



HAWAI'I APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

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HAWAI'I CONTINUES TO FALL BEHIND IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Only 4 in 10 low-income students is getting the benefits of school breakfast

HONOLULU, Hawai'i — According to the latest national [*School Breakfast Scorecard*](#), released today by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), 25,559 low-income children in Hawai'i participated in the national School Breakfast Program on an average school day during the 2019–2020 school year. That's about 40 percent of those who receive free or reduced price lunch. This compares to a national rate of 58.4 percent, which places Hawai'i at 50th in the nation for school breakfast participation.

These numbers only include October 2019 through February 2020, in order to account for the absence of traditional school meal service due the Covid-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020.

Since then, the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) has transitioned to a “grab-and-go” model of meal service, which has expanded to offer free breakfast and lunch at over 200 schools statewide. Since the transition to free grab-and-go, which allows parents to pick up breakfast and lunch at the same time, breakfast participation has nearly reached pre-pandemic levels. However, lunch participation rates are still at only about a third of what it was before the beginning of the pandemic, so overall meal participation is down considerably.

“We are very pleased with how the DOE has stepped up to provide free meals to so many students during campus closures,” said Daniela Spoto, Director of Anti-Hunger Initiatives at Hawai'i Appleseed. “This new report finds that Hawai'i still has some work to do once students return to in-person learning, but we're hopeful that the innovations that have been made with the transition to grab-and-go will be an advantage going forward.”

The *School Breakfast Scorecard* also describes best practices to boost school breakfast participation. The first is utilizing the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), which allows high-poverty schools to offer school meals free of charge to all students. The Hawai'i DOE has been proactive and effective in recent years at expanding the number of CEP schools across the state. Schools can be eligible if enough of the student population are enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

In addition, the scorecard recommends that states be proactive in distributing a new benefit, known

as Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT), to families with children who relied on free or reduced price meals prior to school closures. Hawai'i distributed two rounds of Pandemic-EBT over the summer, and is currently working on getting additional payments to families upon approval by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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The *School Breakfast Scorecard* measures the reach of the School Breakfast Program in the 2019–20 school year—nationally and in each state—based on a variety of metrics, and examines the impact of select trends and policies on program participation. Read the [School Breakfast Scorecard](#) in full.

The [Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice](#) is committed to a more socially just Hawai'i, where everyone has genuine opportunities to achieve economic security and fulfill their potential. We change systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice through policy development, advocacy, and coalition building.