

THE SCHOOL  
BREAKFAST  
PROGRAM IN  
NEW YORK CITY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

*Results from a Parent  
Survey Concerning  
Student Participation*



CITIZENS' COMMITTEE for CHILDREN  
O F N E W Y O R K I N C

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CITIZENS' COMMITTEE for CHILDREN  
OF NEW YORK INC

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) is a 68-year-old independent, non-profit, child advocacy organization, dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. CCC is devoted to increasing children's ability to access healthy food. A substantial body of literature shows that eating breakfast, which is widely recognized to be the most important meal of the day, beneficially impacts children's well-being and academic outcomes.<sup>1</sup> CCC's advocacy therefore includes efforts to improve children's access to nutritious breakfasts.

The School Breakfast Program (SBP), a federally assisted meal program operating in public and non-profit private schools, plays a critical role in ensuring that children have the opportunity to eat breakfast. The SBP reimburses participating schools for every in-school breakfast that they serve.<sup>2</sup> In exchange for this federal cash subsidy, participating schools offer free or reduced-price breakfasts to income-eligible children,<sup>3</sup> and agree to serve breakfasts that meet federal dietary standards.<sup>4</sup>

New York City public schools participate in SBP, and offer free breakfast to all students, regardless of their income-eligibility status.<sup>5</sup> Even though New York City's SBP is

universal, it does bear noting that a substantial number of New York City public school students qualify for free or reduced-price meals; out of New York City's over one million public school students, almost 725,000 are free or reduced-price eligible.<sup>6</sup> Despite these facts, recently-released data show that New York City's school breakfast participation rate is low. According to the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) 2012 report entitled *School Breakfast in America's Big Cities*, during the 2010-2011 school year, for every 100 eligible low-income New York City public school children who participated in the National School Lunch Program, only 33.9 ate in-school breakfast.<sup>7</sup> Among the 26 major American cities that FRAC studied, New York's 33.9 percent school breakfast participation rate was the lowest, trailing some of the best-performing cities, such as Newark (87.2 percent) and Detroit (86.8 percent), by over 50 percentage points.<sup>8</sup>

Given the significant share of New York City students who are income eligible for free or reduced-price meals and the City's troubling breakfast participation rate, there is a clear need to explore ways in which to increase the number of children who eat breakfast at school. One method to improve the consumption of breakfast at school is to expand the City's use of the Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) program, which provides in-classroom breakfast to children at the start of the school day.

The New York City Department of Education Office of School Food has made progress in implementing and expanding the BIC program, but more work remains to be done. The majority of New York City public school students who eat breakfast at school still do so in the cafeteria, early in the morning before the start of the school day. In December 2011, while 338 of New York City's over 1,600 public schools participated in the BIC program, only 64 of these schools provided BIC in every

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1 Charles E. Basch, "Healthier Students Are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap," *EQUITY MATTERS: Research Review* 6 (2010): 46-48; J.M. Murphy, "Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review," *Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science* 3(1) (2007): 30-32; Food Research and Action Center, "Breakfast for Learning: Scientific Research on the Link Between Children's Nutrition and Academic Performance." Fall 2011. Last accessed January 27, 2012. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf>; Food Research and Action Center, "Breakfast for Health." Fall 2011. Last accessed January 27, 2012. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf>.

2 United States Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service, "School Breakfast Program Fact Sheet." October 2011. Last accessed February 21, 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/AboutBFast/SBPFactSheet.pdf>.

3 Children whose families have incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for free meals, while those whose families' incomes are between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

4 The USDA's School Breakfast Program Fact Sheet explains that the relevant Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that "no more than 30 percent of an individual's calories come from fat, and less than 10 percent from saturated fat. In addition, breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein, calcium, iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin C and calories."

5 In 2003, New York City instituted a policy change mandating that New York City public school breakfast be free for all students, including those who did not qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

6 New York State Education Department, "New York State Report Cards." Last accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/reportcard/>.

7 Food Research and Action Center, "School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010-2011." January 2012. Last accessed February 21, 2012. [http://frac.org/pdf/urban\\_school\\_breakfast\\_report\\_2012.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/urban_school_breakfast_report_2012.pdf).

8 According to "School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010-2011," Newark and Detroit require BIC in almost all of their K-8 schools. *Ibid.*, at 7.

classroom.<sup>9</sup> In the remaining 274 schools that offered BIC, differing numbers of classrooms engaged in the program, with some schools piloting BIC in a single classroom, or for classes at a specific grade level. In sum, while there has been some advancement, very few New York City students receive BIC and there is much room to expand the program.

