



2024

THE BREAKFAST CONNECTION

FEEDBACK SURVEY



YMCA
Schools'
Breakfast
Program

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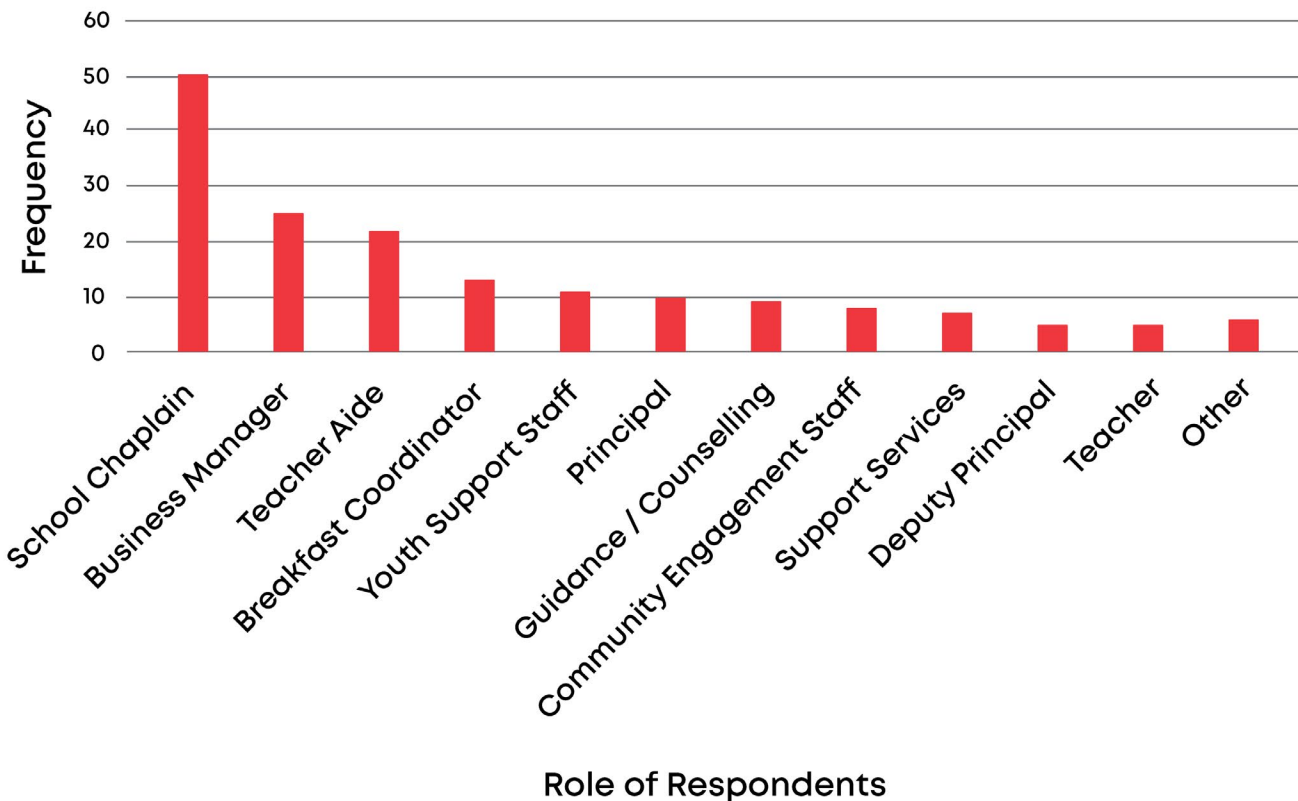
Background

The YMCA Breakfast Program supports over 380 schools across South-East, regional and remote Queensland, with various types of support offered within this program, including provision of food, funding, family vouchers and hampers. A total of 361 participating QLD schools were sent a questionnaire survey regarding the support received from the Y by their school. The questionnaire survey is used annually for service evaluation and was made up of both open and close-ended questions resulting in the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was opened on February 16th and closed

on March 1st in 2024. In total there were 186 respondents to the survey with responses being representative of the total number of respondents rather than the total number of schools as some schools had several responses. For surveys to be included in data analysis, over 40% of the relevant questions must be completed. Subsequently the final sample size used in analysis was 171, with 15 responses being excluded.

