

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF AMORREL@THECASTLEGRP.COM

From the Boston Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2024/06/18/eos-report-breakfast-schools.html>

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:

Government & Regulations

Report: Just 48% of the state's low-income kids get breakfast every day




Image: Home Grown Springfield

Springfield is one of the few Mass. school districts to be getting its students to eat healthy breakfasts.

HOME GROWN SPRINGFIELD



By [Maya Shavit](#) – Intern, Boston Business Journal
Jun 18, 2024

 Listen to this article 4 min



Despite recent government efforts, Boston's children are not treating breakfast as the most important meal of the day.

A new study from the Eos Foundation, which researches ways to invest in children to break the poverty cycle, [found](#) that most Massachusetts students are not eating the free breakfast provided to them.

Eos Foundation President Andrea Silbert said the organization was disappointed to find out that the percentage of low-income kids in Massachusetts getting breakfast every day dropped from 58% in 2019 to 48%, according to its 2023/2024 report card.

"That's a big drop – and even 58% wasn't enough," she added.

Silbert believes the timing of meals is the main culprit for students not getting the nutrition they need. The solution the Eos Foundation proposed to schools is holding breakfasts after the bell, directly in the classroom.

"It really has the advantage of breaking bread together, and it is a beautiful way to start the day for the kids. It gets rid of the stigma of 'Oh, you're a poor kid if you go to the cafeteria early,'" said Silbert.

- ***[Never miss an early education story: sign up for Boston Business Journal's emails to get the latest business news in your inbox twice a day.](#)***

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit, there were two changes for school breakfasts that were supposed to nudge schools into providing food for its students. In 2020, former Gov. Charlie Baker passed [legislation](#) that made it mandatory for low-income schools to serve breakfast after the bell. Gov. Maura Healey expanded the initiative, making it [universal](#) for all schools by filling in the gaps of federal reimbursement dollars for the [National School Lunch and Breakfast programs](#).

Currently, Massachusetts is one of eight states to permanently have free school meals for all students, but many schools are not taking advantage of their entitlement dollars.

“Why are we leaving federal dollars in D.C.?” said Silbert, noting that students perform better overall when they are fed nutritious meals in school.

Breakfast in the classroom

One school district in Massachusetts that has taken advantage of the program is Springfield, whose K-12 schools all have breakfast in the classroom – with just under a 90% student participation rate.

“We know that we're a high poverty district and that our kids need these meals and they're free of charge. So you know, we, we feel like we should be hitting 100%,” said Tim Gray, food service administrator for Springfield Public Schools. “What we have to do is figure out ways of breaking down barriers that our students are facing on why they're not being able to get those meals.”

Home Grown Springfield is a culinary and nutrition program that is the largest of its kind in Massachusetts. It provides meals for all of the students in the Springfield public schools that are focused on enriching local ecosystems as they feed their students.

A quarter of the food provided to the students is locally produced and meals are driven by their partnerships with local farms, such as [Little Leaf Farms](#) in Devens, which provided all of the lettuce for school salads.

“Here in Springfield, we have over 350 employees that work within our schools, within our culinary center and within our warehouse,” said Lydia Rodriguez, director of operations and communications at Sodexo.

Over 85% of the employees working on the Springfield program are from the district and have Hispanic heritage in some way, according to Rodriguez. The food reflects this with favorites including empanadas and fresh tortillas.

“We think we're on the cutting edge of changing the way school lunches are being done,” said Gray.

