

# Expanding Breakfast Participation in the School District of Philadelphia

Catherine Tkatch, Ebru Erdem-Akçay, and Erin Cassar, *Office of Research and Evaluation*; Stacy Smith, *Division of Food Services*

## BACKGROUND

- Eating breakfast at school is associated with improved academic performance, attendance, and punctuality<sup>1</sup>, as well as better nutrition<sup>2,3</sup> and decreased food insecurity<sup>4</sup>.
- The Division of Food Services offers alternatives to traditional “before the bell” cafeteria breakfast service. Grab & Go carts allow students to take items to class and Breakfast in Classroom (BIC) gives students the chance to eat “after the bell.”
- In 2017-18, Food Services targeted 30 schools to adopt alternative breakfast models.
- The Coalition Against Hunger offered prizes for increasing breakfast participation to schools that joined the Philadelphia School Breakfast Challenge. 41 District schools signed up in 2017-18.
- This study analyzes school-level monthly breakfast participation rates (reported by Food Services).
- This is the first District-wide comparison of breakfast service models in Philadelphia public schools.

## OBJECTIVES

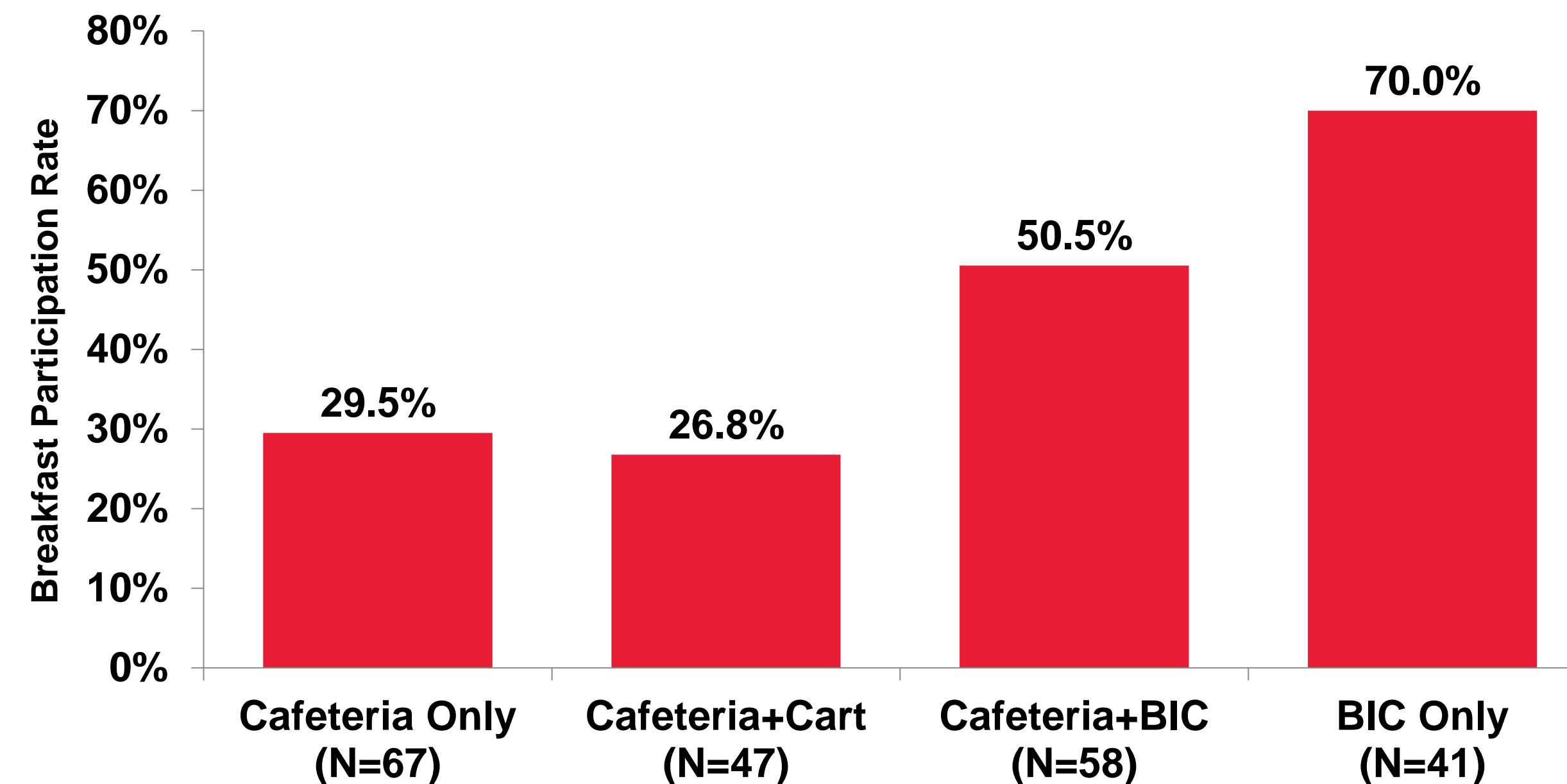
- To explore the association between breakfast models and breakfast participation rates across District schools.
- To inform key stakeholders about the results of two breakfast initiatives: Food Services targeting schools to adopt alternative breakfast models and the Philadelphia School Breakfast Challenge.

