

# Child Nutrition: School Meals

## Definition

*Children receiving free or reduced-price breakfast* is the average daily number of children eating a free or reduced-price breakfast. *Children receiving free or reduced-price lunch* is the average daily number of children eating a free or reduced-price lunch.

## Data in context

Children need proper nutrition for healthy development and success in school. Undernourished children have poorer health and miss more school than nourished children. Also, children not eating properly, especially those missing breakfast, are less likely to be ready to learn when arriving at school.<sup>1</sup> Students who eat breakfast have much higher reading and math scores, attend school more regularly, and are more attentive with fewer behavioral problems.<sup>2</sup> Access to school meal programs can encourage healthy eating habits, which begin in childhood.

The National School Lunch Program, a federal meal program, operates in more than 100,000 public and independent schools and residential child care institutions.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, the program provided nutritionally-balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more than 30.1 million children each school day.<sup>4</sup> In the 2005-2006 school year, 45 percent of children who received free or reduced-priced lunch nationwide also received free or reduced-price breakfast.<sup>5</sup> That year, Kentucky had the 4th highest breakfast participation among states as a percent of free or reduced-price lunches served.<sup>6</sup> The number of children receiving breakfast at school increased by 59 percent nationally over the past decade, compared with a 49 percent increase in Kentucky.<sup>7</sup>

Schools that choose to take part in the lunch program receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from the U.S. Department of



Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve. To participate, schools must serve meals that meet federal nutritional requirements and offer free or reduced-price meals to eligible children. Since 1998, the program has included reimbursement for snacks served to children in after-school educational and enrichment programs for children through 18 years of age.

In Kentucky, any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the program. Children qualify for free meals if their families have incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. Children qualify for reduced-price meals, capped at 40 cents per meal, if their families have incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level. This year, 130 percent of the poverty level for a family of four is \$26,845, and 185 percent is \$38,203.<sup>8</sup> All school meals, including full-priced meals, are subsidized to some extent. Local schools set their own prices for paid meals, but they must operate their meal services as nonprofit programs.<sup>9</sup>

All of Kentucky's 175 school districts participate in the school meals program. Statewide the average daily participation in the free or reduced-price meal program was 231,756 students for lunch and 128,540 students for breakfast in FFY 2007. These

participation numbers represent a 19 percent increase for breakfast and a 14 percent increase for lunch since FFY 2000. Fayette County and Jefferson County School Districts, the two largest school districts, had the highest participation in the breakfast and lunch programs. Other school districts with high lunch participation include Christian County, Hardin County, Laurel County, Pike County, Pulaski County, and Warren County.

Statewide, 55 students participated in the free or reduced-price breakfast program for every 100 students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program. School districts with the lowest ratios of breakfast participation to lunch participation include Anchorage Independent (0 per 100), Boone County (34 per 100), Fort Thomas Independent (10 per 100), and Kenton County (33 per 100). Ratios were greater than 90 per 100 in Breathitt County, Pineville Independent, and Robertson County.

**Data Source:** Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Nutrition and Health Services, School Nutrition Branch.

- 1 The Center on Hunger and Poverty, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University (2002). *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies*. Available at <http://www.centeronhunger.org>. Accessed September 2007.
- 2 Food Research and Action Center (2006). *School Breakfast Scorecard 2006*. Available at <http://www.frac.org>. Accessed September 2007.
- 3 USDA Food and Nutrition Service, National School Lunch Program (2007). *Fact Sheet*. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov>. Accessed September 2007.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Food Research and Action Center (2007). *State of the States: 2007. A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation*. Available at <http://www.frac.org>. Accessed September 2007.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 USDA Food and Nutrition Service, National School Lunch Program (2007). *Fact Sheet*. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov>. Accessed September 2007.
- 9 Ibid.

