



Policy Report
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**Administrator
school breakfast
survey: Report of
findings**

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Purpose

The following report presents selected findings from an online survey of K-12 school administrators in the state of Iowa (n=152). The purpose of the survey was to better understand administrator perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs around the school breakfast program and determine barriers and facilitators to improving school breakfast program participation in Iowa schools.

The results of the survey will be used to better understand why school breakfast participation in Iowa is low compared to rates of school lunch participation, and inform ways in which the Iowa Department of Education can work to increase school breakfast participation in the state. This survey represents one component of a larger body of recent research related to school breakfast in the state of Iowa.

Methods

The electronic survey instrument was developed jointly by researchers at the University of Iowa Public Policy Center and Team Nutrition program staff at the Iowa Department of Education. The University of Iowa Institutional Review Board reviewed the project. The survey was developed using Qualtrics® survey software and was fielded from September 24, 2014 to June 1, 2015.

The survey instrument was designed to identify administrator perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs around school breakfast and specifically asked administrators to report on topics related to perceived benefits of a school breakfast program and barriers to improving participation in school breakfast. Administrators were asked to assess their school's readiness for improving school breakfast participation and identify concerns they have about improving participation. Administrators also reported if they had communicated with their school or district's food service director about improving participation in the school breakfast program, and were asked about possible alternative breakfast serving models (e.g., breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go breakfast) that they would be willing to implement in the future. Respondents were also asked to supply responses for open-ended questions related to why school breakfast participation is so low in the state of Iowa.

The survey link and an email introducing the survey were distributed through the Iowa Department of Education to school district administrators.

Results

I. Respondent characteristics

School district size

Respondents were asked the size of the school district in which they work based on enrollment. Nearly half of respondents reported that their school's enrollment was less than 1,000 students.

Table 1. School district size distribution

Grade	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1,000 students	74	48.7%
1,000 to 2,499 students	43	28.3%
2,500 students or more	35	23.0%
TOTAL	152	100.0%

Current breakfast availability

Respondents were asked to report on current breakfast serving models available in their school. Respondents were asked to check all that apply to their school from a list of possible breakfast models. No respondents reported that school breakfast was not currently served at their school.

Nearly all respondents (96.1%) currently offer breakfast in the cafeteria before school starts. Reported participation in alternative breakfast serving models was low. Nearly 10% of respondents offer grab-and-go breakfast, but almost no respondents said that their schools offer breakfast in the classroom, after the first bell, or between the first and second bells.

Table 2. Breakfast serving models currently used

School district	Frequency	Percent
In the cafeteria before school	146	96.1%
Grab and go	13	8.6%
In classrooms	8	5.3%
After the first bell	2	1.3%
Between first and second bells	2	1.3%
Breakfast isn't served at our school	0	0.0%
Other	5	3.3%

Respondents who selected 'other' were asked to explain further. These responses are given verbatim below:

As soon as children arrive, breakfast is served - 8:00 - 8:30

Cafeteria for elem. and middle school and high school has a grab and go.

Our gym is our cafeteria

Seniors who have open campus can access breakfast in the cafeteria until 10:00 a.m.

We serve breakfast before school starts

II. Improvements to school breakfast participation

Readiness to improve school breakfast participation

Respondents were asked to assess their school's readiness for improving participation in the school breakfast program. One-quarter of respondents reported that their school currently had high breakfast participation, while another quarter reported that they are currently working on improving participation in the program. One-third of respondents stated that they are 'uncertain' about their school's readiness to improve participation in the school breakfast program.

Table 3. School readiness to improve breakfast participation

How would you assess your school's readiness for improving participation in the school breakfast program?	Frequency	Percent
We currently have high participation	38	26.4%
We are currently working on improving participation	37	25.7%
We're ready to start now	12	8.3%
We're nearly ready	2	1.4%
Uncertain	45	31.3%
Not really ready at this time	4	2.8%
Do not want to improve participation	6	4.2%
Total	144	100.0%

Barriers to improving school breakfast participation

Respondents were asked to select among concerns they had for improving participation in the school breakfast program at their school. Respondents were instructed to select all options that apply to their school from the list in Table 4 below.

One-third of respondents selected the school's bus schedule as a barrier to improving participation. Nearly one-third of respondents stated that they had concerns about the lack of flexibility in changing food items offered at school breakfast, while another one-quarter cited a lack of time and resources for food service staff or budget concerns as a barrier to improving participation. Other potential barriers that elicited responses were the school schedule, issues related to staff supervision at breakfast, parent support, and the belief among families that breakfast is a parent's responsibility.

