

Mississippi School Breakfast Report

2016–2017 School Year



Acknowledgments

The Mississippi Center for Justice is a nonprofit, public interest law firm committed to advancing racial and economic justice. Supported and staffed by attorneys, community leaders, and volunteers, the Center develops and pursues strategies to combat discrimination and poverty statewide.

This report analyzes the School Breakfast Program's reach in Mississippi school districts that participated in the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program in the 2016–2017 school year. In addition, this report covers the School Breakfast Program's benefits, how it works, and best practices to increase school breakfast participation.

Mississippi Center for Justice gratefully acknowledges major support of its work to expand and improve the School Breakfast Program from the following:

- Food Research & Action Center;
- Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom; and
- Walmart Foundation.

Mississippi Center for Justice also acknowledges the indispensable roles played by statewide partners:

- Mississippi Association of Educators;
- Mississippi Association of School Administrators;
- Mississippi Department of Education; and
- Mississippi School Nutrition Association.



Introduction

Participation in the School Breakfast Program continued to grow in Mississippi in the 2016–2017 school year, providing a healthy morning meal to more than 172,000 low-income children each school day.

This is good news for Mississippi schools and families. The School Breakfast Program is an important tool for educators to ensure that students have adequate nutrition to learn and thrive and not be distracted by hunger or lack of proper nutrition in the classroom. The school nutrition programs are a vital component of the federal safety net for low-income families, helping stretch limited budgets and provide assurance for parents that their children can receive healthy meals at school each day.

High breakfast participation can be attributed to two key strategies: adopting community eligibility (when possible) and implementing breakfast after the bell service models, such as breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance, all of which reach more children than the traditional method of serving breakfast in the cafeteria before the school day starts.

While gains are being made, and more schools are adopting best practices, there is still significant variation among the school districts that provide breakfast to their low-income students. In the 2016–2017 school year, 59.5 low-income students ate school breakfast for every 100 that ate school lunch in Mississippi. In order

Top 10 School Districts: Ratio of Low-Income Student Participation in Breakfast per 100 Participating in Lunch	
School District	Ratio of Low-Income Student Participation in Breakfast per 100 Participating in Lunch
Tunica County School District	97.2
Columbus Municipal School District	94.8
Chickasaw County School District	93.7
North Bolivar Consolidated School District	91.7
Oxford Separate School District	90.2
South Delta School District	88.5
East Jasper Consolidated School District	88.2
Quitman City School District	87.5
Wilkinson County School District	87.0
Montgomery County School District	83.8

to meet the national benchmark set by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) of reaching a ratio of 70 low-income children receiving school breakfast for every 100 receiving school lunch, low-performing school districts must take every opportunity to increase school breakfast participation, to ensure Mississippi students do not miss out on the academic, nutrition, and health benefits of the program.

This report examines key findings regarding school breakfast participation rates in Mississippi school districts that participated in the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program during the 2016–2017 school year. In addition, this report informs

about the School Breakfast Program’s benefits and how it works; offering breakfast at no charge to all students, potentially through community eligibility; breakfast after the bell models; examples of top-performing school districts, and school breakfast funding information.

How the School Breakfast Program Works

Who Operates the School Breakfast Program?

Any public school, nonprofit private school, or residential child care institution can participate in the national School Breakfast Program and receive federal funds for each breakfast served. The program is administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and in each state typically through the state department of education or agriculture.

Who Can Participate in the School Breakfast Program?

Any student attending a school that offers the program can eat breakfast. What the federal government covers, and what a student pays, depends on family income:

- Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for free school meals.
- Children from families with incomes between 130 to 185 percent of the FPL qualify for reduced-price meals and can be charged no more than 30 cents per breakfast.

- Children from families with incomes above 185 percent of the FPL pay charges (referred to as “paid meals”), which are set by the school.

Other federal and, in some cases, state rules, however, make it possible to offer free meals to all children, or to all children in households with incomes under 185 percent of the FPL, especially in schools with high proportions of low-income children.

How are Children Certified for Free or Reduced-Price Meals?

Most children are certified for free or reduced-price meals via applications collected by the school district at the beginning of the school year or during the year. However, children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as foster youth, migrant, homeless, or runaway youth, and Head Start participants are “categorically eligible” (automatically eligible) for free school meals and can be certified without submitting a school meal application.

School districts are required to “directly certify” children in households participating in SNAP for free school meals through data matching of SNAP records with school enrollment lists. School districts also have the option of directly certifying other categorically eligible children as well. Some states also utilize income information from Medicaid to directly certify students as eligible for free and reduced-price school meals.