Survey participants included SBP representatives from various areas of the school community.

Figure 1: Distribution and types of roles of questionnaire respondents



Background

The other category was made up of six members including early years line manager, Head of Special Education Services [HOSES], wellbeing facilitator, welfare worker, youth health nurse and head of inclusion.

The collected data was collated in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and deidentified, with each school being provided a unique ID. Quantitative data was evaluated through the statistical software IBM SPSS. As this data was largely descriptive, frequencies were the primary analysis method. Qualitative data was analysed through the Braun and Clark framework for thematic analysis, where five key themes were identified in order to better categorise and evaluate findings.

The key findings from the 2024 feedback survey could be categorised into the following five themes. These themes were:

1. 'Family challenges and social determinants';
2. 'Community support and relationships';
3. 'Program participation and impact';
4. 'Student welfare and wellbeing'; and
5. 'SBP barriers'.

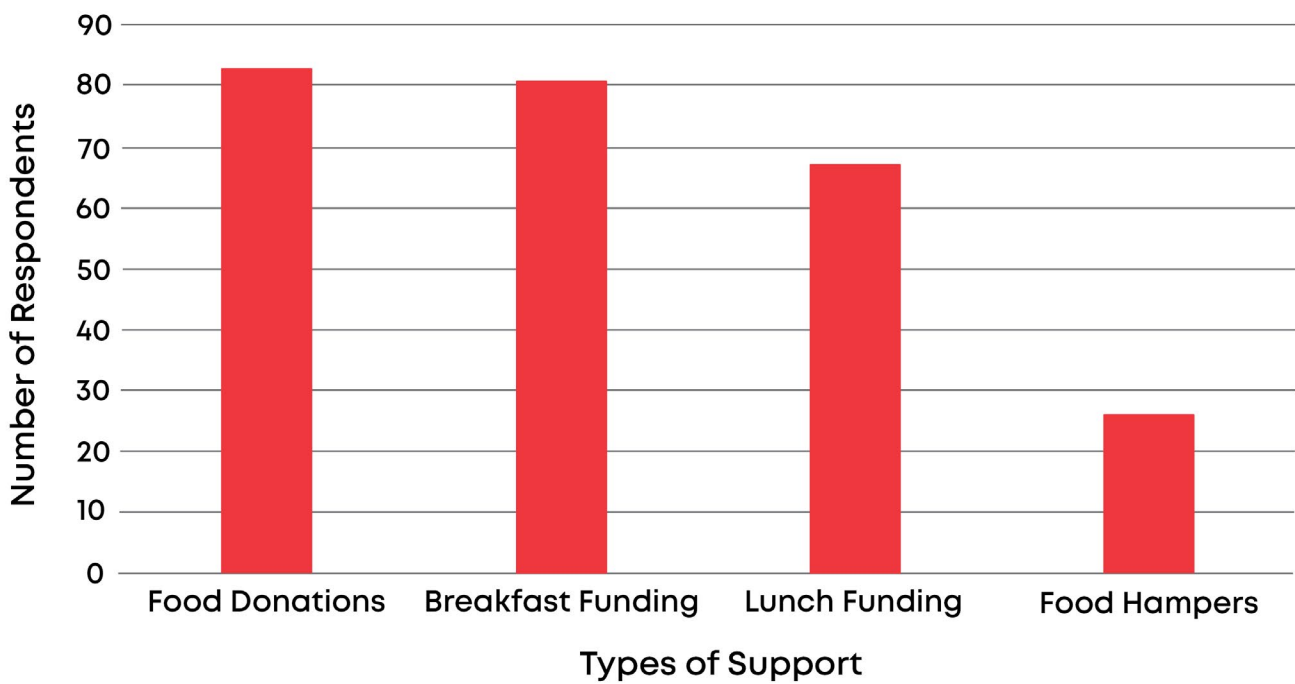
The quantitative data was then linked to the relevant themes, supporting the perspectives and opinions provided by SBP representatives.