Table 4. Concerns about improving school breakfast participation

Amount	Frequency	Percent
Bus schedule	51	33.6%
Lack of flexibility in changing the items offered at school breakfast	42	27.6%
Time and resources for food service staff	40	26.3%
Budget	37	24.3%
School schedule	31	20.4%
Supervision issues	31	20.4%
Lack of flexibility in changing the structure of how school breakfast is served	28	18.4%
Parent support	26	17.1%

Belief that breakfast is a parent's responsibility	25	16.4%
Wasted food	17	11.2%
Support from teachers	14	9.2%
Space and facilities	14	9.2%
Support from food service staff	12	7.9%
Community support	8	5.3%
Support from other administrators	8	5.3%
Other	23	15.1%

Respondents who selected 'other' were asked to explain further. These responses are given verbatim below:

cost is a factor

Don't fix what is not broken from a student and parent perspective.

Federal Regulations on Breakfast Menu

getting students to school on time

I don't have concerns. Our breakfast participation is good.

I have no concerns. Our district fully supports it, but we just can't get the numbers we think we should have.

I have no concerns. We started our breakfast program very quickly and easily in Jan, and it has gone very well.

no concerns

No concerns

No Concerns

No concerns at this time

None

none - we have an active program

offering more variety

Since we currently have a system in place, we would adjust as needed within the system.

students getting to school on time

Tardiness of many children. We're working on offering breakfast for a half hour after the bell rings.

The only way to improve participation is to go back to the breakfasts of the past. The students ARE NOT fond of everything being whole grain

We have a good program. I would like to see more hot breakfast selections.

We have no concerns. Our cafeteria is full with students each morning.

We have participation from those parents and students who desire breakfast - we are not seeking to increase participation - it is optional and a parental decision. Parents and staff and not satisfied with our food service company - XXX as their whole focus is to cut corners and make money!

Barriers to improving school breakfast participation

As an open-ended question, respondents were also asked to describe the barriers to improving participation in the school breakfast program at their school. These responses were analyzed qualitatively. Emergent themes are presented below with illustrative quotes from the response set.

Time

Timing by far was the most frequently discussed barrier to improving school breakfast participation. Administrators described the difficulties of providing more time for breakfast or pushing it back to a later time during the morning. Timing was related to many other factors described as barriers, such as bus schedules, space, staffing, budget concerns, and student preferences.

Students getting b-fast miss out the first minutes of preparation of the day in the classroom. Most of these students really benefit from the organizational routines of the day and they miss them. They also miss some of the AM relationship building with teachers during that more conversation time vs. instructional conversations.

We do breakfast before school starts. To change this requires working out time to have students eat in the classroom which may take away from academic learning. Staff would have to figure out where to cut something else in the day to set aside 15-20 minutes for breakfast.

We've got to get the kids here on time to eat breakfast and then get to class on time. A number of students enter the cafeteria right before classes begin, eat breakfast, and are continually tardy for class every day.

Bus schedule

School bus scheduling was another major concern identified by respondents. Especially in rural districts, many students ride a long distance on the bus before arriving at school and have limited time to eat school breakfast before the start of first period.

There are some buses that get in right as the bell is ringing which doesn't allow time for breakfast.

The majority of students who eat breakfast require school transportation to get to school. This leaves a short window of time for students to eat.

Transportation and bus schedules are a huge barrier in our district. Students don't have a lot of time for breakfast.

Space

Some administrators described the lack of space available if more students were to participate in school breakfast. Unlike school lunch, which is typically stratified by grade or school schedule, traditional school breakfast is served in one place at one time before the day starts—and there may not be sufficient room or food service personnel to accommodate all students at one time.

Time and space to serve breakfast to so many students. Breakfast can't be like a lunch schedule, so how can you get 400 students to eat breakfast all at once in 10 minutes.

Where to have a later breakfast

Staffing

Insufficient staff power was a barrier often related to space and time constraints. More students eating breakfast at school would require additional food service personnel to prepare and serve food along with other school staff to monitor the

breakfast area.

More supervision and time would be required with even a slight increase in participation. It is not feasible to feed more students in the 30 minutes available.

We have a problem with supervision. If we could start serving breakfast at 7:30 with food service providing supervision I would guess that we would double our participation.

