

NEVADA BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL LEGISLATION: CASE STUDY PROFILE



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Nevada's Breakfast after the Bell (BAB) legislation led to a dramatic increase in school breakfast participation—thereby effectively reducing hunger—and more than doubled the state return on investment in program implementation.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2015, the Nevada legislature took bold action to tackle childhood hunger and food insecurity among school-aged children in the state by passing Breakfast After the Bell (BAB) legislation. BAB provides school breakfast to all children after the official instructional day has begun. States and districts across the nation are increasingly requiring BAB because it is one of the most effective and efficient policies to increase the number of students who eat school breakfast.

Research consistently demonstrates the positive role of breakfast for children. Children who have access to breakfast on a regular basis have demonstrated better academic performance, a significantly lower rate of chronic absenteeism, greater engagement in classroom activities, and lower obesity rates, contributing to children's ability to reach their full potential. In contrast, childhood hunger and food insecurity robs children of productive futures and impacts the nation at large.

States across the nation have reaped a range of benefits through BAB program implementation in their school districts.

This brief presents the successful impacts of BAB legislation in Nevada and lessons learned in the implementation process, from which other states and school districts can learn. The legislation notably increased the number of children eating school breakfast and significantly boosted the financial bottom line of the state and school nutrition programs.

PASSAGE OF BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL LEGISLATION IN NEVADA

The Nevada legislature passed BAB legislation (SB503) in June 2015, requiring any school with at least 70 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price (FRP) school meals to provide breakfast after the start of the official instructional day. Accordingly, the law affected nine school districts and 220 schools statewide: 106 schools that had already been implementing BAB and 114 new schools. The law appropriated \$2 million in start-up funds for new BAB schools implementing the program for the first time.

Statewide Breakfast Participation Impact

As a result of the BAB legislation, Nevada saw a dramatic increase in school breakfast participation statewide, both in the percent change in breakfast participation rates and the number of children eating breakfast. In school year 2015-16, the first year of the law's implementation, school breakfast participation rates for all students combined—free, reduced-price and paid—increased to 28.2% of enrolled students; a jump from 21.5% in school year 2014-15 and 20.73% in school year 2013-14.

New BAB Schools--those that met the law's 70 percent FRP eligibility threshold and had not been implementing BAB until they were required by the state law and received an implementation grant—had the biggest increase in school breakfast participation. This is both in terms of increases in the number of children on average who eat school breakfast every day (average daily participation or ADP) and the share of children who eat breakfast among the total enrolled (participation rate). Table 1 below shows the changes in total ADP between school years 2014-15 and 2015-16, and Table 2 shows the changes in total breakfast participation rate over the same school years.

Table 1: Total Average Daily Breakfast Participation

	2014-2015	2015-2016	Difference	% Change
New BAB Schools	17,223	38,534	21,310	124%
Existing BAB Schools*	41,207	41,664	457	1%
Non-BAB Schools**	14,732	16,319	1,587	11%
All Nevada Schools	91,544	109,366	17,822	12%

*Schools that met the law's 70 percent FRP eligibility threshold and had already voluntarily implemented BAB prior to its passage

** Schools with a higher percentage of FRP students, but not high enough to qualify under the BAB requirement. These schools have a FRP range between 50%-69%.

Table 2: Total Breakfast Participation Rate (Total ADP/Total Enrollment)

	2014-2015	2015-2016	% Point Change
New BAB Schools	24%	51%	28
Existing BAB Schools	63%	64%	1
Non-BAB Schools	19%	21%	2

In addition to the participation increases among free and reduced-price eligible students, new BAB schools have seen a significant increase in total breakfasts served to paid meal students. These 106 new BAB schools served 3.6 million additional breakfasts during the 2015-2016 academic year, compared with only 138,000 additional breakfasts in the 102 existing BAB Schools and 304,000 additional breakfasts in the 116 non-BAB Schools.

County Level Breakfast Participation Impact

Clark County School District (CCSD) is the largest and most populated school district in Nevada, with more than 75 percent of all Nevada students attending school in this district. The district has the largest number of free and reduced-price eligible students (322,672 in 2015-16 school year) and also the largest number of schools (154) impacted by the BAB legislation. This led the district to gain the most from BAB legislation, both in breakfast participation and the receipt of implementation grant funding. Further, CCSD Food Service Department further supported the BAB legislation by implementing universal free meals in all schools impacted by the legislation (free meals for all students regardless of their eligibility for free or reduced-price meals), which was a voluntary

decision taken by the school district. This was funded using the increased federal reimbursement that CCSD received from the jump in free and reduced price breakfast participation following the law's passage.

As a result, in CCSD, total breakfasts served (free, reduced-price and paid) jumped from 10.2 million in school year 2014-2015 to 15.3 million in school year 2015-2016. The district also received 67 percent of the available funds for implementation grants in the first year (school year 2015-16).

Return on State Investment

Actual return on state investment in BAB implementation was more than double initial projections. In 2015, the Nevada Department of Agriculture initially estimated that for every \$1 of state grant funds provided to support districts or schools to implement new BAB programs, federal meal reimbursements would increase by \$3. Actual return in the first year of BAB implementation resulted in \$8 per dollar invested in federal breakfast meal reimbursements, making it an attractive and strategic investment of state resources. A \$1 million state investment resulted in \$8 million in federal funds returning to the state in the first year, demonstrating high and sustainable return on the state's investment for the program.