Various different types of supports are offered within The YMCA School Breakfast Program. Respondents were asked to identify the types of support their school receives, providing insight into which program initiatives are more frequently relied upon.



Background

Figure 2: Provision of support received by the Y*



**Schools may receive multiple support services simultaneously.*



Findings

Theme 1: Family Challenges and Social Determinants

Families experiencing social and familial difficulties may struggle to send their children to school with breakfast or food. Analysis of qualitative data presented key concepts that were classified into two groups: the factors driving the need for The YMCA SBP, such as the cost of living and homelessness, and the benefits that SBPs offer, including alleviating stress, providing support during illness and disability, and addressing food insecurity through food and financial relief. Survey respondents identified rising unemployment, escalating costs of housing, food, and fuel, as well as illness and disability, as the primary factors driving the need for SBPs.

“One parent rang the school to say her children would not be coming for the next few days until she gets her next pay because she didn’t have enough food for them. We were able to provide the students with breakfast and lunch and also give the family a voucher to help ease the burden that week.”

(ID 85, Teacher Aide, Regional School)

Most participants recognised the role of SBPs in alleviating food insecurity among children and families. The provision of food donations, hampers, or funding from The Y provides schools with the means to support families with inadequate food or financial resources. The vouchers and hampers were especially valuable for supporting families outside of school hours.

“Providing food has certainly reflected the burden from the cost of living. Numbers have increased in the last 12 months, students coming to school with nothing.”

(ID 172, Youth Support Coordinator, Regional School)



“With the funding provided we have been able to help different families with either vouchers or food hampers to help them through their various difficulties. Some have only needed short term help while others have needed longer term help.”

(ID 6, Breakfast Coordinator, Regional School)

Findings

Theme 2: Community Support and Relationships

The Y's SBP was credited by many respondents as being key in fostering community relationships and engagement, providing leadership opportunities for students, building trust among students and families and the wider school community, and reducing shame or stigma. 97% of respondents reported they found SBPs valuable for students and the wider school community, and 61% felt it highly important that schools continue providing breakfast programs.

"We are a small school and the children that do receive our lunches feel connected and that they "fit" in with the other children. One little boy loves coming to get his lunch and then runs straight outside with the boys in his class. You can see he is happier to be the same."

(ID 75, Business Manager/School Leader, Regional School)

The Y's program was perceived by survey participants as paramount in contributing to a heightened sense of belonging and connection by students, and improving the connection between students and their families, and school staff. It was recognised that this enhanced sense of belonging, reduced shame and removed stigma. Fostering trusting relationships between families and the school was identified as a significant benefit provided by The Y's program.

"...It allows families to view the school in a view that we care about the student and want to support their best educational journey, even if this means supporting the family with hampers. It also gives the students an element of trust within the school staff as they see us help their parents."

(ID 142, Chaplain, Metro School)

Finally, the growth in confidence seen in students that volunteer in the program was discussed throughout survey responses, allowing students to hone social, communication, and customer service skills.

"We had 2 students who asked if they could volunteer to help with Breaky Club. Both students have struggled in the past to make positive connections with peers to create friendship groups. Through volunteering at Breakfast Club, both students have gotten to know other students, increased their self-confidence, social skills, and communication skills and now both have a group each of 5 or more friends that they now hang out with."

