



Feeding Our Future Program: Interim Findings

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Students who eat morning meals at least three days during a school week achieve higher grades and higher ratings on learning skills compared to students who eat morning meals on fewer days or who never eat them.¹ These are some of the interim findings from the evaluation of the Feeding Our Future program.

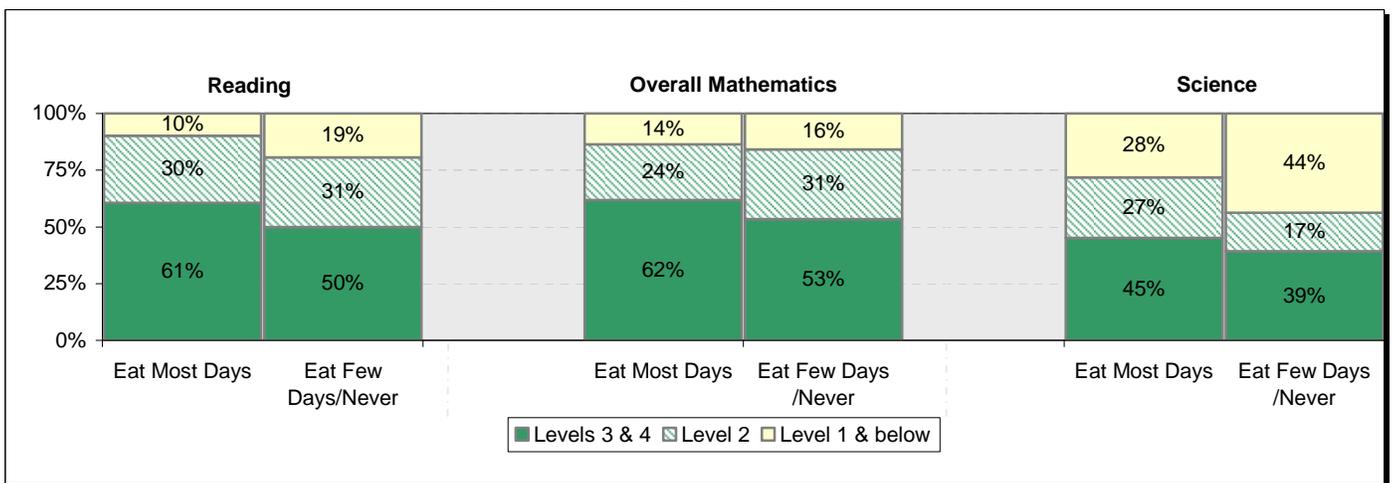
The Feeding Our Future program is a free, universal morning meal pilot program. It was initiated in 2008 in four middle schools (Grades 6 to 8) and three secondary schools located in the Jane and Finch area. The Jane and Finch area faces considerable socio-economic challenges, such as elevated rates of poverty, immigration and violent incidents. The program aims to provide a healthy morning meal for about 6,000 students in the seven schools.²

A number of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to evaluate the program. The findings presented here are based on a student survey that was conducted at the end of the second year of the program (Spring 2010) and on interviews with school administrators, teachers, and school and program staff. In the middle schools, almost all students (97%) participated in the program; the vast majority (82%) participated at least three days in a school week. The findings presented here for academic achievement and learning skills pertain to middle school (i.e., Grades 7 and 8) student cohorts (1,332)³, who had the opportunity to eat the school meal for two years.

Academic Achievement

The Grade 7 and 8 students who ate morning meals on most days during a school week achieved better grades and were less likely to be at-risk (achieving Level 1 and below on their report cards) compared to those who ate morning meals on only a few days or who never ate in the morning.⁴

Figure 1: Grades 7 and 8 Student Academic Achievement (2009-10 Term 3 Report Card) and Eating in the Morning During a School Week



¹This includes eating either at home or at school and eating at home as well as at school.

² For more information about the Feeding Our Future program see http://www.studentsuccess.ca/feeding_our_future.html

³ There was a 92% student survey return rate for Grades 7 and 8; 96% of the student survey responses were matched with the report card data.

