same quartile.

Table 4. Percent of Non-Funded Schools and Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools by Economic Disadvantaged Quartile

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	Number of Non-Funded Schools	Number of Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools	Percent of Non-Funded Schools	Percent of Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools
1	452	12	29.26%	3.8%
2	401	65	25.95%	20.57%
3	350	116	22.65%	36.71%
4	342	123	22.14%	38.92%
Total	1,545	316	100%	100%

Breakfast After the Bell funded schools have a higher proportion of students who are economically disadvantaged when compared to non-funded schools. This indicates that Breakfast After Bell funding is targeted toward schools serving higher-need student populations.

When compared to schools in the same economically disadvantaged quartile, students at Breakfast After the Bell funded schools had similar *Standards of Learning* (SOL) pass rates in both reading and math (Table 5). Results must be interpreted with caution given the sample size. Additionally, other factors that may affect the outcome variables were not controlled within the analysis.

Table 5. SOL Reading and Math Pass Rates for Non-Funded Schools and Breakfast After the Bell Schools by Economic Disadvantaged Quartile and School Type

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	School Type	SOL Reading Pass Rate Non-Funded Schools	SOL Reading Pass Rate Breakfast After the Bell Schools	SOL Math Pass Rate Non-Funded Schools	SOL Math Pass Rate Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools
1	Elementary	85	78	87	80
	Middle	85	79	83	69
	High	91	80	88	85
2	Elementary	73	82	76	83
	Middle	72	72	69	67
	High	86	82	82	81
3	Elementary	68	64	71	63
	Middle	68	69	64	64
	High	82	82	79	80
4	Elementary	58	56	60	57
	Middle	60	61	55	54
	High	73	75	71	69

When schools are grouped by type (Elementary, Middle, High) and by economically disadvantaged quartiles, no statistically significant differences were evident in Reading and Math SOL pass rate between currently funded and non-funded schools. Minor fluctuations appear by school type (for example, lower middle school math pass rates among funded schools in Quartile 1 and higher elementary reading performance in Quartile 2); and, while these variations are not consistent, they show potential benefits of funding particularly in elementary schools. In general, pass rates drop across all schools as the percentage of economically disadvantaged students increases. However, the small differences in Quartiles 3 and 4 between the two groups suggest that alternative breakfast models may help narrow the achievement gap in more disadvantaged settings.

Breakfast After the Bell funded schools also had similar Chronic Absenteeism rates when compared to non-funded schools in the same economically disadvantaged quartiles (Table 6). Results must be interpreted with caution given the sample size. Additionally, other factors that may affect the outcome variables were not controlled within the analysis, including non-funded schools that implement alternative breakfast service models.

Table 6. Chronic Absenteeism Rates for Non-Funded Schools and Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools by Economic Disadvantaged Quartile and School Type

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	School Type	Chronic Absenteeism rates Non-Funded Schools	Chronic Absenteeism rates Breakfast After the Bell Schools
1	Elementary	8	9
	Middle	11	11
	High	14	23
2	Elementary	11	14
	Middle	13	14
	High	17	22
3	Elementary	12	14
	Middle	17	16
	High	19	21
4	Elementary	15	18
	Middle	17	19
	High	25	21

Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student missing 10% or more of the academic year; approximately 18 or more days in a typical 180-day year. Absenteeism rates are generally the highest in high schools, with elementary schools generally exhibiting the lowest rates.

Chronic absenteeism increases as the concentration of economically disadvantaged students rises, a pattern observed in both funded and non-funded schools. There are variations where funded high schools show higher chronic absenteeism rates than their non-funded peers in quartiles 1-3, but lower rates in the most disadvantaged quartile 4. Overall, the data suggests that Breakfast After the Bell participation may be more effective in high-poverty schools (Quartile 4), where absenteeism drops significantly.

There is no statistically significant relationship between Breakfast After the Bell funding and the number of discipline events per 100 students, percent of students involved in a discipline event, or percent of students suspended (Table 7). Results must be interpreted with caution given the sample size. Additionally, other factors that may affect the outcome variables were not controlled within the analysis. *Table 7. Student Discipline Rates for Non-Funded Schools and Breakfast After the Bell Schools by Economic Disadvantaged Quartile and School Type*

Economic Disadvantaged Quartile	School Type	Events per 100 Students		% of Students w/ an Event		% of Students w/ Suspension	
		Non-Funded Schools	Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools	Non-Funded Schools	Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools	Non-Funded Schools	Breakfast After the Bell Funded Schools
1	Elementary	7.19	6.10	3.88	4.78	1.29	3.17
	Middle	18.10	23.83	10.64	14.05	5.33	7.77
	High	25.51	38.53	12.82	21.90	4.55	3.75
2	Elementary	12.24	5.99	5.82	3.93	2.41	1.50
	Middle	34.90	41.06	16.67	19.22	10.75	12.03
	High	40.92	41.72	18.44	19.70	9.18	11.83
3	Elementary	15.36	12.81	7.30	7.51	3.46	4.24
	Middle	36.67	40.52	18.45	20.70	12.65	12.87
	High	42.62	39.99	20.27	18.04	12.31	11.85
4	Elementary	21.05	17.80	9.17	10.00	5.14	5.41
	Middle	56.46	47.20	26.53	25.28	19.30	18.48
	High	65.35	30.65	25.55	18.15	16.58	11.85

The events reported here include a spectrum of behaviors that impede academic progress, affect relationships, or raise safety concerns. When compared to schools of the same type (Elementary, Middle, High), across all economically disadvantaged quartiles, Breakfast After the Bell funded schools and non-funded schools show no consistent pattern in terms of discipline events per 100 students, percent of students involved in a discipline event or percent of students suspended.

Across both groups, disciplinary measures increase as the share of economically disadvantaged students rises and are highest in high schools. However, there appears to be an improvement in all measures of discipline for Breakfast After the Bell funded middle and high schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students when compared to non-funded peer

schools. This supports broader-based research on the positive behavior effects of breakfast, particularly evident in schools with the highest percentages of economically disadvantaged students, where breakfast programs can help mitigate the effects of food insecurity on behavior.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Item 125 C.29.c.3, Chapter 725, 2025 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 breakfast after first period. School divisions may determine the breakfast serving model that best applies to their 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.