CCC supports the expansion of BIC in New York City schools because we strongly believe it will improve children's access to this necessary meal. The BIC method of in-classroom breakfast distribution is the best strategy to increase children's participation in SBP, because it helps to reduce the barriers that otherwise prevent students from eating breakfast at school.<sup>10</sup> For example, BIC removes the need for parents to rush their children to school early in the morning, before the school day begins, in order to guarantee that their children eat breakfast in the school cafeteria. BIC also eliminates the stigma some children feel when receiving a free meal in the cafeteria, prior to the beginning of the school day. Because BIC helps diminish these obstacles, it results in more children actually eating breakfast, which is critical to their healthy development and ability to achieve academically.<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to learn more about New York City's low school breakfast participation rates, New York City School breakfasts in general, and BIC in particular, CCC surveyed New York City parents about their children's school breakfasts.<sup>12</sup> Those surveyed thought breakfast was important for their children and appreciated that their children could receive a free breakfast at school. When

asked specifically about the BIC program, some survey participants, most of whose children had never received in-classroom breakfast, were unfamiliar with this program or its benefits. Conversely, almost all survey participants whose children currently or previously participated in the BIC program thought that the program was advantageous for their children.

Despite survey participants' primarily positive views regarding breakfast and the free distribution of breakfast in school, about a quarter of the survey participants' children had not eaten breakfast "every day" in the prior school week. The survey results also showed that "at home" was the most popular location in which survey participants' children had eaten breakfast in the preceding school week, although many survey participants reported that their children had eaten breakfast "at school" at some point during that same time period. Survey participants' children were least likely to have eaten breakfast "on the way to school."

Survey participants' responses to questions about where and how often their children had eaten breakfast in the week prior varied somewhat by borough. Notably, the children of survey participants in the Bronx were less likely than the children of Manhattan and Brooklyn survey participants to have eaten breakfast "every day" during the previous school week. Bronx survey participants' children were also less likely than the children of other survey participants to have eaten breakfast in their homes "every day" in the preceding week.

Finally, more than half of all survey participants reported that their children had "never" eaten breakfast "at home" and "at school" on the same day, while just over a third stated that their child had done so at some point in time. Our information gathered did not include data about the caloric and nutritional content or portion sizes of what the survey participants' children had eaten for breakfast in any location. Therefore, we could not, from this information alone, determine whether survey participants' children who had eaten breakfast in more than one location on the same day had consumed food that fell short of or exceeded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommendations about the nutritional and caloric make-up of a healthy breakfast.

The following is a detailed discussion of CCC's survey methodology, findings, and recommendations.

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9 The New York City Department of Education Office of School Food provided this information in January 2012.

10 The top performing cities in "School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010-2011" – Newark, Detroit, Houston, and Washington, D.C. – mandate BIC in almost all of their K-8 schools. *Ibid.*

11 United States Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service, "Strategies for School Breakfast Program Expansion, Breakfast in the Classroom." Last accessed January 27, 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/expansionstrategies.htm#classroom>; Food Research and Action Center, "Breakfast in the Classroom Fact Sheet." Last accessed January 27, 2012. [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/universal\\_classroom\\_breakfast\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/universal_classroom_breakfast_fact_sheet.pdf).

12 CCC also conducted this survey in order to provide in-kind support to a New York City Coalition Against Hunger-coordinated research project concerning the New York City School Breakfast Program and BIC.

## METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY SAMPLE

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CCC created a short street survey about school breakfast to be administered to parents whose children were attending New York City public elementary and middle schools. The survey was designed to explore parents' experiences with, and perceptions of, the breakfast provided in their children's schools, as well as to learn if, where, and how often their children had eaten breakfast in the previous school week.

CCC staff and volunteers conducted these surveys in late June 2011, prior to the end of the 2010-2011 school year. The surveys were administered in the following New York City locations: East Harlem, Manhattan; Mott Haven, the Bronx; Crotona Park, the Bronx; Prospect Park, Brooklyn; and Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Trained survey administrators approached potential survey participants in these neighborhoods to ask whether they were the parents or caretakers of a child currently attending a New York City

elementary and/or middle school,<sup>13</sup> and whether they were interested in taking a five-minute survey about their child's school breakfast.

