

# THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE



## Evaluation of the School Breakfast Clubs Program Interim Report

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April 2017

[vu.edu.au](http://vu.edu.au)  
CRICOS Provider No. 00124K  
CRICOS Provider No. 02475D





## *Introduction*

Around Australia on any given school day ‘three students in every class will arrive at school hungry or without having eaten breakfast’ (Foodbank 2015). There are significant negative consequences of not eating a healthy breakfast, that impact on a child’s learning and their overall wellbeing (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013; Mills 2011). Teachers report that students can lose more than two hours of learning time each day they come to school hungry. Unfortunately teachers are reporting that the problem is getting worse not better (Foodbank 2015).

The provision of food in schools is one of the most obvious policy interventions in children’s diets (Belot and James 2009). Providing food in schools is considered to improve student concentration, nutrition and academic performance (Crawford et al. 2016). School breakfast clubs are also designed to build connections between families, schools and their local communities. In the 2015-2016 Budget, the Victorian Government committed \$13.7 million over four years to Foodbank Victoria to establish breakfast clubs at 500 government primary schools and serve breakfast to up to 25,000 children across the state every school day.

In partnership with Foodbank Victoria the aim of the School Breakfast Clubs Program is to tackle the disadvantage children experience through the impact of hunger and to make ‘sure every student, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to reach their potential’ (Premier of Victoria 2016). The aim of the SBCP is to provide a free breakfast to students in 500 of Victoria’s most disadvantaged government primary schools over four years, from 2016-2019.

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# The School Breakfast Clubs Program

## Overview

The Victorian Government School Breakfast Clubs Program (SBCP) commenced in 2016 with an aim to alleviate the negative consequences for children who are starting the school day hungry. The Victorian Government will fund the SBCP for four years from 2016 – 2019 in 500 of the most disadvantaged primary schools around the state. Participant schools were identified by their 2015 Student Family Occupation (SFO) data that is collected at school level and is considered to be the most accurate measure of disadvantage (DET 2017). The SBCP commenced in 2016 with some schools joining in term 1 and the remaining schools in stages from term 2 to term 3. By Term 3, 2016, 500 schools were offering healthy breakfast food to their students.

The aim of the SBCP is to offer a healthy breakfast every school day to students who may otherwise arrive at school hungry. Enabling children to enjoy a healthy, nutritious breakfast before they start the school day will allow them to ‘engage and participate fully in all the educational and social opportunities that the school years offer’ (Foodbank 2017). The program aims to improve student learning and children’s engagement in the classroom, improve attendance and reinforce positive behaviour patterns, support the development of children’s social skills and improve academic outcomes. In addition to providing healthy breakfast food to schools, Foodbank Victoria (Foodbank) assists schools with advice and support on how to run their SBCPs. A regular newsletter for SBCP schools is produced by Foodbank to share information, practices and to keep schools up to date with the program.

Many of the 500 schools joining the SBCP had identified a need to provide food at school. Schools were attempting to respond to this need, providing breakfast food for their students when they could. Programs in schools ranged from running their own breakfast clubs to handing out a piece of fruit or muesli bars to students. The running of these programs presented challenges for schools. The need to source food and staff their programs were identified as their biggest challenges. 34% of schools offering a breakfast program before the SBCP did not believe they were meeting the needs of their students.



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## The Research

Foodbank has engaged the Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning at Victoria University (VU) to conduct an independent evaluation of the School Breakfast Clubs Program over three years, from 2016-2018. The aim of the evaluation is to provide rich insights into project implementation and its impact to inform continual improvement of the program. The evaluation will identify effective aspects of the program, aspects that need improvement, and the impact of the program on students and school communities. Interim reports will be delivered at the end of the first and second year of operation, to assist Foodbank in its commitment to continuous improvement of the Victorian Government's SBCP. A final report will be delivered at the end of the third year of the SBCP.