Budget

Funding and budgeting was another concern frequently mentioned by respondents. Schools may not have the resources available to address other barriers like space, staffing, and transportation in order to expand the school breakfast program.

Parent factors

Some respondents mentioned parent or family factors as a barrier to more children participating in school breakfast. Several administrators cited lack of awareness about school breakfast as an issue, while others attributed low rates of breakfast participation to family or community norms dictating that parents should feed their children breakfast at home.

Overcoming the culture at our school where kids eat breakfast at home before coming to school. I don't necessarily believe that is a problem, as long as kids are eating somewhere.

Continually communicating with parents that breakfast is an option.

Administrative barriers

Administrative barriers described ranged from the impact of governmental regulations on school foods to a lack of motivation by food service directors or personnel to change current practices surrounding school breakfast.

Laws saying students need to take certain food choices. If they know they are not going to eat it, why would we tell them they are required to take it? That makes no sense to me.

Leadership in our Food Service Department. Willingness to adjust schedules and transportation to give more time. Quality of food served. We do not employ cooks, rather food preparers

The kitchen staff, specifically the food service director is old fashioned. It is easier for them to serve food from a box that already has the nutrition facts given than to actually figure it out for themselves by providing fresher and homemade options.

Student preferences

Often a lack of participation was traced back to student habits and preferences. Students either do not like the food served at breakfast, are not motivated to get to school early enough for breakfast, or simply have other priorities in the morning. Some respondents mentioned that this problem was more striking among older children than in the elementary grades.

Students don't say anything about being hungry until later in the morning. Some kids would rather play outside than eat.

The barriers are that the kids are not hungry or they have ate somewhere else. They are tired of the new meal requirements and want to go back to what was.

Our cafeteria is not in our building. I think once kids get into our building? they don't feel like walking to the cafeteria.

The middle and high school students feel that the breakfast offered is not enough for students in sports.

Food quality

Some respondents mentioned the quality and variety of food served at school breakfast as barriers to more students participating in breakfast.

The options are not very healthy, hot, or fresh (no or little meat, eggs, fresh fruit)

The items that can be served for the students. Too many processed items.

We need to offer better choices for breakfast and I'm not sure the cafeteria staff is willing to work for that.

No barriers

Many administrators responded that participation in the breakfast program at their school is already sufficient-- or that improving participation in the program is not an objective for their school.

None - We have very good nutrition service program in our school.

This just hasn't risen to a concern level. We are have a relatively low F/R lunch rate, approximately 15%. That doesn't mean there isn't a need to improve our breakfast participation, it is just not a top priority. We may hold the belief that hungry students just isn't an issue at our school.

We already offer it the only way it will really work. Parents can either choose to participate or not. We don't really see the need to try and improve it.

We have no barriers. If kids show up, we feed them. We have a good program available and if kids show up, we can take care of them.

I feel many families are currently providing daily breakfast for their students and do not know if a school based program needs improving. The current system is helping those families that need the service.

Future options

Respondents were asked what other breakfast options they would consider at their school moving forward. Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of school breakfast serving models.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents selected the traditional model of 'in the cafeteria before school.' Nearly one-half responded that they would consider a grab-and-go model where students pick up a pre-packaged breakfast to be eaten at their discretion. Only one-fifth of respondents reported that they would consider breakfast in the classrooms, and a minority of respondents would consider breakfast after the first bell (12.5%) or between the first and second bells (9.9%).

Table 5. Future options for school breakfast

Option	Frequency	Percent
In the cafeteria before school	110	72.4%
Grab and go	75	49.3%
In classrooms	31	20.4%
After the first bell	19	12.5%
Between first and second bells	15	9.9%
None of the above	6	3.9%

Communication with food service director

Respondents were asked if they had talked with their school or district’s food service director about improving breakfast participation at their school. Responses were split—slightly under half reported that they had talked to their food service director, while slightly over half had not.

Table 6. Communication with food service director about improving school breakfast participation

Have you talked to the Food Service Director about improving breakfast participation?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	66	46.2%
No	77	53.8%
Total	143	100.0%

Resources for SB program

Respondents were asked about a variety of different information and resources potentially available to help with school breakfast participation. Respondents rated these topics to reflect whether they felt their school currently has enough information about a given topic or not. Respondents could also select that they were uncertain if there was enough information about a topic, or if that topic was not applicable to their school/school breakfast program.