CCC surveyed 97 participants: 28 in the Bronx, 35 in Brooklyn, and 34 in Manhattan.<sup>14</sup> The children of these survey participants ranged in age from four-years-old to fourteen-years-old. The median age was eight.

CCC analyzed the responses of all survey participants citywide and conducted borough-specific analysis of the data. It is important to note, however, that the sample size from each borough was small and may not be representative of the population of that borough.

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<sup>13</sup> The survey asked parents to answer the survey questions about only one child. If a survey participant had more than one child, that participant was asked to randomly choose one of his or her children about whom to answer all of the survey questions.

<sup>14</sup> In total, CCC had 102 survey participants, but five surveys were not valid due to data recording errors.

## DISCUSSION OF SURVEY AND FINDINGS

### What did survey participants think about breakfast and the School Breakfast Program?

Survey participants were asked to agree or disagree with a series of general statements about breakfast's value. The survey participants' responses to these questions demonstrated their recognition of breakfast's importance. For example, every survey participant agreed with the assertion, "It is important for my child to eat breakfast." In addition, about 66 percent of survey participants agreed with the statements, "My child does not feel well if s/he doesn't eat breakfast," and "My child is tired if s/he doesn't eat breakfast."

Survey participants were also aware of the School Breakfast Program, and appreciated that their children could participate in it. Of the 97 survey participants, all but four knew that universal free breakfast was provided in their

**"I'm very happy my child can eat breakfast at school. I think it's essential. My child would be hungry and distracted without breakfast. It's especially important for working mothers who don't have time to make breakfast at home and get to school and work on time."**

**—Survey Participant**

children's schools. Further, 95 survey participants agreed with the statement, "I am happy that my child can eat breakfast in school." Such responses showed that survey participants found breakfast, and the School Breakfast Program, valuable.

### What did parents think about the Breakfast in the Classroom program?

Given the limited number of schools that offer BIC, it is not surprising that at the time of the survey only six of the 97 survey participants reported that their children received in-classroom breakfast. Of the other survey participants, 86 reported that their children's schools provided breakfast in their cafeterias, and five did not know the answer to this question.

Five of the six survey participants whose children were receiving in-classroom breakfast made positive statements about the program, as did a survey participant who stated that her child had participated in BIC during the previous school year. Specifically, when asked to agree or disagree with the statement "It is a good idea to feed my child breakfast in his/her classroom," six of the seven survey participants who had children with current or previous BIC experience agreed. The seventh disagreed, but did not provide an explanation for her opinion, nor make any other statements about the program.

Further, 28.1 percent of all survey participants agreed that BIC was a good idea. Many of those survey participants whose children did not receive in-classroom breakfast, however, did not have as positive a view of BIC, since 61.5 percent of survey participants disagreed with this statement, and 10.4 percent did not have an opinion.

**"Breakfast should be available in classroom... [it's] too hard to get to school early enough to have it in cafeteria."**

**—Survey Participant**

• • •

**"Sometimes breakfast [in the cafeteria] is cut short and I don't like that. This is a problem because kids end up getting sent to class without breakfast."**

**—Survey Participant**

• • •

**"My son had breakfast in the classroom in pre-K and 1st grade. It was great because he really focused on eating right and eating his food. The cafeteria was too chaotic, especially for the young ones, and they were with the bigger kids. I think breakfast in the classroom was terrific."**

**—Survey Participant**

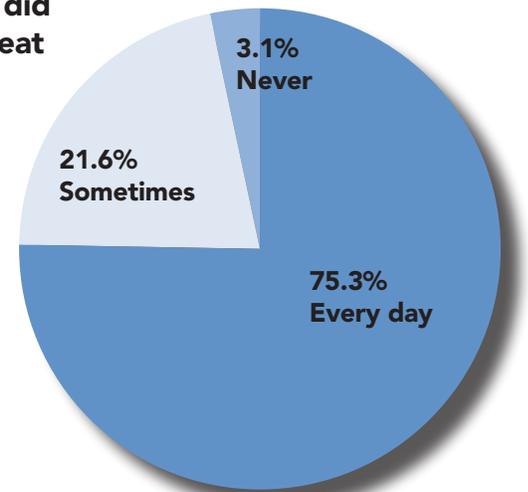
## How often in the past school week had the children of survey participants eaten breakfast?