(ID 111, Youth Support Coordinator, Regional School)

Findings

Theme 3: Program Participation and Impact

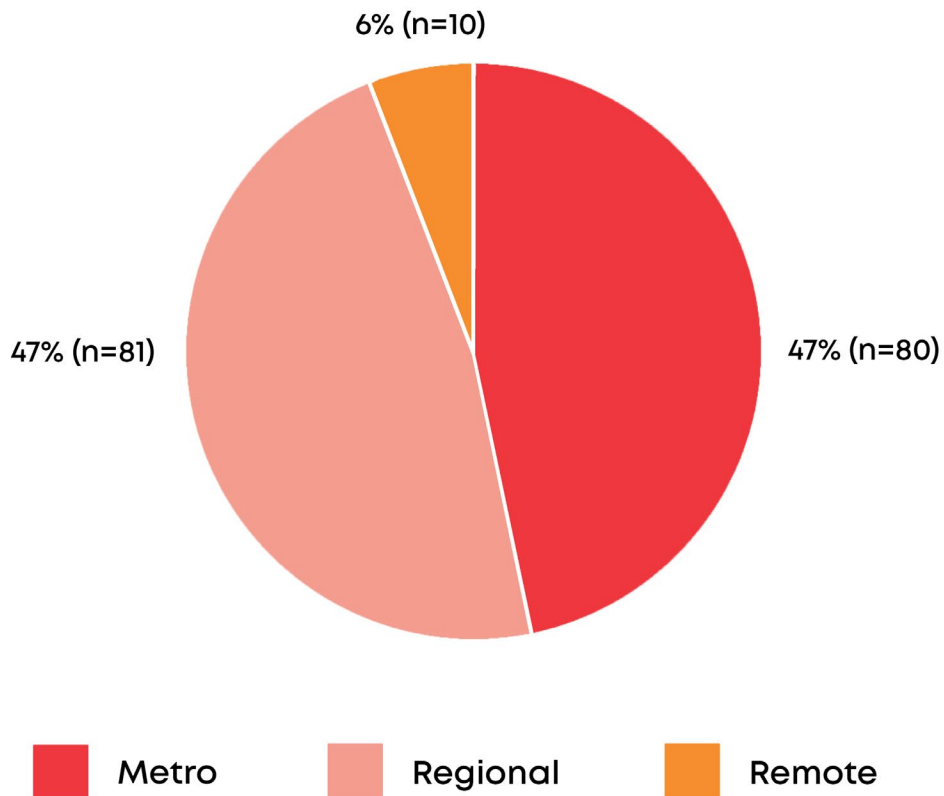
Two key areas were recognised as representing the overall impact and reach of the Y's program – participation in the SBP and the provision of food.

Survey respondents identified their school's regional classification as either metro, regional, or remote. This is beneficial in understanding the reach of The YMCA School Breakfast Program.

“We try and spread funding across our breakfast and lunch programs. We have a huge number of students that don't have access to breakfast each day and at least half of our students don't have lunch at some stage. We would find it extremely difficult if we didn't have the funding that the YMCA provides.”

(ID 11, Teacher Aide, Regional School)

Figure 3: School's regional classification



Findings

Theme 3: Program Participation and Impact

In all three regions, the median number of days the SBP operated was five. The frequency data showed that more than half of the respondents' schools ran the program five days a week in each region (metro: 56%, n = 45; regional: 54%, n = 44; remote: 60%, n = 6).

The provision of food is central to the program's purpose and is well-documented in the qualitative data. Respondents view the program as playing a crucial role in supplying food to children who might otherwise go without. In many instances students and families are now aware they can rely on the program to provide extra support on days when they have inadequate food available at home.

“Students and their parents are comfortable with knowing that food is available at school if they don't have any at home. Parents now feel comfortable to contact us and tell us that their child has no or limited food for the day, knowing we can provide them with healthy options.”

(ID 114, Business Manager/School Leader, Metro School)

Additionally, for many children, simply providing food improves their nutritional intake. For those in households where food variety and quality cannot be prioritized, the program serves to diversify their dietary options. Some schools leverage the program's support to organise activities

such as cooking classes, that help children enhance food preparation skills.

“Students learn valuable cooking skills and create meals for themselves and others. They learn about hygiene, sharing, caring hospitality, rather than just struggling to get their own nutrition needs met. With your [the Y] help we ensure there is always enough, at school.”

