

Testimony: HB: 166
FY 2020-21 Biennial Budget
Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee
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The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) supports language included by the House in Amended Substitute House Bill 166 that would increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by ensuring that all low-income public schools in Ohio are working to reach the national benchmark set by FRAC of 70% participation in their School Breakfast Program.

FRAC is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC has worked for decades to improve and strengthen the federal School Breakfast Program and other child nutrition programs through federal and state legislation and works extensively with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofits and other stakeholders to ensure that the programs reach the children who need them. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 166, critically important legislation that will improve low-income children's access to a healthy school breakfast so they are well nourished and able to learn at the start of the school day.

Research shows that not only are well-nourished children better learners, but they are also better test-takers and more active participants in school—more likely to arrive at school on time, to behave and be attentive in class.¹ Children experiencing hunger have been found to have lower math scores and be more likely to repeat a grade.² Teens experiencing hunger are more likely to have been suspended from school and have difficulty getting along with other children.³ The nutrient-rich foods provided through the school meal programs, which must meet federal nutrition standards, also can help reduce participants' risk of obesity. A nationally representative study found that school breakfast participation was associated with a significantly lower body mass index (BMI), an indicator of excess body fat.⁴ Further, school meal participants are less likely to have nutrient deficiencies, and are more likely to consume fruit, vegetables, and milk at breakfast and lunch.⁵

¹ Murphy, J.M. "Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review." *Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science* 2007; 3(1): 3-36.

² Alaimo, K, Olson, C.M., Frongillo, E.A. Jr. "Food Insufficiency and American School-Aged Children's Cognitive, Academic, and Psychosocial Development." *Pediatrics* 2001; 108(1):44-53.

³ Id.

⁴ Gleason, P.M. and Dodd, A.H. (2009). School breakfast program but not school lunch program participation is associated with lower body mass index. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109 (2 Supplement 1), S118-S128.

⁵ Clark, M.A. and Fox, M.K. (2009). Nutritional quality of the diets of U.S. public school children and the role of the school meal programs. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109 (2 Supplement 1), S44-S56.

Many of these positive impacts are particularly pronounced in the School Breakfast Program, which is vastly underutilized: in Ohio, only 56.7 low-income students who ate school lunch during the 2017-2018 school year also received a school breakfast, less than the national average of 57:100.⁶

The School Breakfast Program is a critical tool in improving academic achievement and combatting childhood hunger, yet it fails to reach many of the low-income students who need it across the country and in the state of Ohio. The reason for this is simple; in many schools, breakfast is served in the cafeteria before the school day begins. As a result, many students miss out on school breakfast when it's served before school in the cafeteria. Long bus rides and commutes and busy morning schedules make getting to school early either inconvenient or impossible for overextended families. Social stigma associated with participating in school breakfast serves as another impediment for low-income children.

School districts—large and small, urban, suburban, and rural—across the country have had tremendous success in countering these barriers by making breakfast part of the school day. Offering breakfast in the classroom, from “grab and go” carts in the hallway, or after first period, as the bill provides for, makes participation convenient and accessible for all children. Allowing children to eat at their desks with their teacher and fellow students removes stigma and provides opportunities for social and emotional learning in the classroom. In addition, FRAC in partnership with the National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation surveyed 276 school principals in 15 school districts on their breakfast after the bell program and issued *Start the School Day Ready to Learn with Breakfast in the Classroom: Principals Share What Works*. Surveyed principals reported: increased school breakfast participation, less student hunger, less tardiness and absenteeism, improved student attentiveness, improved school environment, fewer visits to the school nurse, fewer disciplinary referrals, and improved standardized, reading, math, and cognitive test scores.⁷

As a national, founding member of the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom, FRAC has worked with partners in Ohio including the Children’s Hunger Alliance, Ohio Education Association, Ohio School Nutrition Association, and the Ohio Association of Education Administrators, over the past three years to expand school breakfast through stakeholder engagement, technical assistance and grant funding. Through the implementation of universal, free breakfast after the bell programs, the fifteen (and counting) school districts the Partners have worked with have dramatically increased breakfast participation.

At the national level, the federal government has a long history of maintaining and supporting the school meal programs. The federal child nutrition programs are designed to respond to the needs of low-income children in communities and are permanently authorized. Both the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs are permanently authorized by Congress. Child nutrition reauthorization (CNR) provides Congress an opportunity to improve and strengthen the child nutrition and school meal programs so they better meet the needs of our nation’s children. While the current law, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

⁶ Girouard, D. and Rosso, R., “School Breakfast Scorecard School Year 2017-2018” (2019). Retrieval at <http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/school-breakfast-scorecard-sy-2017-2018.pdf>

⁷ Garrison, E, FitzSimons, C, Bertocci, L, & Adach, J. “Start the School Day Ready to Learn: Principals Share What Works” (2013).

(Public Law 111-296), expired on September 30, 2015, the programs continue to operate. In recent years, when structural changes to the programs have been proposed, bipartisan support to maintain the programs has thwarted these efforts due to the nation's commitment to ensure that children in this country do not go hungry and to safeguard the health and well-being of low-income children.

A commitment at the state-level to making breakfast a priority, through HB 166, will mean more children will have the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast at school each day. It also will mean much more federal funding supporting the health and well-being of Ohio's children. Ensuring that students start the school day with a healthy school breakfast also will support student success. FRAC strongly supports HB 166 and urge Chairman Terhar and committee members, to support the provisions included by the House in Am. Sub. HB 166 that would strengthen Ohio's School Breakfast program.