Although, as noted above, all of the survey participants stated that breakfast was important, not all of their children had actually eaten breakfast each day during the previous school week. Survey participants were asked, “In the past school week, how often did your child eat breakfast?” and were directed to choose “every day,” “sometimes,” “never,” or “I don’t know” as an answer. In response, 75.3 percent of survey participants reported that their children had eaten breakfast “every day,” while 21.6 percent said that their children had eaten breakfast “sometimes.” Very few survey participants – three, or 3.1 percent – stated that their children had “never” eaten breakfast during the past school week. (See Figure 1 at right.)

A borough-specific review of responses to this survey question showed that the children of survey participants in the Bronx were less likely than children of survey participants in the other two boroughs to have eaten breakfast “every day” during the past week. Only 64.3 percent of Bronx survey participants stated that in the preceding school week their children had eaten breakfast “every day,” as compared to 74.3 percent of Brooklyn survey participants and 85.3 percent of Manhattan survey participants. (See Table 1 below.)

In sum, three-quarters of all of the survey participants’ children had eaten breakfast “every day” in the prior school week. However, survey participants’ responses to questions about how often in the last school week their children had eaten breakfast varied by borough, with children of survey participants in the Bronx being the least likely to have eaten breakfast “every day.”

**Figure 1**  
In the past school week, how often did your child eat breakfast?



**Table 1**

Ate Breakfast That Week	Bronx (28 children)	Brooklyn (35 children)	Manhattan (34 children)	Total (97 children)
Every day	64.3% (18 children)	74.3% (26 children)	85.3% (29 children)	75.3% (73 children)
Sometimes	28.6% (8 children)	22.9% (8 children)	14.5% (5 children)	21.6% (21 children)
Never	7.1% (2 children)	2.9% (1 child)	0	3.1% (3 children)

## Where had the children of survey participants eaten breakfast during the previous school week?

In addition to answering a general question about how often their children had eaten breakfast, survey participants were also asked to identify the locations in which their children had eaten breakfast, and how often their children had done so in those locations, during the previous school week.<sup>15</sup> Survey participants were first asked, “In the past school week, how often did your child eat breakfast at home?” Survey participants’ most frequent response to this question was “every day” (45.7 percent). Further, about 86 percent of survey participants reported that their children had eaten breakfast at home at some point in the previous school week, as compared to the 12.8 percent of survey participants who stated that their children had “never” eaten breakfast at home during that time. Thus, in the school week prior to the survey participants’ taking of the survey, their children were more likely to have eaten breakfast at home at some point, than to have never eaten breakfast at home at all. (See Figure 2 below.)

There were, however, children of survey participants who had eaten breakfast at school during the same time period. When asked, “In the past school week, how often did your child eat breakfast at school,” almost 60 percent of survey participants responded that in the prior school week their children had eaten breakfast “at school” at some point. Only 21.3 percent of survey participants, though, reported that their children had actually eaten breakfast in school

“every day” during the previous school week, while another 38.3 percent of survey participants said that their children had done so “sometimes.” More than a third of survey participants – 36.2 percent – reported that in the last week their children had “never” eaten breakfast “at school.” (See Figure 2 below.)