The majority of respondents felt they had enough information about basic food service requirements for breakfast (e.g., meal cycles) (83.5%) along with the basic administrative requirements like meal counting and claims (85.6%) and reimbursement rates (79.9%).

Many respondents feel they lack knowledge about alternative serving models such as serving breakfast in the classroom (36.7%), grab-and-go breakfast (32.4%), and serving breakfast after first period (33.8%). Most respondents (86.3%) agreed that they currently have enough information about traditional before-bell breakfast, but many were either unsure (31.7%) or felt they did not have enough information (15.8%) about what students at their school like to eat for breakfast.

Table 7. Resources available for school breakfast program

With regards to the school breakfast program, do you feel that your school has enough information about...	Yes		Maybe/ Uncertain		No		N/A	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Traditional before-bell breakfast?	120	86.3%	15	10.8%	2	1.4%	2	1.4%
The basic administrative requirements (for example meal counting, claiming, etc)?	119	85.6%	15	10.8%	4	2.9%	1	0.7%

The basic food service re-requirements (for example, meal patterns)?	116	83.5%	18	12.9%	4	2.9%	1	0.7%
Reimbursement rates?	111	79.9%	21	15.1%	6	4.3%	1	0.7%
What students like to eat?	72	51.8%	44	31.7%	22	15.8%	1	0.7%
The financial implications of starting a SB program?	60	43.2%	29	20.9%	9	6.5%	41	29.5%
Grab-and-go breakfast?	38	27.3%	41	29.5%	45	32.4%	15	10.8%
Serving breakfast in the classroom?	27	19.4%	38	27.3%	51	36.7%	23	16.5%
Serving breakfast after first period?	21	15.1%	34	24.5%	47	33.8%	37	26.6%

III. Perceptions of the school breakfast program

Perceived benefits of a school breakfast program

Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list hypothetical benefits to having a school breakfast program. The vast majority of respondents agreed that school breakfast ensures that students will not be hungry (88.8%) and that students will perform better academically (84.2%). Over half (62.5%) agreed that eating school breakfast means that students will have fewer behavioral problems. About one-third of respondents perceived that convenience (30.9%), students not over-eating at lunch (27.0%), and teachers not having to feed students (24.3%) are benefits to having a school breakfast program.

Table 7. Perceived benefits of a school breakfast program

In your opinion, what are the benefits of a school breakfast program? Please select all that apply.	Frequency	Percent
Students will not be hungry	135	88.8%
Students will perform better academically	128	84.2%
Students will have fewer behavioral problems	95	62.5%
Convenience	47	30.9%
Students will not binge eat at lunch	41	27.0%
Teachers will not have to feed students	37	24.3%
The food service budget will increase	31	20.4%
Other	7	4.6%

Respondents who selected ‘other’ were asked to explain further. These responses are given verbatim below:

Breakfast would offered to the children that would maybe would not eat at home, parent not able to fix them a meal.

I feel if the students are hungry, they come and eat, otherwise they just use the cafeteria as a place to hang out away from authority

If high quality, students whose parents can't afford healthy meals will gain nutrients

Job security for staff.

None of the above

students will have basic needs met by school staff and opportunity to make connections with school staff

Reasons for low school breakfast participation in Iowa

Respondents were given space to respond to the statement: “Compared to other states, Iowa schools have some of the lowest participation rates for school breakfast in the country. We rank 47th out of 50 states. Why do you think this is the case?” These responses were analyzed qualitatively and emergent themes are presented below with illustrative quotes from the response set.

Logistical issues

Timing

Because it is hard enough for the parents to get their kids to school on time, let alone get there in time for breakfast.

It requires parents to get their children up for school earlier in the day.

Kids that ride a bus get here in plenty of time to eat breakfast, but kids that get a ride from an adult have to rely on the adult to bring them early to school to eat breakfast.

Bus schedules

Most of our students do NOT live in town. When the bus drops them at school, there isn't time to eat. They need to report to class.

In our district, I do not feel that students that ride the bus have time to eat before the bell rings. We would love help pushing our teachers and administrators to help implement breakfast in the classroom for K-8.

School schedule

Our schedules do not reflect an importance on the breakfast meal.

When children get to school in the morning they don't have enough time to eat and then get to class. Some of that is due to parents dropping off their children right when the bell rings.

It is low because it is served on a restricted schedule.

Regional values

Perception that school breakfast is tied to poverty

Students have the money, ability, and supports needed to eat at home. Iowa also has a very low free and reduced rate compared to other states.