## Children receiving free or reduced-price meals (average daily number of children)

	2000		2007	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>108,194</b>	<b>203,090</b>	<b>128,540</b>	<b>231,756</b>
Adair Co.	743	1,259	725	1,286
Allen Co.	441	897	669	1,204
Anderson Co.	262	640	487	1,030
Ballard Co.	256	495	327	631
Barren Co.	820	1,134	1,346	1,903
Caverna Ind.	270	417	329	491
Glasgow Ind.	431	682	500	796
Bath Co.	715	982	999	1,143
Bell Co.	1,708	2,018	1,963	2,222
Middlesboro Ind.	529	998	490	952
Pineville Ind.	198	377	336	357
Boone Co.	489	1,928	1,112	3,293
Walton Verona Ind.	71	143	138	248
Bourbon Co.	411	876	534	1,068
Paris Ind.	225	338	251	376
Boyd Co.	943	1,398	769	1,316
Ashland Ind.	633	1,121	807	1,361
Fairview Ind.	151	228	184	330
Boyle Co.	257	565	348	762
Danville Ind.	360	686	490	846
Bracken Co.	240	393	287	437
Augusta Ind.	77	154	105	179
Breathitt Co.	1,391	1,641	1,375	1,504
Jackson Ind.	209	260	109	205
Breckinridge Co.	826	1,297	966	1,433
Cloverport Ind.	92	158	141	171
Bullitt Co.	1,193	2,595	1,689	3,548
Butler Co.	552	985	594	1,017
Caldwell Co.	338	736	427	856
Calloway Co.	712	1,203	798	1,391
Murray Ind.	174	318	246	416
Campbell Co.	283	772	472	1,156
Bellevue Ind.	144	317	153	418
Dayton Ind.	259	601	276	604
Fort Thomas Ind.	14	70	18	172
Newport Ind.	659	1,521	690	1,302
Silver Grove Ind.	94	121	130	170
Southgate Ind.	13	46	19	50
Carlisle Co.	202	349	263	365
Carroll Co.	353	692	521	891
Carter Co.	1,185	2,323	1,481	2,519
Casey Co.	740	1,286	931	1,459
Christian Co.	2,549	4,552	2,505	4,915
Clark Co.	796	1,604	1,152	2,222

	2000		2007	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
Clay Co.	1,342	2,241	1,402	2,111
Clinton Co.	879	924	882	988
Crittenden Co.	250	491	283	511
Cumberland Co.	361	688	367	646
Davies Co.	1,541	2,761	2,397	3,889
Owensboro Ind.	1,168	1,977	1,517	2,676
Edmonson Co.	427	786	577	938
Elliott Co.	602	733	593	728
Estill Co.	735	1,117	716	1,249
Fayette Co.	3,207	7,621	5,103	11,739
Fleming Co.	655	1,078	716	1,154
Floyd Co.	1,873	3,830	2,061	3,817
Franklin Co.	487	1,327	797	1,813
Frankfort Ind.	144	260	126	239
Fulton Co.	288	518	275	454
Fulton Ind.	149	264	176	309
Gallatin Co.	245	574	411	717
Garrard Co.	438	835	480	991
Grant Co.	741	1,132	842	1,640
Williamstown Ind.	65	190	162	316
Graves Co.	1,014	1,304	1,314	1,763
Mayfield Ind.	538	816	709	1,041
Grayson Co.	805	1,459	990	1,913
Green Co.	273	641	419	783
Greenup Co.	844	1,419	878	1,496
Raceland Ind.	20	244	168	297
Russell Ind.	114	382	257	541
Hancock Co.	228	406	321	534
Hardin Co.	2,086	4,140	3,614	5,461
Elizabethtown Ind.	350	600	586	910
West Point Ind.	86	128	70	110
Harlan Co.	1,107	2,890	1,569	2,641
Harlan Ind.	187	326	199	402
Harrison Co.	632	1,123	664	1,307
Hart Co.	550	1,081	910	1,245
Henderson Co.	1,076	2,136	1,305	2,605
Henry Co.	456	746	624	874
Eminence Ind.	167	209	170	250
Hickman Co.	173	389	236	383
Hopkins Co.	1,337	2,546	1,381	2,816
Dawson Springs Ind.	173	284	202	338
Jackson Co.	1,074	1,678	1,234	1,679
Jefferson Co.	14,486	30,083	16,436	34,043
Anchorage Ind.	0	1	0	1
Jessamine Co.	1,108	1,844	1,226	2,433

