

“Breakfast Works,” by Dr. Chris Jones

Providing free breakfasts, lunches, and snacks in schools works. It’s a proven strategy to support student health and academic success.

Sarah Sanders' recent proposal to fund free school breakfasts for every child in Arkansas is the right thing to do. I’ve long believed that kids learn better when they’re fed. Breakfast works! And feeding kids has been shown to enhance student well-being and academic performance.

Research consistently underscores the significant benefits of providing free meals to students. Access to nutritious food has been linked to improved health, increased food security, and enhanced academic outcomes. A 2023 study in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that children receiving onsite meals and snacks were more likely to be food-secure, in good health, and had lower odds of emergency hospital admissions compared to those bringing food from home.

Moreover, participation in school meal programs has been associated with better academic performance. A 2021 report from the Brookings Institution analyzed the impact of a program offering schoolwide free meals and found improvements in math performance, particularly among elementary and Hispanic students. The same study noted a significant reduction in suspensions among certain student groups.

The plan is to fund this utilizing tax revenue from medical marijuana sales to support this program is a step towards addressing child hunger here in Arkansas.

Several states have implemented similar initiatives, utilizing various funding mechanisms. For instance, California funds its universal free school meal program through general revenue appropriations, while Massachusetts utilizes revenue from a 4% tax on incomes over \$1 million. Colorado's program is supported by a voter-approved tax measure that reduces income tax deductions for households earning over \$300,000.

Evidence suggests that these funding strategies can be effective. States like California and Maine, which have implemented universal free school meal programs, have reported positive outcomes in terms of student participation and reduced food insecurity.

While the Governor’s current plan to fund this breakfast program is a positive step, it's essential to consider sustainable funding sources for such programs. Integrating the cost into the state's general fund would ensure long-term stability and reflect a commitment to the health and education of Arkansas's children.

The devil is always in the details, but this appears to be a good move by the administration.

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.