Schools also should use data from the state to certify categorically eligible students and they can coordinate with other personnel, such as the school district’s homeless and migrant education liaisons, to obtain documentation to certify children for free school meals. Some categorically eligible children may be missed in this process, requiring the household to submit a school meals application. However, these

households are not required to complete the income information section of the application.

How are School Districts Reimbursed?

The federal reimbursement rate the school receives for each meal served depends on whether a student is receiving free, reduced-price, or paid meals.

For the 2016–2017 school year, schools received

- \$1.71 per free breakfast;
- \$1.41 per reduced-price breakfast; and
- \$0.29 per “paid” breakfast.

“Severe need” schools received an additional 33 cents for each free or reduced-price breakfast served. Schools are considered severe need if at least 40 percent of the lunches served during the second preceding school year were free or reduced-price.

Offering Breakfast Free to All

Many high-poverty schools are able to offer free meals for all students, with federal reimbursements based on the proportions of low-income children in the school. Providing breakfast at no charge to all students helps remove the stigma often associated with means-tested school breakfast (that breakfast in school is for “the poor kids”), opens the program to children from families that would struggle to pay the reduced-price copayment or the paid breakfast charges, and streamlines the implementation of breakfast in the classroom and other alternative service models. Schools can offer free breakfast to all students through the following options:

- **Community Eligibility Provision:** Community eligibility schools are high-poverty schools that offer free breakfast and lunch to all students and do not have to collect, process, or verify school meal applications, or keep track of meals by fee category, resulting in significant administrative savings and increased participation.
- **Provision 2:** Schools using Provision 2 (referring to a provision of the National School Lunch Act) do not need to collect, process, or verify school meal applications or keep track of meals by fee category for at least three out of every four years. Schools collect school

meal applications and count and claim meals by fee category during year one of the multi-year cycle, called the “base year.” Those data then determine the federal reimbursement and are used for future years in the cycle. Provision 2 schools have the option to serve only breakfast or lunch, or both breakfast and lunch, to all students at no charge, and use economies of scale from increased

participation and significant administrative savings to offset the cost of offering free meals to all students.

- **Nonpricing:** No fees are collected from students, while schools continue to receive federal reimbursements for the breakfasts served under the three-tier federal fee categories (free, reduced-price, and paid).

Benefits of School Breakfast

Children from low-income households are more likely to experience food insecurity. Research shows that access to school meals can improve students’ dietary intake and give them the nutrition they need to start their school day focused and ready to learn. In short, school meals, such as school breakfast, are critical to the healthy development and academic achievement of students.

The academic and health benefits of school breakfast are undeniable. Participation in the School Breakfast Program has been linked with better test performance; fewer cases of tardiness, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems; fewer visits to the school nurse; improved overall dietary quality; and a lower probability of

overweight and obesity. Low-income students in particular benefit from participating in school meal programs. (For more information on the benefits of school breakfast, see the following briefs from FRAC: [Breakfast for Learning](#); [Breakfast for Health](#); and [The Connections Between Food Insecurity, the Federal Nutrition Programs, and Student Behavior](#).)

In light of the large and growing body of research supporting the link between school breakfast and academic success, education stakeholders, including the Mississippi Association of School Administrators and the Mississippi Association of Educators, are making concerted efforts to improve the reach of the School Breakfast Program.

“Breakfast in Classroom has been a huge success for us because MORE kids get breakfast. Statistics show that when a child has access to breakfast, it can enhance psychosocial well-being, reduce aggression, school suspensions, and discipline problems. School breakfast improves attendance, behavior, concentration, and overall academic performance.”

— Daniel Westmoreland, Director of Child Nutrition, Oxford School District

Breakfast After the Bell

Implementing a breakfast after the bell model that moves breakfast out of the school cafeteria served before school starts — making it more accessible and a part of the regular school day — has proven to be the most successful strategy for increasing school breakfast participation. Breakfast after the bell overcomes timing, convenience, and stigma barriers that get in the way of children participating in school breakfast and are even more impactful when they are combined with offering breakfast at no charge to all students. Schools generally use one or more of three options when offering breakfast after the bell:

- **Breakfast in the Classroom:** Meals are delivered to and eaten in the classroom at the start of the school day.
- **“Grab and Go”:** Children (particularly older students) can quickly grab the components of their breakfast from carts or kiosks in the hallway or the cafeteria line to eat in their classroom or in common areas.
- **Second Chance Breakfast:** Students are offered a second chance to eat breakfast after homeroom or first period. Many middle and high school students are not hungry first thing in the morning. Serving these students breakfast after first period allows them ample time to arrive to class on time, while still providing them the opportunity to get a nutritious start to the day.

Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom

The Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (Partners for BIC) — a consortium of national organizations that came together for their shared passion for nutrition and educational achievements — including the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the NEA Foundation, the School Nutrition Foundation, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation — is now working in Mississippi to increase breakfast participation.

The Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi Association of Educators, Mississippi Association of School Administrators, and the Mississippi School Nutrition Association, have joined the Partners to engage and educate stakeholders across the state about best practices to increase breakfast participation and work together to implement these practices statewide. To help districts, the Partners for BIC provide grants and technical assistance to help school districts implement successful and sustainable programs. As of January 2018, three Mississippi school districts — Bay St. Louis-Waveland School District, Houston School District and Moss Point School District — have been awarded the grant and are in the process of implementing breakfast after the bell models in multiple schools. For more information on the grant, go to: www.breakfastintheclassroom.org/grants.

Community Eligibility

In the 2016–2017 school year, and in its third year of nationwide availability, 333 high-poverty schools in Mississippi adopted community eligibility. The momentum has not stopped; even more schools in Mississippi have signed up for the program in the 2017–2018 school year. School districts adopting community eligibility experience a multitude of benefits. Community eligibility eliminates the need for school meal applications, relieving school districts from the administrative and financial burdens of processing and verifying school meal applications. By allowing all students, regardless of income, to eat a free school

breakfast and lunch, the stigma associated with means testing these programs disappears and participation grows. With the administrative burden of processing school meal applications lifted, schools can redirect resources to improved nutrition, menu planning, and food procurement, resulting in better school meals. School districts can use a number of strategies to maximize the reach of community eligibility and ensure that all students are able to eat a healthy breakfast and start their school day ready to learn. For more information about this option and how to implement best practices, visit [FRAC's website](#).

Mississippi school districts that have adopted community eligibility (2017–2018 school year):

Aberdeen School District (3 schools)
Amite County School District (2 schools)
Bay St. Louis-Waveland School District (3 schools)
Canton Separate School District (8 schools)
Claiborne County School District (3 schools)
Clarksdale Municipal School District (9 schools)
Cleveland School District (6 schools)
Coahoma County School District (5 schools)
Coffeeville School District (2 schools)
Columbus Municipal School District (8 schools)
Copiah County School District (4 schools)
Durant Separate School District (1 school)
Greenville Public Schools (11 schools)
Greenwood Public School District (6 schools)
Hancock County School District (1 school)
Hattiesburg Separate School District (9 schools)
Hazelhurst City School District (2 schools)
Hollandale School District (1 school)
Holmes County School District (5 schools)
Humphreys County School District (3 schools)
Jackson Public School District (59 schools)
Jefferson County School District (2 schools)
Jefferson Davis County School District (3 schools)
Kemper County School District (3 schools)
Laurel School District (6 schools)
Lee County School District (2 schools)
Leflore County School District (5 schools)
Leland School District (2 schools)
Louisville Municipal School District (4 schools)
McComb School District (6 schools)
Meridian Public Schools (10 schools)
Montgomery County School District (2 schools)
Moss Point School District (4 schools)
Natchez-Adams School District (7 schools)
Newton Municipal School District (3 schools)
North Bolivar Consolidated School District (4 schools)
North Panola Consolidated School District (4 schools)
Noxubee County School District (4 schools)
Okolona Public Schools (2 schools)
Pascagoula Separate School District (18 schools)
Pearl River County School District (2 schools)
Philadelphia Public School District (2 schools)
Picayune School District (9 schools)
Quitman County School District (6 schools)
South Delta School District (3 schools)
South Pike Consolidated School District (3 schools)
Sunflower County Consolidated School District (12 schools)
Tunica County School District (5 schools)
Vicksburg-Warren School District (15 schools)
Walthall County Schools (3 schools)
Wayne County School District (6 schools)
West Bolivar Consolidated School District (6 schools)
West Point Consolidated School District (8 schools)
Western Line School District (3 schools)
Wilkinson County School District (3 schools)
Yazoo City Municipal School District (4 schools)
Yazoo County School District (4 schools)

Conclusion

By utilizing best practice strategies, school districts are reducing childhood hunger in Mississippi. Through the implementation of breakfast after the bell models and community eligibility, along with an engaged group of diverse stakeholders like U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi Association of Educators,

Mississippi Association of School Administrators, the Mississippi School Nutrition Association, the Southeast Dairy Council and other stakeholders, Mississippi has made great strides over the past few years to expand school breakfast. The Mississippi Center for Justice looks forward to working with school divisions and partners to build on these successes in the coming years.