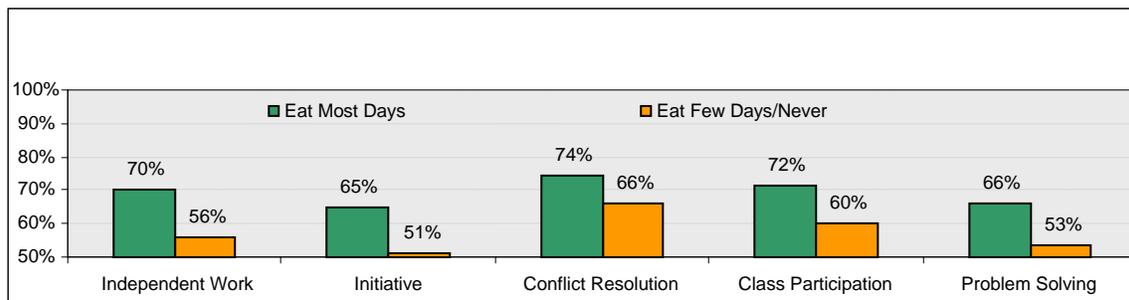
⁴ Causal pathways relating to the variables presented here are multi-factorial and complex; caution is advised when interpreting the causality of these results.

The differences are significant in the case of Reading, where 61% of students who ate the morning meal on most days in a school week achieved or exceeded the provincial standard (Levels 3 and 4) compared to half (50%) of students who ate morning meals on only a few days or not at all (see Figure 1). Fewer students (28%) who ate morning meals at least three days in a school week were at-risk in Science, compared to nearly half (44%) of those who ate morning meals only one to two days or who never ate them.

Learning Skills

Students who ate morning meals most days in a school week achieved better results on their learning skills (i.e., excellent or good) compared to those who ate in the morning on only one to two days or who never ate in the morning. Differences were remarkable in the areas of independent work (70% vs. 56%), initiative (65% vs. 51%), problem solving (66% vs. 53%), and class participation (72% vs. 60%) (see Figure 2).

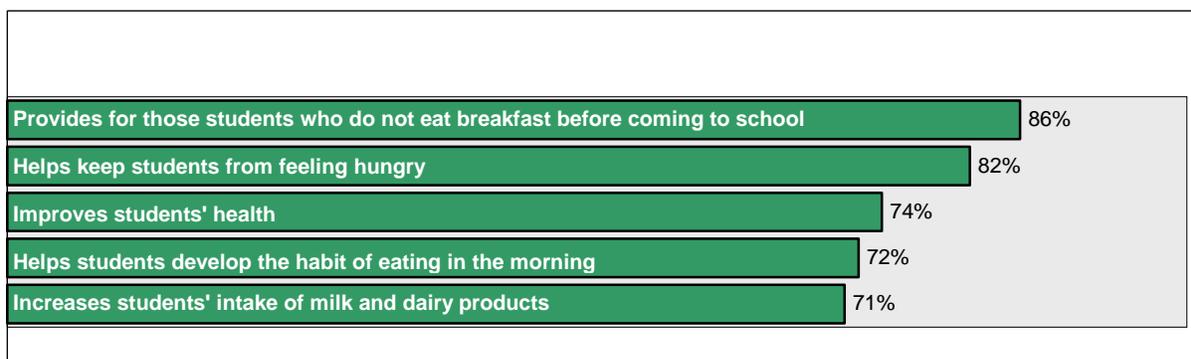
Figure 2: Percentage of Grades 7 and 8 Students Who Achieved “Excellent” or “Good” in Learning Skills (2009-10 Term 3 Report Card)



Perceived Benefits

During the interviews conducted as part of the research, most of the school administrators, teachers, and school and program staff indicated numerous benefits resulting from eating morning meals, such as improved student behaviour or attitude, reduced tardiness, reduced incidence of disciplinary problems, improvements in ability to stay on task, etc. Students who completed the survey (4,050) from the participating middle and secondary schools, were asked about the benefits of this program. Most students agreed that it fulfilled their basic needs (e.g., provided a breakfast for those who wouldn't otherwise eat in the morning, kept students from feeling hungry, etc.) and improved their well-being (e.g., improved their health, increased their intake of milk and dairy products) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Top Five Benefits of the Morning Meal Program



The interim results suggest that universal school morning meal programs can be a valuable intervention measure to facilitate student success and well-being. A comprehensive report will be released once all analyses are completed.

Questions or comments? Contact Eshwar.Muthuswamy@tdsb.on.ca