	2000		2007	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
Johnson Co.	1,125	2,144	990	2,014
Paintsville Ind.	99	201	137	255
Kenton Co.	441	1,854	946	2,827
Beechwood Ind.	12	31	18	48
Covington Ind.	1,243	2,969	1,268	2,382
Erlanger-Elsmere Ind.	141	487	369	873
Ludlow Ind.	96	294	143	376
Knott Co.	835	1,779	932	1,549
Knox Co.	1,469	2,888	1,777	3,161
Barbourville Ind.	131	206	140	243
Larue Co.	486	911	562	1,059
Laurel Co.	1,534	3,084	2,428	4,285
East Bernstadt Ind.	125	270	160	275
Lawrence Co.	938	1,617	837	1,412
Lee Co.	459	869	523	783
Leslie Co.	935	1,290	717	1,090
Letcher Co.	720	1,896	895	1,796
Jenkins Ind.	182	300	246	380
Lewis Co.	724	1,277	912	1,441
Lincoln Co.	1,165	1,836	1,384	2,231
Livingston Co.	318	516	376	593
Logan Co.	475	994	864	1,421
Russellville Ind.	244	530	448	598
Lyon Co.	80	265	122	339
McCracken Co.	1,016	1,562	1,505	2,581
Paducah Ind.	1,193	1,875	1,160	1,873
McCreary Co.	1,739	2,450	1,876	2,461
McLean Co.	302	606	385	710
Madison Co.	1,426	2,622	1,835	3,287
Berea Ind.	129	267	233	456
Magoffin Co.	1,242	1,716	1,119	1,506
Marion Co.	644	1,446	757	1,442
Marshall Co.	830	1,254	956	1,656
Martin Co.	1,092	1,603	946	1,350
Mason Co.	568	978	680	1,282
Meade Co.	738	1,558	876	1,960
Menifee Co.	331	583	508	628
Mercer Co.	146	421	288	725
Burgin Ind.	0	66	60	132
Harrodsburg Ind.	267	422	309	481
Metcalfe Co.	566	864	602	953
Monroe Co.	639	1,072	927	1,210
Montgomery Co.	656	1,580	1,022	2,009
Morgan Co.	856	1,322	808	1,288
Muhlenberg Co.	999	1,885	1,196	2,252

	2000		2007	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
Nelson Co.	592	1,290	759	1,529
Bardstown Ind.	428	790	697	1,105
Nicholas Co.	327	483	341	542
Ohio Co.	591	1,132	1,128	1,981
Oldham Co.	361	852	552	1,447
Owen Co.	391	644	563	889
Owsley Co.	602	726	579	704
Pendleton Co.	424	983	569	1,052
Perry Co.	1,354	2,660	1,469	2,486
Hazard Ind.	155	364	194	363
Pike Co.	1,987	4,875	1,976	4,563
Pikeville Ind.	166	341	179	355
Powell Co.	689	1,285	657	1,410
Pulaski Co.	2,301	3,825	2,548	4,124
Science Hill Ind.	89	175	103	176
Somerset Ind.	294	625	363	642
Robertson Co.	161	167	183	185
Rockcastle Co.	582	1,525	701	1,566
Rowan Co.	579	1,254	740	1,416
Russell Co.	749	1,293	877	1,579
Scott Co.	445	1,271	872	1,817
Shelby Co.	906	1,232	1,200	1,888
Simpson Co.	390	830	503	1,140
Spencer Co.	265	547	341	693
Taylor Co.	386	791	494	980
Campbellsville Ind.	382	689	396	680
Todd Co.	557	879	629	1,053
Trigg Co.	350	698	418	825
Trimble Co.	331	548	372	711
Union Co.	360	852	545	1,028
Warren Co.	1,795	3,238	2,462	4,633
Bowling Green Ind.	869	1,559	1,094	1,723
Washington Co.	330	649	397	827
Wayne Co.	769	1,658	1,185	1,586
Monticello Ind.	183	414	366	477
Webster Co.	322	501	451	729
Providence Ind.	160	286	180	247
Whitley Co.	2,078	3,011	2,150	3,239
Corbin Ind.	370	651	533	860
Williamsburg Ind.	153	339	283	435
Wolfe Co.	697	1,005	682	968
Woodford Co.	219	522	424	919