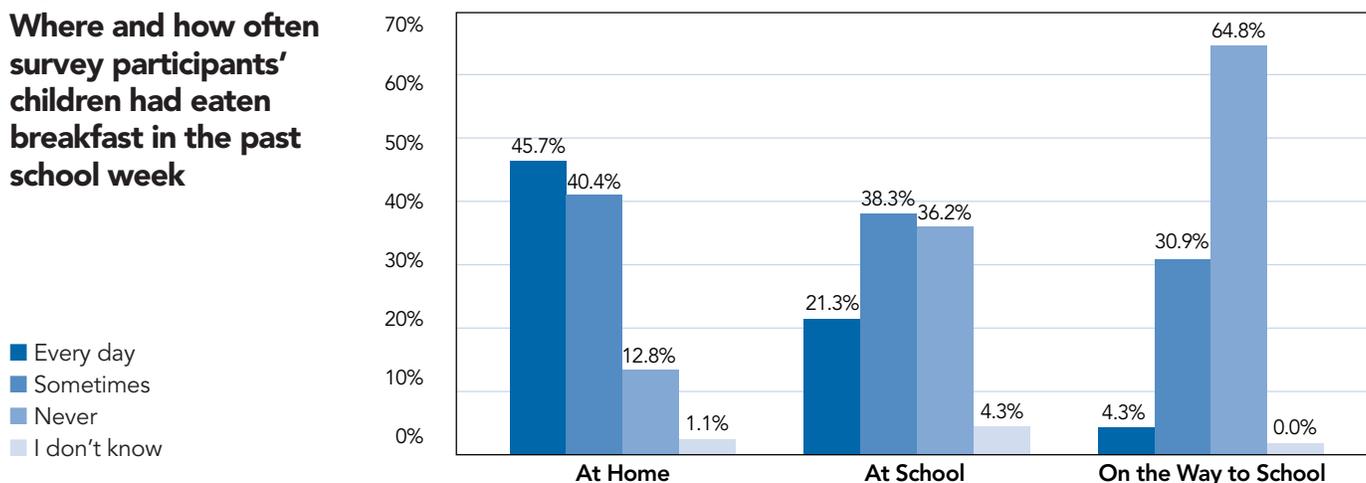
Finally, far fewer survey participants stated that their children had eaten “on the way to school” during the prior week than said that their children had eaten “at home” or “at school.” In response to the question “In the past school week, how often did your child eat breakfast on the way to school?” only four survey participants – 4.3 percent – said that their children had eaten “on the way to school” “every day,” and 30.9 percent responded that their children had “sometimes” eaten “on the way to school.” The majority of survey participants – 64.8 percent – stated that their children had “never” eaten on the way to school during the previous school week.<sup>16</sup> (See Figure 2 below.)

As was the case with survey participants’ answers to the general question about how often their children had eaten breakfast in the past school week, borough-specific analysis showed that survey participants’ responses to questions about how often their children had eaten breakfast in the above-specified locations differed across boroughs. (See Tables 2-4 on next page.)

<sup>15</sup> For this, and all other questions about how often the survey participants’ children had eaten breakfast in the previous week, the possible responses remained “every day,” “sometimes,” “never,” and “I don’t know.”

<sup>16</sup> Survey participants were also asked, “In the past school week, was there any other place where your child ate breakfast?” Only two people responded “yes.” Both of these survey participants specified that their children had eaten breakfast at a fast food establishment.

**Figure 2**  
Where and how often survey participants’ children had eaten breakfast in the past school week



First, the children of Bronx survey participants were less likely than the children of those surveyed in Brooklyn and Manhattan to have eaten breakfast “at home” “every day” of the prior school week. In fact, only about a third of Bronx survey participants reported that their children had eaten “at home” “every day” in the past week, as compared to over one-half of Manhattan survey participants. (See Table 2 below.)

The survey participants’ responses about how often their children had eaten breakfast in school were more uniform. In each borough, just over a third of survey participants reported that their children had “never” eaten breakfast “at school” in the past week. Also almost equal was the percentage of survey participants in the Bronx and Manhattan who said that their children had eaten “at school” “every day” in the past week. Survey participants from Brooklyn, however, provided somewhat different answers, with fewer of their children having eaten breakfast at school “every day” in the previous week

than the children of survey participants in other boroughs. (See Table 3 below.)

Finally, large percentages of survey participants in each borough stated that their children had not eaten “on the way to school” during the past week. Although some survey participants in each borough acknowledged that at some point in the prior week their children had eaten “on the way to school,” the only four survey participants who stated that their children had done so “every day” during the previous school week were from the Bronx, and represented 15.4 percent of Bronx survey participants. The children of Brooklyn and Manhattan survey participants were less likely to have eaten “on the way to school” at all during the last school week, with 41.2 percent of Brooklyn survey participants and 23.5 percent of Manhattan survey participants reporting that their children had “sometimes” done so, and no one reporting that this happened “every day.” (See Table 4 below.)

**Table 2**

Ate Breakfast at Home	Bronx (26 children)	Brooklyn (34 children)	Manhattan (34 children)	Total (94 children) <sup>17</sup>
Every day	34.6% (9 children)	47.1% (16 children)	52.9% (18 children)	45.7% (43 children)
Sometimes	46.2% (12 children)	47.1% (16 children)	29.4% (10 children)	40.4% (38 children)
Never	19.2% (5 children)	2.9% (1 child)	17.6% (6 children)	12.8% (12 children)
Do not know	0	2.9% (1 child)	0	1.1% (1 child)