## METHODS

- Categorized District schools by 2017-18 breakfast model. Identified 2017-18 Breakfast Challenge schools and schools targeted by Food Services.
- Computed school-level mean breakfast participation rates for September through December of 2016 and 2017 to compare by breakfast model and initiative.

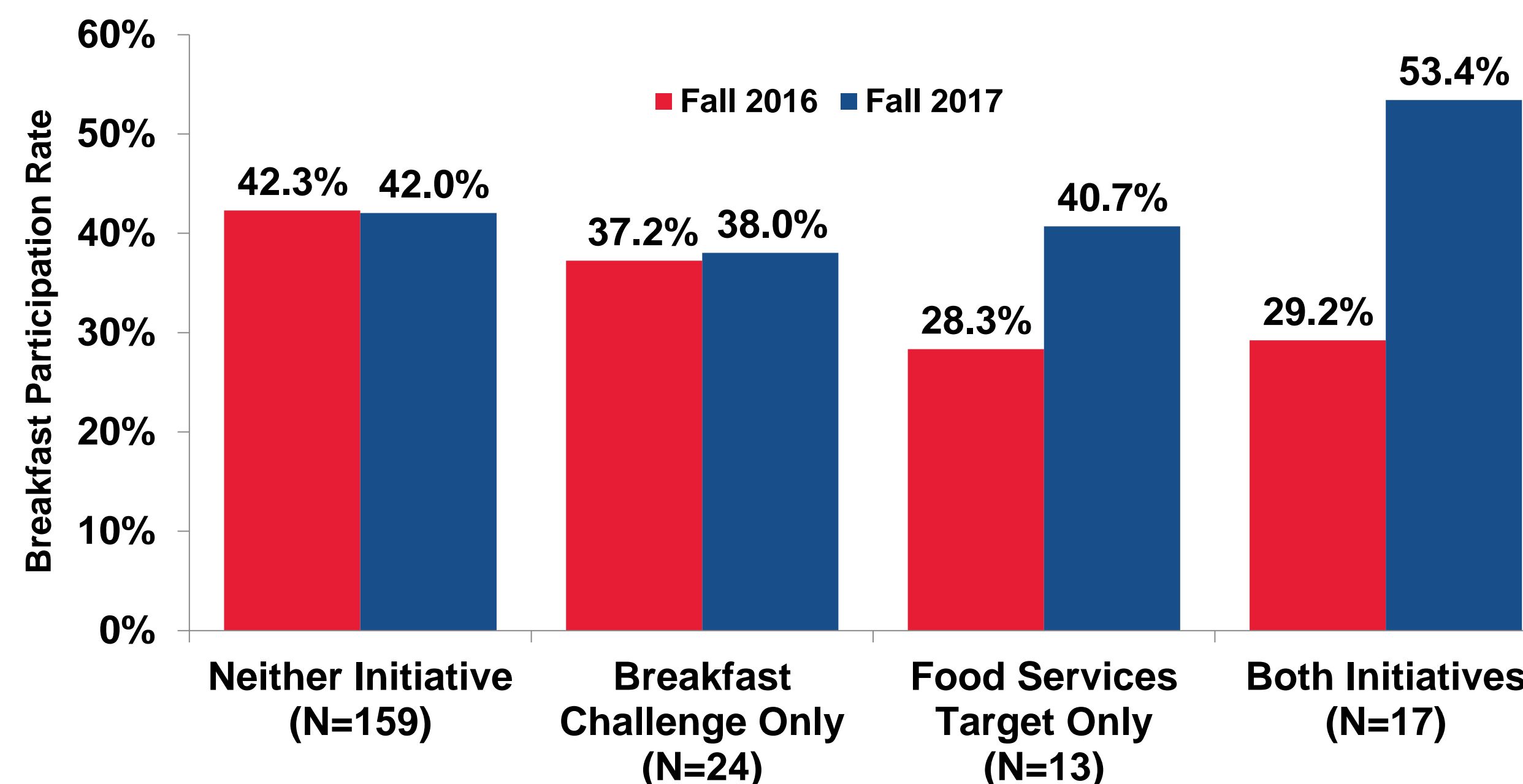
## FINDINGS

Figure 1. Breakfast Participation by Model, Fall 2017



Notes: Breakfast participation rate = # of meals served / # of students enrolled. Most Grab & Go carts (64%) are in high schools and BIC is almost exclusively implemented in elementary schools.

Figure 2. Change in Breakfast Participation by Initiative, Fall 2016 and Fall 2017



Notes: Breakfast participation rate = # of meals served / # of students enrolled.

- Breakfast in Classroom models show significantly higher breakfast participation rates than traditional cafeteria service.
- The addition of Grab & Go carts to schools with cafeteria models is not associated with significant changes in breakfast participation.
- Schools that both were targeted by Food Services and participated in the Breakfast Challenge demonstrated the largest increases in breakfast participation over one year.
- Breakfast Challenge schools that were not targeted by Food Services did not see significant increases in breakfast participation.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Supporting schools in implementing Breakfast in Classroom models may be an effective way to increase breakfast participation, especially when schools are encouraged to also sign up for the Breakfast Challenge.