In our school, we in the northwest corner of Iowa, we are a farming community and majority of the people have breakfast ready for their children before they go to school. Our free and reduced is very low and they are the ones that have breakfast.

Rural considerations

We are a rural school. Most of our students eat at home.

Parents are feeding their children at home. By and large, Iowa is a state with a significant rural population - it is beneficial to feed your children before you travel to your child's school in a community that could be miles away.

I think that it is partially due to the sprawl of population (large districts/long bus rides) and as a result, many students are awake for some time before they even arrive at school. I believe they therefore eat prior to this (on the bus, etc).

Although our demographics are shifting, they are not the same as other parts of the

country.

Family-centered norms and values

Not part of the culture.

In our case, rural Iowa, I think the value of breakfast at home is important.

We still have a fairly high percentage of parents that are home in the morning with their kids and thus, they can get breakfast at home.

People feed their children at home as a family. As I have lived in different states I have realized that Iowa families put more emphasis on this in my opinion.

One reason that I believe that breakfast participation is low is family values. Many Iowa families believe that it is important for them to feed their children breakfast.

Parental factors

Parents do not know about school breakfast

Parents aren't aware. Parents prefer to feed their own children in the morning.

It could also be low because parents are not fully informed of the program.

Lack of communication with parents

Parents feel responsible for feeding their children

Many parents do not want their child to eat breakfast at school because they view this as their responsibility.

At the elementary level, the majority of families still believe that feeding their child breakfast is their responsibility. They view eating breakfast at school as a service provided to the low income families who aren't "good enough parents" to feed their child at home. Please understand that I don't hold this view and don't promote this view, but I think that others may believe this to be true. I would guess that the vast majority of students who eat breakfast across the state qualify for free lunch, or it is still seen as a low income service.

More cost-effective to eat at home

If I was serving breakfast at home it would be a bowl of cereal and maybe a glass of juice-it would be cheaper for parents to feed kids at home

I think many Iowa parents believe they can provide as good or better breakfast than the school at a lower cost.

Other reasons

Child preference

The students don't want to get up or they don't like the food.

The food guidelines are so strict, the students don't want to eat what is offered to them at school.

We also have a mobile student population, many of them driving to and from school each day. They stop along the way at their favorite convenience store and grab a Monster, Mountain Dew, or something similar and consider that breakfast.

In middle school, students seem to opt for more unhealthy choices such as energy drinks that they bring from home. I think they want ease and portability with their selections.

The menus lack creativity. "Cold breakfasts are unpopular." HS portion are small and can't compete with options from Subway and Casey's breakfast.

Our school does have high rates of participation

More than 2/3 of my students eat breakfast

I really don't know because our school has a relatively high participation rate. Out of our certified enrollment of 302 we have roughly 100-120 eat breakfast on any given day.

Don't know

I am not sure. I was not aware it was ranked so low.

I am not sure why families do not take advantage of this option.

I have no idea. To be honest - I had no idea Iowa ranked that low. I am a high school principal and many of our students access breakfast on a regular basis.

IV. Discussion

Logistical barriers

Administrators reported on hurdles to serving breakfast at a time and place convenient for both students and the school academic schedule

A majority of responses to open-ended questions about barriers to improving school breakfast participation and reasons behind the low rate of participation in Iowa were tied to logistical obstacles that prevent students from coming to breakfast at school—namely, busing schedules, time constraints, and a lack of flexibility within the school schedule to accommodate breakfast. These barriers to breakfast participation reflect the same concerns expressed by parents in a related survey on parental perceptions of school breakfast. Issues related to busing seem to be especially problematic among rural schools, given the wide geographic spread of students. Students who ride the bus often make it to school without enough time to eat breakfast in the cafeteria. Some respondents pointed out that, unfortunately, those students who may need the school breakfast program most are the ones who frequently ride the bus to school—i.e., students who have no other means of transportation or who have no adult available in the morning to take them to school early enough for breakfast.

Time constraints were described by administrators as another barrier to expanding the breakfast program. The school day is already jam-packed for most students, and improving the breakfast program may not be a priority for schools. Many administrators described how school breakfast currently is served too early for most parents and students, but that moving it any later in the day would disrupt the school schedule.