Low-Income Student Participation in School Lunch (NSLP) and School Breakfast (SBP), 2016–2017 School Year

School District	SBP Free and Reduced-Price Average Daily Participation (ADP)	NSLP Free and Reduced-Price Participation (ADP)	Free & Reduced-Price Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP	Rank
Aberdeen School District	645	1,186	54.4	112
Alcorn County School District	730	1,446	50.5	124
Amite County School District	534	875	61.0	78
Amory City School	529	908	58.2	88
Attala County Schools	562	751	74.8	20
Baldwyn Separate School District	231	384	60.0	82
Bay St Louis-Waveland School District	607	1,264	48.0	131
Benton County School District	477	780	61.2	75
Biloxi Public School District	2,109	3,299	63.9	57
Booneville School District	257	472	54.4	113
Brookhaven School District	940	1,856	50.6	123
Calhoun County School District	1,023	1,626	62.9	61
Canton Separate School District	1,818	3,157	57.6	91
Carroll County School District	623	801	77.7	16
Chickasaw County Sch District	313	334	93.7	3
Choctaw County School District	498	740	67.4	40
Claiborne County School District	1,001	1,303	76.9	18
Clarksdale Municipal School District	1,350	2,355	57.3	95
Cleveland School District	1,324	2,548	52.0	120
Clinton Public School District	479	1,856	25.8	142
Coahoma County School District	1,073	1,317	81.5	13
Coffeeville School District	326	457	71.3	27
Columbia School District	585	1,020	57.4	94
Columbus Municipal School District	3,278	3,456	94.8	2
Copiah County School District	1,540	2,410	63.9	58
Corinth School District	653	1,176	55.5	107
Covington County School District	1,341	2,028	66.1	48
Desoto County School District	4,284	13,513	31.7	140
Durant Separate School District	279	432	64.7	54
East Jasper Consolidated School District	625	709	88.2	7

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School District	SBP Free and Reduced-Price Average Daily Participation (ADP)	NSLP Free and Reduced-Price Participation (ADP)	Free & Reduced-Price Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP	Rank
East Tallahatchie Consolidated School District	492	893	55.1	110
Enterprise Consolidated School District	232	403	57.5	93
Forest Municipal School District	928	1,357	68.3	35
Forrest County School District	1,023	1,540	66.4	44
Franklin County School District	485	791	61.3	70
George County Schools	1,508	2,030	74.3	22
Greene County School District	763	1,246	61.2	74
Greenville Public Schools	2,709	4,425	61.2	72
Greenwood Public School District	1,633	2,475	66.0	51
Grenada School District	1,347	2,229	60.4	80
Gulfport Separate School District	2,041	3,410	59.9	83
Hancock County School District	1,180	2,328	50.7	122
Harrison County School District	5,055	8,080	62.6	65
Hattiesburg Separate Sch District	2,805	3,563	78.7	14
Hazlehurst City School District	781	1,378	56.7	99
Hinds County School District	2,103	4,120	51.0	121
Hollandale School District	357	539	66.3	45
Holly Springs School District	686	1,150	59.6	85
Holmes County School District	1,718	2,347	73.2	24
Houston School District	627	1,179	53.2	117
Humphreys County School District	1,073	1,551	69.2	31
Itawamba County School District	1,056	1,711	61.7	68
Jackson County School District	2,108	3,948	53.4	115
Jackson Public School District	13,681	22,595	60.6	79
Jefferson County School District	732	1,112	65.8	52
Jefferson Davis County School District	780	1,054	74.0	23
Jones County School District	2,110	4,682	45.1	135
Kemper County School District	810	981	82.5	12
Kosciusko School District	959	1,376	69.7	30
Lafayette County School District	556	1,145	48.5	128
Lamar County School District	2,044	4,195	48.7	127
Lauderdale Cty School District	1,571	2,754	57.0	96
Laurel School District	1,822	2,722	67.0	41