(ID 139, Wellbeing Faciliator, Metro School)

Daily participation in the SBP varied significantly among schools, with some serving breakfast to only 1% of the student population, while the highest recorded participation was 79%. The average attendance was 16%. Several respondents noted high levels of participation and increasing attendance in their SBPs, indicating a strong and ongoing demand for this support.



Findings

Theme 4: Student Welfare and Wellbeing

The survey responses highlighted the program's impact on various aspects of student welfare and wellbeing, including reducing hunger and fatigue, providing pastoral care, improving learning and focus, enhancing classroom behavior, and increasing school attendance.

Quantitative data offered insight into respondents' perceptions of the program's benefits for individual students. Three key benefits were identified from this data, these included improvements in classroom behaviour (75%, n 128), academic outcomes (41%, n 70) and concentration in class (79%, n 135).

"...For some other students we were seeing examples of poor behaviour. When we asked the child when they last ate they would often say the day before. Ensuring these students have something to eat before heading to class of every morning has seen an improvement in their behaviour."

(ID 96, Community Liaison Officer, Metro School)

Qualitative responses provided more in-depth descriptions of these benefits. Principals and teachers from various schools reported on noticeable improvements in classroom concentration and behaviour when breakfast was provided to children who previously went without.

While 27% (n = 46) of respondents acknowledged the program's implicit

role in encouraging school attendance in the quantitative data, this impact was emphasised more strongly in the qualitative responses. Many respondents expressed a marked improvement in attendance due to students being able to access food at school.

"We had a number of children with poor attendance. On enquiry with families, it seemed that for many they didn't come to school as the family could not fill the child's lunch box. By providing breakfast and lunch for these students we have seen a positive shift in their attendance."

(ID 96, Community Liaison Officer, Metro School)

Some respondents mentioned using the program as an opportunity for welfare check-ins by teachers, chaplains, and support staff. They reported that these programs allow them to build relationships and connections with the students in a safe and comfortable environment. Additionally, 94% (n = 160) of respondents agreed that students enjoyed and felt comfortable attending the breakfast program.

"Personally, I have seen students better able to manage their learning and attention as the day progresses as they have had something to eat..."

(ID 38, Teacher, Metro School)

Findings

Theme 5: SBP Barriers

Although the questionnaire did not include any questions regarding barriers to the program, several of the qualitative responses still provided insight into some barriers that may arise. The most significant of these barriers included insufficient funding and volunteering alongside time constraints.

“We have parents pushing for 5 days a week, but we do not have the volunteers needed for this to happen. In fact, we are thinking of going to 2 days for this reason.”

(ID 132, Chaplain, Regional School)

SBP staffing is largely dependent on volunteers, volunteering at schools is inherently transient and inconsistent, consequently for some schools a lack of volunteers impacts their ability to run the program at all or across multiple days of the week. Though in some schools they have been able to reduce reliance on external volunteers by utilising students as volunteers. This has also been reported to be beneficial for the students, as recognised in theme 1 this allows students to develop leadership and interpersonal skills.

Funding was also identified as a common barrier, the schools participating in these programs often do not have the funds or resources to independently provide these services and are consequently dependent on the Y to continue supporting children and families.



Conclusion

School breakfast programs aim to tackle food insecurity and enhance nutritional quality. They also foster community by offering social learning opportunities and creating welcoming spaces that promote inclusion and care, showcasing the school's dedication to the wellbeing of students and families.

This survey sought to understand the perceived benefits of the YMCA School Breakfast Program from the perspectives of staff involved in the program. The results showed that the program is important in enhancing students' wellbeing and learning. Additionally, it promotes connectedness among the school community. These benefits are significant for schools, as they have been associated with improved attendance, increased social-emotional wellbeing, and higher engagement in class among students.

Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of our sponsors. Thank you for supporting our work in building healthy, connected, and thriving communities.

We would also like to thank the schools that participated in the survey. Your insights provided a good picture of the benefits and challenges involved in providing school-based food relief.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Queensland Department of Education for granting us permission to share these findings.



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