**Table 3**

Ate Breakfast at School	Bronx (26 children)	Brooklyn (34 children)	Manhattan (34 children)	Total (94 children)
Every day	26.9% (7 children)	11.8% (4 children)	26.5% (9 children)	21.3% (20 children)
Sometimes	30.8% (8 children)	50% (17 children)	32.4% (11 children)	38.3% (36 children)
Never	34.6% (9 children)	35.3% (12 children)	38.2% (13 children)	36.2% (34 children)
Do not know	7.7% (2 children)	2.9% (1 child)	2.9% (1 child)	4.3% (4 children)

**Table 4**

Ate Breakfast on the Way	Bronx (26 children)	Brooklyn (34 children)	Manhattan (34 children)	Total (94 children)
Every day	15.4% (4 children)	0	0	4.3% (4 children)
Sometimes	26.9% (7 children)	41.2% (14 children)	23.5% (8 children)	30.9% (29 children)
Never	57.7% (15 children)	58.8% (20 children)	76.5% (26 children)	64.9% (61 children)

<sup>17</sup> Three survey participants responded “never” when asked, at the onset of the survey, how often their children had eaten breakfast in the past school week. These survey participants were therefore not asked any subsequent questions about where and how often their children had eaten breakfast during that school week. The smaller total sample size of 94 for this and other related questions about where children had eaten breakfast reflects the exclusion of those survey participants from the questions that did not apply to their children.

In sum, during the prior school week “at home” was the most prevalent location in which the children of survey participants had eaten breakfast, whereas “on the way to school” was the least popular place for the survey participants’ children to have eaten breakfast. In addition, many survey participants did report that their children had eaten breakfast “at school” at some point in the

previous week. A borough comparison of where survey participants’ children had eaten breakfast in the last week did reveal some similarities. However, this comparison also showed that children of Bronx survey participants were less likely than the children of other survey participants to have eaten breakfast “at home” “every day” in the preceding week.

### Did the children of survey participants eat breakfast at home and at school on the same day?

Currently, a debate exists about whether children who participate in the School Breakfast Program, including BIC, are eating breakfast in more than one location, and whether this behavior contributes to childhood obesity.<sup>18</sup> For example, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene administered a survey among third through fifth graders in 16 public schools and found an increased association between eating in multiple locations in the morning and BIC participation.<sup>19</sup> This study did not, however, explore the caloric or nutritional value of what children had eaten in the different locations.

Meanwhile, federal studies that have touched upon this issue demonstrate that even though some children may be eating breakfast at school and elsewhere on the same day, they are not necessarily eating two full morning meals or overeating.<sup>20</sup>

Cognizant of this on-going debate, CCC asked survey participants whether their children had ever eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day. Out of all survey participants, 36.2 percent reported that their children had, at some point, eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day. Conversely, 57.4 percent stated that their children had never eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day, while 6.4 percent did not know the answer to this question. (See Figure 3 at left.) Further, seven survey participants reported that their children had eaten breakfast at home and at school “every day” during the previous week. Finally, eight of the 83 survey participants who stated that their children had eaten breakfast on the day of the survey also reported that their children had eaten breakfast both at home and at school that morning.

Borough-specific analysis of responses to this question showed that the children of Bronx survey participants were more likely to have eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day than the children of participants in other boroughs. Of the Bronx survey participants, 46.2 percent answered “yes” when asked whether their children had ever eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day. Lower percentages of Brooklyn and Manhattan survey participants – 32.4 percent in each borough – responded “yes” to the same question.

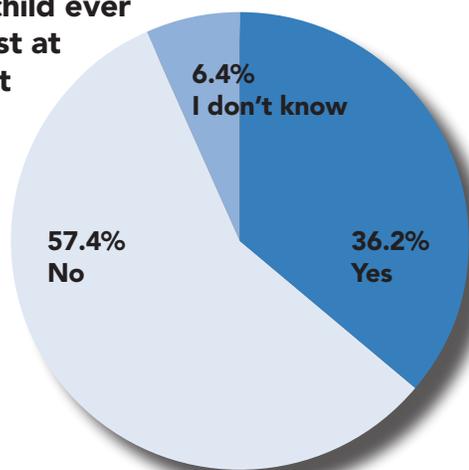
18 Note that, as described in a recent *New York Times* article, the childhood obesity rate for New York City public school students in grades kindergarten through eight dropped for the first time in decades. Anemona Hartocollis, “Obesity Rate Falls for New York Schoolchildren.” *New York Times*. Dec. 15, 2011, accessed January 27, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/2011/12/15/obesity-in-new-york-children-on-the-decline-officials-say/>.