Impact on School District Budgets

Breakfast After the Bell appears to be financially sustainable. Forty-seven schools that received initial BAB implementation grants in the first year saw sufficient increase in federal meal reimbursement to be able to operate BAB without the need for additional state grants. These schools did not request additional funding in the second year, suggesting school districts could sustain these programs on their own once state implementation grant funding was exhausted or terminated.

LESSONS LEARNED

The marked increase in school breakfast participation and the sustainability of the program was the result of concerted efforts made by many community stakeholders such as district administrators, principals, teachers and anti-hunger advocates. Despite this, some implementation challenges were reported. This section describes what contributed to the success of BAB legislation in Nevada and what school administrators, teachers and principals have considered as barriers to smooth BAB implementation in their schools, serving as lessons learned for other states and school districts as they plan to implement Breakfast After the Bell.

Providing implementation grants facilitates smooth BAB implementation in schools that are new to the program

Nevada's BAB legislation provided \$2 million in start-up costs associated with new BAB programs, available in the first two years of implementation. This implementation grant funding allowed schools adopting BAB for the first time to have the resources needed to hire additional personnel to make and serve the increased number of breakfast meals, purchase equipment and supplies as needed, and add custodial services to clean classroom desks and carpets. Thus, the inclusion of implementation grant funding provides new BAB schools with the

resources needed to implement BAB without any strain on their existing limited Food and Nutrition Services budgets.

Community partner support is key to successful and sustainable BAB implementation

In Nevada, the role of many stakeholders, ranging from the Nevada Department of Agriculture to districts and schools to community partners, were critical to the success of the BAB legislation in terms of increased breakfast participation and sustainability of the BAB program. The Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) was responsible for the implementation of BAB law, including providing ongoing technical assistance to districts and schools, such as training on breakfast delivery models.

NDA also worked with school districts affected by the BAB law to ensure that they met at least the core intent of the law in the first several weeks of the first implementation year (2015-16 school year), a time where school districts did not secure all the resources needed as a result of the short implementation timeframe. The Department also worked diligently to develop and administer a process to award the first \$1 million available in implementation grant funding.

Three Square Food Bank worked with the NDA and CCSD to identify and prioritize schools for technical assistance and resources. Thus, schools new to BAB programs were given priority to receive funding and other technical supports compared to schools with existing BAB programs. In addition, Three Square Food Bank, Share Our Strength and the CCSD Food Service Department partnered to provide additional training to school cafeteria staff on breakfast models and promotional activities to boost participation.

Adequate time between passage of BAB legislation and the effective date of implementation is critical

There was short window of time between when Nevada's BAB legislation was signed into law and the effective date of implementation. Nevada's BAB legislation (SB503) passed in May 2015 and was signed in June 2015. Schools impacted by the legislation were required to implement the law on the first day of school in August 2015, having fewer than 90 days. This short duration between the passage of the legislation and the effective date of the legislation did not allow impacted school districts to acquire resources to facilitate BAB implementation. Further, the NDA and impacted school districts had seen an increased workload between June and October 2015 compared with the same months in the previous year, resulting from the short implementation window of the Breakfast After the Bell legislation.

It is critically important that state agencies and school districts have reasonable time for implementation to prepare for smooth and effective rolling out of their BAB programs. School districts and schools each begin the school year with different levels of resources such as personnel and infrastructure. Securing implementation grant funding, purchasing needed supplies and equipment, hiring additional staff, and training on the operation of BAB all require time of at least one year before the effective date of the legislation. This timeframe could vary depending on the unique circumstances of each state agency and school district.

Provision of formal peer-to-peer learning and training can help underperforming schools overcome implementation challenges

Formal peer-to-peer learning opportunities, wherein principals with successful BAB programs mentor or advise underperforming schools, was largely absent in the first year of BAB implementation in Nevada. Further, teachers in schools offering Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) reported that either there was no training at all or they were poorly or “minimally trained” on program implementation. School principals and teachers recognized the importance of continuous training and opportunities to share best practices on how to overcome implementation challenges. Principals and teachers would benefit from learning about others’ successes and challenges, so they can apply these lessons to BAB implementation at their schools. Moreover, such learning opportunities can influence support for the program among educators. It is crucial that formal peer-to-peer learning opportunities and robust training is provided to teachers and principals who are the key actors in the daily operation and implementation of BAB thereby effectively overcoming implementation challenges.

CONCLUSION

Breakfast After the Bell (BAB) is a proven and effective strategy to increase school breakfast participation thereby effectively tackling childhood hunger and food insecurity. Research also demonstrates the crucial role of BAB in boosting the health, academic and overall well-being of children. The high return on investment makes BAB implementation the most cost-effective and strategic investment a state can take to end childhood hunger. The tremendous gains in school breakfast participation and the high return on investment in the effective implementation of Nevada’s BAB law should serve as a catalyst and best practice for other states and school districts across the nation to follow suit.