



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Better School Meals Are Reaching More DC Students

By Alexandra Ashbrook, D.C. Hunger Solutions

DC is taking important steps to make sure students don't come to school hungry and that they get healthy breakfasts and lunches during the school day. Connecting students to school meals is a "magic bullet" that reduces hunger, improves nutrition, and boosts academic achievement all at the same time.

The benefits of school meals go beyond filling a hungry child's belly, which is why it is great that the District is trying to get as many students as possible participating in school breakfast and lunch programs. These programs have the added advantage of being paid for largely with federal funds.

Children who eat school meals have increased concentration, fewer behavior problems, and improved academic achievement than their peers who skip meals. Children who eat healthy breakfast at school—closer to test-taking time—perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.



Source: D.C. Hunger Solutions

At a time when schools are under tremendous pressure to raise students' academic performance, the positive outcomes associated with participation in school meal programs cannot be overlooked, especially when more than 75 percent of students across DC qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

The nation's capital deserves praise for two initiatives that are connecting more students to healthy school meals:

- **Free breakfast for everyone:** [The D.C. Healthy Schools Act of 2010 \(HSA\)](#) makes breakfast free across the city. This continues to fuel the number of children eating school breakfast, and it has led to improvements in food quality: more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and local produce. Click [here](#) for school breakfast participation rates at D.C. Public Schools. School year 2013-2014 rates are listed under our Making Breakfast Work report.

- **More schools offering free lunch to all students:** DC is taking widespread advantage of a federal option, known as “[community eligibility](#),” to provide free meals to all students in eligible high-poverty schools, without making families fill out paperwork. DC has made all meals free at 77 D.C. Public Schools and 45 public charter schools. Click [here](#) for a list of schools taking advantage of this provision in the District.

Children are the District’s greatest resource, and ensuring access to nutritious meals by increasing participation in school meal programs is one of the best investments we can make in their future and ours. For information on how you can support efforts to connect kids to healthy school meals, contact Alexandra Ashbrook, D.C. Hunger Solutions at aashbrook@dchunger.org.