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School District	SBP Free and Reduced-Price Average Daily Participation (ADP)	NSLP Free and Reduced-Price Participation (ADP)	Free & Reduced-Price Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP	Rank
Lawrence County School District	832	1,288	64.6	55
Leake County School District	1,207	2,159	55.9	104
Lee County School District	1,901	3,154	60.3	81
Leflore County School District	1,478	2,225	66.4	43
Leland School District	394	710	55.5	109
Lincoln County School District	750	1,324	56.7	100
Long Beach School District	596	1,334	44.7	137
Louisville Municipal School District	1,434	2,227	64.4	56
Lowndes County School District	1,174	2,175	54.0	114
Lumberton Public School District	266	409	65.0	53
Madison County Schools	1,547	3,967	39.0	139
Marion County School District	1,200	1,708	70.3	29
Marshall County Public Schools	1,817	2,410	75.4	19
Mccomb School District	1,646	2,394	68.8	33
Meridian Public Schools	2,618	4,653	56.3	102
Monroe County School District	675	1,022	66.0	49
Montgomery County School District	196	234	83.8	10
Moss Point School District	968	1,634	59.2	86
Natchez-Adams School District	1,842	2,968	62.0	67
Neshoba County School District	797	1,737	45.9	132
Nettleton School District	487	845	57.6	92
New Albany Schools	727	1,146	63.4	60
Newton County Schools	633	819	77.2	17
Newton Municipal School District	506	828	61.2	76
North Bolivar Consolidated School District	900	981	91.7	4
North Panola Consolidated School District	983	1,255	78.3	15
North Pike School District	716	1,281	55.9	105
North Tippah Consolidated School District	526	795	66.2	47
Noxubee County School District	1,010	1,386	72.9	25
Ocean Springs School District	849	1,871	45.4	133
Okolona Public Schools	351	507	69.2	32
Oxford Separate School District	1,331	1,476	90.2	5

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School District	SBP Free and Reduced-Price Average Daily Participation (ADP)	NSLP Free and Reduced-Price Participation (ADP)	Free & Reduced-Price Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP	Rank
Pascagoula Separate School District	4,096	5,475	74.8	21
Pass Christian Sep Sch District	681	1,088	62.6	64
Pearl Public School District	1,087	2,240	48.5	129
Pearl River Co School District	725	1,609	45.1	134
Perry Cty Schools	527	775	67.9	37
Petal School District	1,183	2,130	55.5	108
Philadelphia Public School District	469	883	53.1	118
Picayune School District	1,244	2,360	52.7	119
Pontotoc City Schools	765	1,200	63.8	59
Pontotoc County School District	769	1,838	41.8	138
Poplarville Separate School District	474	981	48.2	130
Prentiss County School District	1,012	1,408	71.8	26
Quitman County School District	806	921	87.5	8
Quitman School District	855	1,537	55.6	106
Rankin County School District	1,955	6,449	30.3	141
Richton Separate School District	213	370	57.7	90
Scott County School District	1,886	2,746	68.7	34
Senatobia Separate School District	422	942	44.9	136
Simpson County School District	1,488	2,556	58.2	89
Smith County School District	917	1,611	56.9	97
South Delta School District	716	808	88.5	6
South Panola Consolidated School District	1,795	2,887	62.2	66
South Pike Consolidated School District	998	1,479	67.5	38
South Tippah School District	882	1,507	58.5	87
Starkville Consolidated School District	1,642	2,930	56.1	103
Stone County Schools	704	1,399	50.3	125
Sunflower County Consolidated	2,211	3,526	62.7	63
Tate County School District	1,019	1,660	61.4	69
Tishomingo Special Municipal Separate School District	916	1,617	56.6	101
Tunica County School District	1,886	1,941	97.2	1
Tupelo Public School District	1,931	3,238	59.6	84
Union County School District	912	1,374	66.3	46
Union Public School District	263	535	49.1	126

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School District	SBP Free and Reduced-Price Average Daily Participation (ADP)	NSLP Free and Reduced-Price Participation (ADP)	Free & Reduced-Price Students in SBP per 100 in NSLP	Rank
Vicksburg-Warren School District	3,100	5,664	54.7	111
Walthall County Schools	971	1,440	67.4	39
Water Valley School District	372	608	61.2	73
Wayne County School District	2,122	2,554	83.1	11
Webster County School District	454	852	53.3	116
West Bolivar Consolidated School District	843	1,260	66.9	42
West Jasper Consolidated School District	566	995	56.9	98
West Point Consolidated School District	1,637	2,681	61.0	77
West Tallahatchie Consolidated School District	499	702	71.0	28
Western Line School District	1,134	1,663	68.2	36
Wilkinson County School District	885	1,017	87.0	9
Winona School District	495	750	66.0	50
Yazoo City Municipal School District	1,301	2,073	62.8	62
Yazoo County School District	709	1,157	61.3	71
Total	172,703	290,130	59.5	