All schools completed a baseline survey for Foodbank of their existing breakfast provision and expectations of the SBCP before joining the initiative. VU researchers have analysed this baseline survey and are now conducting research with the SBCP schools. The research will be undertaken in three components:

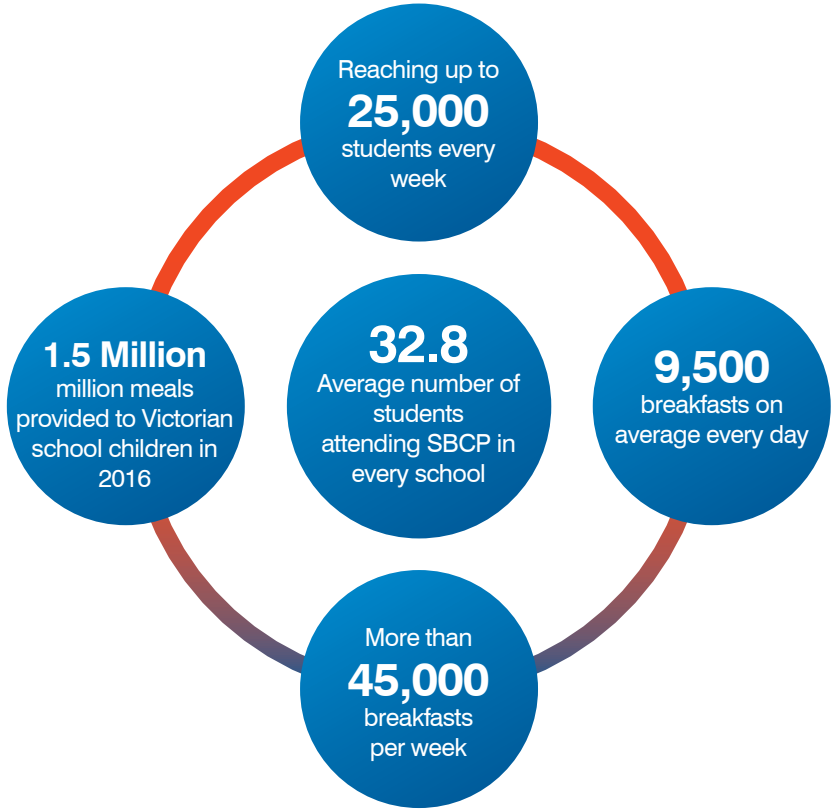
- Component 1. An annual survey with all SBCP schools, 2016-2018
- Component 2. A teacher survey, children's wellbeing survey and school level data with 48 identified SBCP schools in 2016-2018. Schools were identified by Foodbank Victoria using the following criteria:
  - Schools offering their SBCP 3, 4 or 5 days a week;
  - Average number of students attending the SBCP 25 or more, or
  - Average number of students attending the SBCP 10-24 if 50% or more of school population are attending;
  - Selection to be representative of:
    - Metropolitan and Regional Schools;
    - Four Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET) regions;
    - Schools that were already running a breakfast program and those that weren't.
- Component 3. In depth case studies with 4 SBCP schools in 2017 – Schools will be identified by Foodbank Victoria using the above criteria.

This interim report is based on data from the Foodbank baseline survey, the 2016 annual survey, and the 2016 teacher survey. The report provides an overview of the implementation and impact of the Victorian Government's SBCP in its first year of operation. These are preliminary findings as many schools joined the SBCP in terms 2 and 3 in 2016 and not all schools are reporting on a full year of operation. Of the 500 schools participating in SBCP 79% responded to the annual survey conducted online by VU researchers.

In addition 93 teachers from the 48 schools approached responded to the online teacher survey and preliminary findings from these are reported on in this interim report. We also received 187 responses to the student wellbeing survey from 8 schools but these will not be reported on in this interim report as we are awaiting data from CASES 21, AusVELS and the Victorian Curriculum F-10 to conduct an in depth analysis of this data.

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## The Numbers



## Foods provided



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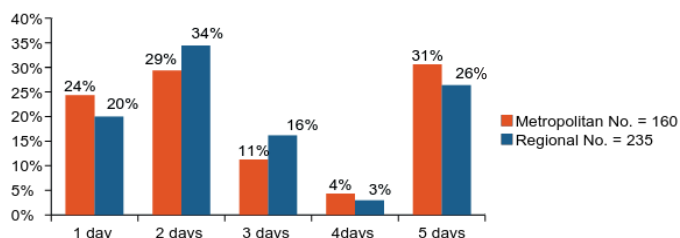
## Early Findings

### SBCP Frequency

The SBCP aims to offer breakfast to students as many days as possible during the school week. There are, however, barriers schools have to overcome to be able to achieve this. Schools who offered a breakfast club prior to the Victorian Government's SBCP reported two main concerns in providing breakfast regularly for their students - 24% of schools faced difficulty sourcing food and 34% reported difficulty staffing their program. The SBCP has addressed the first concern by providing healthy, nutritious food for all students. Addressing this key concern has enabled 57% of these schools to increase the number of days they offer a breakfast program to students.