Potential of alternative breakfast serving models

Thinking outside the cafeteria may alleviate some of the logistical issues associated with school breakfast program participation

The vast majority of schools represented in this survey serve breakfast in the traditional way (i.e., in the school cafeteria before the start of first period). As administrators themselves acknowledged, situating breakfast before the school day starts is not the most convenient option for most students or their caretakers. However, moving breakfast later in the day may disrupt the academic schedule or take time away from other important morning activities. In addition, some administrators described how, even if they could get more students to come to breakfast, their schools lack the space and staff power to accommodate a larger volume of students during the short breakfast period.

Alternative serving models, such as breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go breakfast options, offer a means of fitting breakfast into the already full school day along with giving students more flexibility in breakfast choices.

Over one-fifth of administrators in this survey responded that they would consider an option for breakfast in the classroom, and half of administrators would look at grab-and-go breakfast options for students. However, over a third of administrators did not feel like they had enough information about these models. Although such alternative serving models may present new issues for school administration, food service personnel, and teachers, many administrators in this survey demonstrated an interest in learning more in order to improve and expand breakfast participation at their schools. Schools may benefit from more education and resources about these newer serving models for breakfast to decide whether these options are right for their school.

Attitudes toward improving school breakfast participation

Administrators are at varying stages of readiness to work on improving school breakfast participation

For this survey, over one-quarter of respondents stated that breakfast participation at their school was currently high, and roughly the same proportion of administrators said their school is currently working on improving rates of participation in the program. However, national data indicates that Iowa ranks 48th among the states for rates of school breakfast participation as compared to rates of school lunch participation¹, suggesting a disconnect between administrators perceive as 'high' levels of participation in breakfast and the actual data. Almost half of respondents reported that they had communicated with their school's food service director about improving school breakfast participation, and the majority of administrators agreed on important benefits of school breakfast like ensuring that students are not hungry, help students perform better academically, and have fewer behavioral problems.

However, nearly one-third of respondents were 'uncertain' if they were ready to improve participation. This uncertainty may reflect an underlying philosophical disagreement among school communities about the role and scope of a school breakfast program. Not all respondents agreed on improving school breakfast as a priority objective. Some administrators felt that low rates of school breakfast participation reflected low rates of free and reduced school meal eligibility in the community and was a positive statistic instead of something to improve upon. Others remarked that it is a family's prerogative to decide where a child eats breakfast, and that for many families it was simply easier and more cost-effective to serve breakfast at home. Still others described how school breakfast did not fit into the culture of the state given its relatively rural composition and prevalence of traditional values.

Influence of community norms and values

Administrators believe that many parents see it as their role to provide breakfast at home.

Factors like rural identity and the prevalence of family-centered values were mentioned frequently by administrators in this survey. Many of these responses were resonant with parent attitudes toward school breakfast revealed in a previous survey, many of which cited strong family values and a tradition of parents providing breakfast in the home as reasons behind low statewide participation in school breakfast. As one administrator put it, school breakfast is simply 'not part of the culture' in many parts of Iowa. Rural status both dictates many of the logistical barriers preventing students from eating breakfast at school—such as bussing or other transportation issues-- and may contribute to community perceptions of self-sufficiency and family-centered values that undermine the importance of a school breakfast program.

1 Food Resource and Action Center. (2013). School Breakfast Program. Scorecard: 2012-2013 School Year. Retrieved from http://frac.org/pdf/School_Breakfast_Scorecard_SY_2012_2013.pdf

Additionally, the perception may exist in many communities that school breakfast is a marker of poverty. When asked why they believe Iowa has low rates of school breakfast participation, many administrators attributed this to the relatively low rates of free and reduced school meals eligibility in the state. School breakfast is traditionally seen as being for ‘poor kids’ whose families lack the means to provide a breakfast at home. This kind of stigma may be a barrier to school breakfast at both the administrator and family levels. Administrators may feel that low rates of breakfast participation indicate a high socioeconomic status community and lack the motivation to expand the program, while students and families who would benefit from school breakfast may avoid it due to its association as a program for ‘poor kids.’

Importance of child preference

To successfully promote breakfast, schools need to engage the students

Previous research on school breakfast in Iowa points to the critical importance of the child’s preference in the decision to participate in school breakfast. If students are excited about and enjoy school breakfast, they may be more motivated to arrive at school early and go to breakfast. Many administrators in the present survey acknowledged the role of child preference in determining school-wide breakfast participation. The food options offered at school breakfast are described as unappealing to students, who would often prefer to grab breakfast at home, or at local convenience stores or fast food restaurants. Additionally, students—especially older students who may be responsible for driving themselves to school in the morning—may not be motivated to get to school any earlier than their first period of class.