19 CCC learned about DOHMH’s survey through both a DOHMH presentation and a circulated conference poster. The poster explains that the survey was conducted in 16 schools, nine of which provided BIC in at least some of their classrooms, and seven of which were used as a control. The survey was administered during January through March 2010, but CCC does not know on how many days the survey was conducted, nor were we privy to the raw data.

20 Barbara Devaney & Elizabeth Stuart, “Eating Breakfast: Effects of the School Breakfast Program,” Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., submitted to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service. August 1998; Joan E. McLaughlin, et al, “Evaluation of the School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Findings from the First Year of Implementation,” *Nutrition Assistance Program Report Series*, No. CN-02-SBP, Project Officer: Anita Singh. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, Alexandria, VA: 2002.

**Figure 3**

**Does your child ever eat breakfast at home and at school?**



CCC could not, on the basis of this survey, determine whether the children of survey participants had, on the same day, eaten full breakfasts at home, at school, or both. Conclusions could therefore not be drawn from the data collected about whether the children of survey participants had eaten food that, according to United States Department of Agriculture caloric and nutritional standards, comprised a complete breakfast in any or all of the locations in which they ate. We stress that just because a child may have eaten in more than one location on the same morning, it does not automatically follow that that child ate two full breakfasts, or that what that child ate exceeded recommended caloric and nutritional standards. Therefore, our data can simply be interpreted to show that while the children of some survey participants had at some point in time eaten something in more than one location during the same morning, more than half of the survey participants' children had not done so.

Finally, it is worth examining Bronx survey participants' responses to this area of questioning in conjunction with their reports about where their children had eaten breakfast during the previous school week. Of the three boroughs in which surveys were conducted, the Bronx had the highest percentage of survey participants who stated that their children had, at some point, eaten breakfast at home

and at school on the same day, and the lowest percentage of survey participants who stated that their children had eaten at home "every day" during the past week. On first inspection, these results may seem somewhat incongruous. These answers are compatible, however, given the Bronx's soberingly high level of food insecurity and the effect that food insecurity can have on eating habits.<sup>21</sup> Those who are food insecure cannot consistently access sufficient nutritious food, and therefore may, at certain times, eat less than adequate amounts of food because it is scarce, or eat more food because it is available.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Bronx survey results may reflect the amount of food insecurity present in that borough.

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21 According to a Food Research and Action Center report released in 2012, the 16th Congressional District in the South Bronx was the second most food insecure Congressional District in the country. Food Research and Action Center, "Food Hardship in America 2011: Data for Nation, States, 100 MSAs, and Every Congressional District." Last accessed March 16, 2012. [http://frac.org/pdf/food\\_hardship\\_2011\\_report.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_2011_report.pdf). A year earlier, the South Bronx was deemed the most food insecure Congressional District in the country, with almost 37 percent of residents reporting that at some point in the previous year they did not have money to buy food. Sam Dolnick. "The Obesity-Hunger Paradox." New York Times. March 12, 2010, accessed March 16, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/nyregion/14hunger.html>.

22 *Ibid.*; Tracy Hampton, "Food Insecurity Harms Health, Well-Being of Millions in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 298(16)(2007):1851-1853.

### **Did the survey participants' children who participated in the BIC program eat both at home and at school on the same day?**

In light of the small sample size of six, any findings about this limited subset of survey participants are cautiously drawn. It is, however, worth closely inspecting the information that these survey participants provided, given the dearth of extensive study about BIC in New York City.

A majority of survey participants whose children received in-classroom breakfast said "no" when asked, "Does your child ever eat breakfast at home and at school?" Out of the

six survey participants whose children received BIC, five – or about 83 percent – reported that their children had never eaten breakfast at home and at school on the same day, including on the morning of the survey. A single survey participant whose child received in-classroom breakfast responded "yes" to this question, and also stated that her child had eaten breakfast at home and at school "every day" in past school week.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on our findings, CCC recommends the following:

## 1. Mandate BIC in all New York City schools, beginning with immediate targeted outreach and expansion of the program in the Bronx and other high-poverty areas.

As noted in the background section of this report, the New York City public school breakfast participation rates are incredibly low, especially in light of City students' existing need for school food, which is evidenced by how many New York City public school children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. CCC therefore hopes to see BIC mandated in all New York City public schools. BIC has been shown to improve breakfast participation and greatly increase access to a free and healthy breakfast for

many children living in food insecure households and neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> We recognize that taking BIC to scale in the City's massive school system may take time. We therefore recommend commencing expansion efforts in high-poverty areas, such as the Bronx, as it is home to one of the most food insecure Congressional Districts in the country, and, according to our findings, has fewer children consistently eating breakfast "every day."