“ *I am very appreciative of the resources provided. Before our involvement we funded our own Breakfast Club which cost our budget several thousand dollars. This savings can go into our general school budget aimed at education of students (South-Western Metropolitan school; 15% attendance)* ”

**Figure 1: Number of days SBCP operates in schools, by metropolitan and regional schools<sup>2</sup>.**



The confidence gained from running their SBCP in 2016 may result in more schools increasing the days they offer breakfast as the program enters the second year of operation. Overall, at the end of the first year, 31% of Metropolitan schools offer SBCP every day, with 26% of Regional schools able to offer the program to students daily.

“ *In 2017, our campus will be running the Breakfast Club five mornings a week. (North-Eastern Regional school; 20% attendance)* ”

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the level of attendance at the SBCP for this school.

<sup>2</sup> Where Nil responses to question are less than 3% they have not been included in graphs.

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## Implementation of SBCP in schools

- 83% of SBCP schools report they are meeting the breakfast needs of their students, an improvement from the 43% of schools who felt they were meeting the needs of their students prior to the SBCP.
- 97% of schools use their SBCP for informal learning;
  - 87% of schools use their SBCP for learning about the importance of breakfast.
  - 84% of schools use SBCP to build positive relationships.
  - 74% of schools use their SBCP for learning about healthy eating and nutrition.
- 80% of schools report they are offering SBCP the exact number of days they had anticipated.
- 35% of schools report a significant level of staff involvement in their SBCP.
- 29% of schools offer their SBCP daily, with more planning to increase the frequency in 2017.
- Only 4% of schools report difficulty with sourcing food as a barrier to offering SBCP more frequently, down from 25% before the SBCP.
- 92% of schools do not place any constraints on students' attendance at SBCP. Those who do are asking for parental permission before students can attend.
- Schools have adapted the running of their SBCP to suit their individual needs. Some programs are offered in every classroom rather than in a central location.
- Many schools offer leadership responsibility for senior students to assist with the running of SBCPs.
- 83% of schools report that they provide additional food for their SBCP.
  - 56% of schools source additional food through school purchases, 34% are supported by local businesses and 30% are purchased by parents or the school community.
  - Popular foods include:
    - Bread (73%)
    - Spreads (63%)
- Hunger is not isolated to breakfast for many of these children. 80% of schools report that they provided emergency school lunches before their SBCP and continue to do so now.
- 16% of schools are now able to use their SBCP food to provide more suitable emergency lunches for children.

“ *Very grateful for the donation by SBCP and because we have your supply we are able to meet emergencies as well as breakfast club needs*  
*(South-Eastern Regional school; 12% attendance).*”



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## Barriers to implementation

- 50% of schools report difficulty staffing and sourcing volunteers is the greatest barrier to offering their SBCP more frequently.
- 16% of schools report ongoing staff concerns about running their SBCP. Issues include:
  - Additional responsibility.
  - Time.
  - Competing expectations of staff at the beginning of the day.
  - Small schools with limited staff find running a SBCP particularly difficult.
- 56% of schools report a low level of parent/community involvement in their SBCP. Metropolitan schools have less parent/community volunteer support than Regional schools.
- 12% of schools report that they have insufficient physical space to run their program and/or storage space for the breakfast foods.
- 9% of Regional schools report that their school bus arrival time does not give students time to participate in SBCPs.

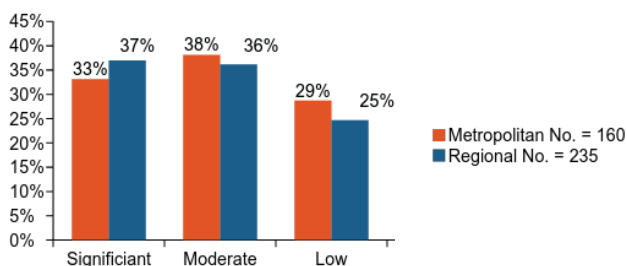


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## Volunteer Involvement

Locating sufficient support from staff, parents and community volunteers is vital to success of the SBCP and is a key determinant to how regularly SBCPs run in schools. In many schools SBCPs are run by staff, often the welfare coordinator.