- 2018-19 Breakfast Program Expansion Implementation Study:
  - Explore the association between school demographics/climate and adoption of alternative models.
  - Observe and conduct stakeholder interviews to identify factors that contribute to or impede the successful adoption of alternative breakfast models.

## CONTRIBUTORS

- Funded by the Pennsylvania (PA) Department of Human Services through PA Nutrition Education Tracks, a part of USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Division of Food Services
- Coalition Against Hunger

### Contact Information

Catherine Tkatch  
Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE)  
(215) 400-6444  
ctkatch@philasd.org

<sup>1</sup> Murphy JM, Pagano M, Nachmani J, Sperling P, Kane S, & Kleinman R. (1998). The relationship of school breakfast to psychosocial and academic functioning: Cross-sectional and longitudinal observations in an inner-city sample. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 152, 899-907.  
<sup>2</sup> Bhattacharya J, Currie J, & Haider SJ. (2006). Breakfast of champions? The School Breakfast Program and the nutrition of children and families. *Journal of Human Resources*, 41(3), 445-466.  
<sup>3</sup> Clark MA & Fox MK. (2009). Nutritional quality of the diets of US public school children and the role of the school meal program. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109(2), S44-S56.  
<sup>4</sup> Bartfield JS & Ahn HM. (2011). The School Breakfast Program strengthens household food security among low-income households with elementary school children. *Journal of Nutrition*, 141(3), 470-475.