## 2. Increase parent education about all school meals, especially BIC.

CCC's survey results showed that many parents were aware of and appreciated the School Breakfast Program, but did not know about the BIC program, or how it could benefit their children. CCC appreciates the Department of Education's Office of School Food's ongoing work and outreach to teach parents about school breakfasts and encourage their children's participation, but suggests more focused efforts, which would include educational sessions about the benefits of BIC and how BIC can be established in one's own school. In addition,

schools must work to better communicate with parents not just about where their children's school breakfast is provided or located, but also about what foods children are offered, so that parents can make informed decisions about their children's breakfasts based on more complete information. In addition, all schools should ensure that weekly menus are distributed, and that parents can access information about all school meals, including breakfast, on school websites, as well as information about the locations in which those meals are served.

## 3. Conduct further research about experiences with BIC, from the perspective of students, parents, teachers, and principals.

Almost all of the survey participants whose children received BIC were extremely positive about the program. It would be of great value to hear from the students themselves about their experiences with the school

breakfast program in general, and BIC in particular. Also valuable would be conversations with principals, teachers, and more parents who have experienced BIC in their schools and classrooms.

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22 United States Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service, "Strategies for School Breakfast Program Expansion, Breakfast in the Classroom." Last accessed January 27, 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/expansionstrategies.htm#classroom>; Food Research and Action Center, "Breakfast in the Classroom Fact Sheet." Last accessed January 27, 2012. [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/universal\\_classroom\\_breakfast\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/universal_classroom_breakfast_fact_sheet.pdf). Food Research and Action Center, "School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2010-2011." January 2012. Last accessed March 12, 2012. [http://frac.org/pdf/school\\_breakfast\\_scorecard\\_2010-2011.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/school_breakfast_scorecard_2010-2011.pdf).

#### 4. Conduct further research to gather data about what children eat for breakfast.

As discussed in the findings section above, there is a dearth of research specifically examining what and how much children eat for breakfast, and why they may be eating breakfast in more than one place. Also lacking is information about whether the caloric and nutritional make-up of the foods that children eat in the morning fails to meet or surpasses what the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends for breakfast consumption. This lack of information makes it difficult, if not impossible, to draw conclusions about whether children are eating too much or too little, or foods that are healthy or unhealthy, for breakfast, and why they are doing so. It is important

to adequately study the nutritional and caloric make-up of what children eat for breakfast, in order to determine whether concerns about the impact of children's potentially eating breakfast in more than one place on the same day are legitimate. Such study may also provide insight into whether certain children eat breakfast in more than one place because they and their families are struggling with an inadequate level of food security, and are therefore eating as often as they can when food is actually available. In light of these questions, CCC recommends there be further study to explore this issue.

## CONCLUSION

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Through the School Breakfast Program, New York City can ensure that over one million public school children receive a healthy breakfast at the start of each day. This task is critical, not only because breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but also because about 725,000 of New York City’s public school children come from households with incomes low enough to qualify them for free or reduced-price meals. Despite these facts, New York City’s school breakfast participation rate remains low. The number of children who participate in school breakfast can, however, be markedly increased through both the expansion of the BIC program and parental engagement. Also, further study about opinions

of, and experiences with, BIC can provide insight into how to strengthen and expand this successful program, and ultimately school breakfast participation. Similarly, gathering information about New York City students’ breakfast habits – the what, where, and why of their breakfasts – will facilitate a better understanding of the choices and needs of New York City’s public school children and their families, which can ultimately help identify additional ways to use school-based programs and initiatives to address hunger and improve child nutrition. Overall, these steps present a significant opportunity to contribute to the food security and well-being of so many of New York City’s children.

# ABOUT CCC

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Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) has convened, informed and mobilized New Yorkers to make the city a better place for children. CCC's approach to child advocacy is fact-based and combines the best features of public policy advocacy with a tradition of citizen activism. Our focus is on identifying the causes and effects of vulnerability and disadvantage, recommending solutions to problems children face and working to make public policies, budgets, services and benefits more responsive to children. Our mission is to ensure that every New York City child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

CCC is a non-profit organization supported entirely by individuals, foundations and corporations.

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