**Figure 2: Level of Staff Involvement with SBCP.**



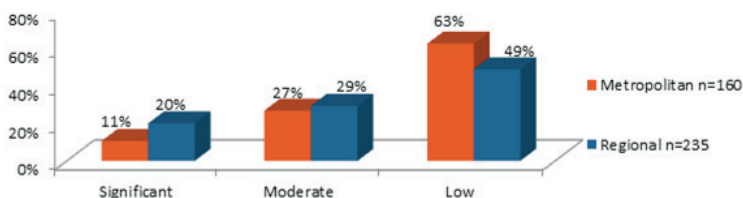
The main barrier for schools wanting to offer their SBCP more regularly is the difficulty they face in staffing the program. 50% of schools, both Metropolitan and Regional report that generating sufficient support from staff, parents and community volunteers continues to be a major barrier. School staff have made a commitment to their SBCP with 33% of Metropolitan and 37% of Regional schools reporting significant levels of staff support for their program.

“ *Our Breakfast Club is an important and essential component of our school and is well valued by our staff.*  
*(North-Western Metropolitan school; 20% attendance)* ”

In some schools a parent or community member has taken on the responsibility of running the program. The benefits of SBCP appear to encourage volunteer support in some communities and nearly 50% of regional schools report a significant or moderate support for the program from their parent and school community.

“ *Our parent volunteers have not missed a session as they feel the program is so beneficial to our students and they receive great feedback from our students.*  
*(South-Western Regional school; 10% attendance)*

**Figure 3: Level of parent/school community involvement with SBCP.**



Foodbank works with schools to assist them to identify volunteer support and through the SBCP newsletter schools share their experiences of locating volunteers. Schools have located support from their broader community and report that their volunteers come from organisations such as Rotary or church groups.

“ *We have no parent volunteers, all our volunteers are people from the community who are not affiliated with the school.*  
*(South-Eastern Regional school; 33% attendance)*

“ *We have our volunteer gardeners join us for breakfast on Thursdays, students give a weather report and then we go to garden classes. A very nice way to start the day.*  
*(North-Eastern Regional school; 100% attendance)*



Schools are also identifying the benefits for their senior students in helping with the running of their SBCP. In many schools senior students are taking on the responsibility of running programs, assisting with service, and helping younger students. The role of 'Breakfast Monitor' has been added to the roles that are allocated to senior students.

**“** *Hands on involvement; students help set up; pack up; wash and dry own cutlery; crockery and put away.*  
*(South-Eastern Metropolitan school; 15% attendance)*

**“** *Grade 6 students use the items to create healthy and delicious food recipes for emergency school lunches for those in need.*  
*(North-Western Regional school; 50% attendance)*

Some schools are using SBCPs as part of their leadership development program for senior students making this part of their Student Representative Council (SRC) responsibility. The opportunity to build positive relationships with their peers, older and younger students, teachers, and SBCP coordinators, is recognised as a valuable informal learning opportunity by 84% of all schools.

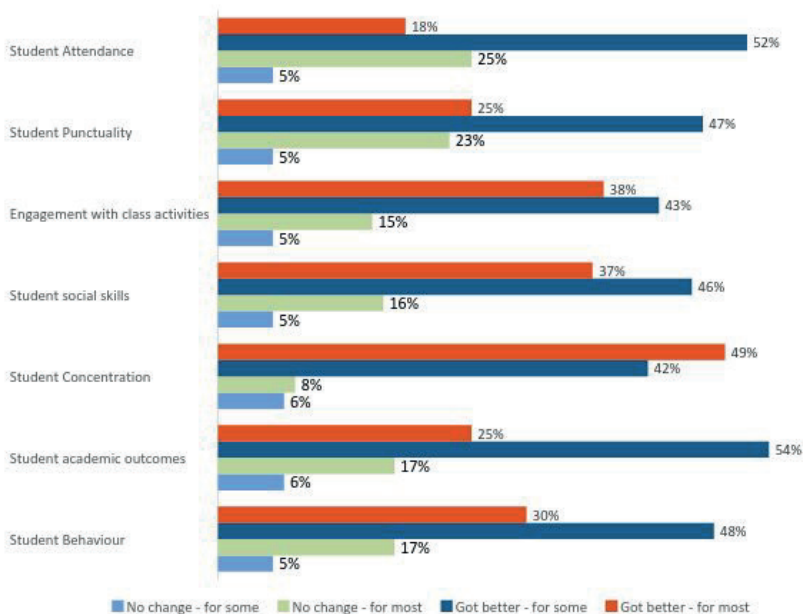
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## SBCP Impact

Teachers were asked to give their professional judgment on the impact of SBCP on students' education, wellbeing, nutrition, social and environmental and discipline factors. Teachers in 48 schools were invited to complete our online survey and we received 93 survey responses from classroom teachers, specialist teachers, assistant principals and principals. Teachers in all SBCP schools will be invited to undertake the survey in 2017 and 2018.

The 93 teachers surveyed reported that the biggest impact in their classrooms has been in student concentration and social skills. 91% of teachers surveyed believe that concentration has improved for students in their class who regularly attend their SBCP and 83% have identified an improvement in students' social skills. This supports current research in the UK which suggests that 'pupils' concentration and behaviour improved' as a result of breakfast clubs (Crawford et al. 2016).

**Figure 4: Professional judgement of impact of SBCP on educational factors by classroom teachers, specialist staff, Assistant Principals and Principals (n=93)<sup>3</sup>**



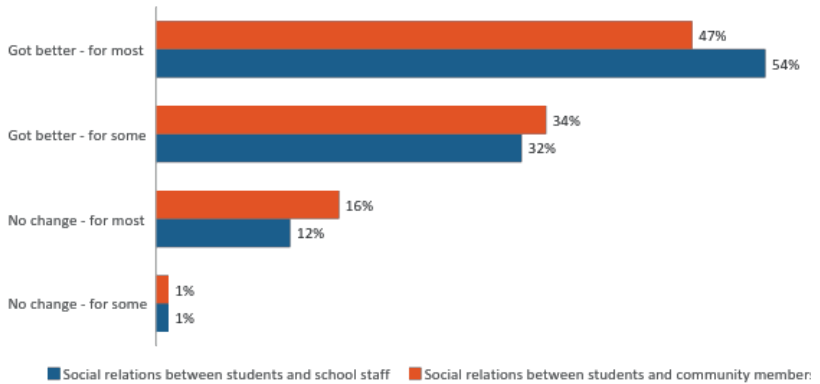
<sup>3</sup> Schools were also asked if these factors had got worse for their students attending the SBCP. Less than 1% of schools believed this to be the case and these have not been included in these graphs.

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“ They can concentrate for longer periods of time and oral language [is] starting to improve by engaging in conversation. (Prep teacher, South-Western Regional school; 25% attendance)

Teachers' responses also revealed the impact their SBCP was having on students' social skills. 86% of teachers surveyed believe the social relationships between students and school staff have improved for the students who attend SBCP.

**Figure 5: Professional judgement of impact of SBCP on social skills in classrooms by teachers and specialist staff (n=93).**



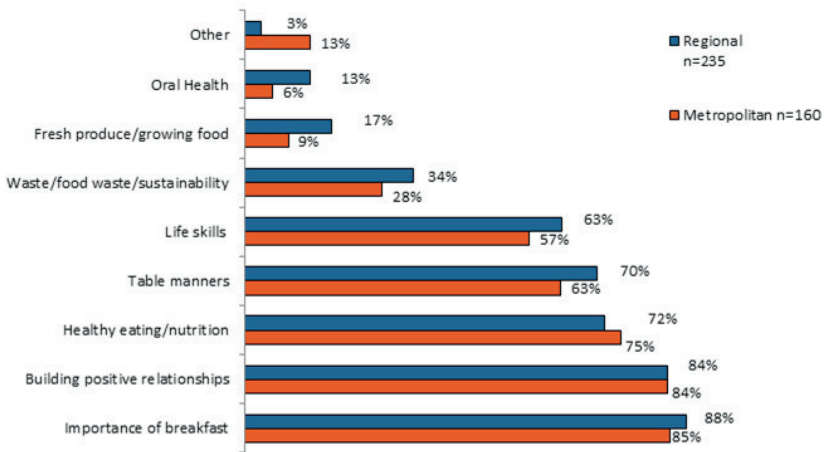
“ The students who attended the program enjoyed the social interaction amongst their peers. They developed positive relationships with both staff and parent helpers. (Year 1/2 Teacher, South-Eastern Metropolitan school; 25% attendance)



“ *This program has allowed teachers to communicate with the students in their class in another way and learn more about students across the whole school which we feel is beneficial for our students*  
*(South-Eastern Metropolitan school; 20% attendance).* ”

Many schools have embraced the opportunity to use SBCP as a form of informal learning. 87% of schools use the program to educate children in the benefits of having breakfast. Incorporating the SBCP into learning about healthy eating and nutrition is another learning opportunity 73% of schools have adopted.

**Figure 6: Opportunities for informal learning presented by the SBCP.**



Opportunities are being identified for teachers to include SBCP learning into their classroom learning and to help them to understand the needs of their students.

“ *We have recommended our teachers to include SBCP into their work programs and link their students' learning outcomes to aspects of SBCP to the Victorian Curriculum. Many teachers have and more are going to in 2017.*  
*(South-Eastern Metropolitan school; 74% attendance)* ”

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## Summary

After the first year of operation the SBCP appears to be well on the way to meeting its aims, both in implementation and the impact for students:

- 91% of teachers surveyed reported that students' concentration had improved for students attending their SBCP.
- 81% of schools reported that students' engagement with class activities improved for those attending their SBCP.
- 79% of schools reported that academic outcomes improved for students attending their SBCP.

Schools have been recruited in line with DET requirements and are offering breakfast to their students as often as they can. Schools report that the SBCPs they offer are meeting the needs of their students. There have also been some useful learnings for schools and Foodbank, on the implementation of SBCPs from the first year of operation. In particular, SBCPs could be offered more frequently in schools if some logistical barriers were addressed.

The key barrier for schools is the challenge of staffing their SBCP. The sharing of experiences from other schools may assist in this regard alongside the support of Foodbank who have also gained knowledge of how to source volunteers from their first year of operation. Other logistical barriers that could be addressed for schools include the support to find space to store food and/or conduct their program, and consideration to amending the school bus arrival times for Regional schools would also enable more students to have time to access SBCPs before they begin their school day.

Despite these barriers the feedback from schools has been positive; they report that the SBCP is meeting the overall aims and having a positive impact for their students. The following feedback summarises the positive impact for students:

### Improve student's readiness to learn

**“** *The program has been an asset to our school community. The students are able to focus and engage in their learning after a healthy breakfast.*  
*(South-Western Metropolitan school; 10% attendance)*



### **Improve attendance and reduce absenteeism**

**“** *Encouraged some children to arrive at school on time whereas prior, there were children who were always late.  
(South-Eastern Regional school; 49% attendance)*

### **Ensure all students, regardless of circumstance, to have the opportunity to reach their potential**

**“** *Has really allowed us to cater for the needs of our students, giving all students in our school the opportunity to have healthy food for breakfast, snack, fruit time or lunch if they have not been able to receive food at home or have forgotten to bring their own food.  
(South-Eastern Metropolitan school; 20% attendance)*

### **Develop good social skills**

**“** *A wonderful addition to our Student Engagement and Wellbeing Program, connecting the child to their learning environment, enhancing their opportunity to develop positive social and emotional skills and healthier patterns of behaviour.  
(South-Western Regional school; 30% attendance)*



### **Interactions with staff and other students**

**“** *Great interest from grade 6 students, who have trained and become most effective volunteers, partnering with staff.  
(North-Western Regional School; 10% attendance)*

### **Build connections between families, schools and their local communities**

**“** *It's really great to see ... parents coming as well to see their child and support them. The families here love the breakfast program as children will sit with their peers and get to know them.  
(North-Western Metropolitan school; 33% attendance)*

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## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Elders, their families and forebears of both clans the Boonwurring and Wurundjeri tribes of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Custodians of Melbourne land for many centuries. We acknowledge that the land on which we work is the place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin nation people's continuous living culture has played a significant and unique role in the life of this region.

This report is based on research conducted with SBCP schools by Professor Kitty te Riele, Claire Brown, Dr Vida Vončina Vodeb and Dr Fiona MacDonald. We acknowledge the support from Foodbank Victoria for their assistance with the research. The research is funded by Foodbank Victoria and the Department of Education and Training Victoria.