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## **New Report on School Breakfast Shows Texas Outperforms Most States; Houston ISD Ranks 3rd Among America's Big Cities**

(AUSTIN, Texas)— The Center for Public Policy Priorities today highlighted two national reports on the National School Breakfast Program that demonstrate Texas' strong commitment to improving the nutrition, health, and academic achievement of its students by providing them a nutritious start to the school day. The Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) *School Breakfast Scorecard 2011* finds that Texas has the highest percentage of schools offering breakfast to students of any state in the nation, with 100 percent of schools offering a School Breakfast Program.

Texas ranks 7th among the states in the percentage of low-income children who eat breakfast at school, with 58 percent of eligible children participating in the program in 2010-11. Last year, over 1.4 million low-income students ate breakfast at school, a 6.1 increase over the 2009-10 school year.

Studies have shown that students who eat school breakfast improve math and reading scores as well as their speed and memory in cognitive tests. Research also shows that children who eat breakfast at school – closer to class and test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home. Evidence is also mounting that children who eat school breakfast are less likely to be overweight and have improved nutrition – they eat more fruits, drink more milk, and consume a wider variety of foods than those who don't eat breakfast or eat breakfast at home.

The Texas Legislature played an important role in ensuring the success of the School Breakfast Program in Texas. In 1995 the Texas Legislature, responding to a policy recommendation from CPPP, enacted a law requiring school districts to offer a breakfast program if 10 percent or more of their students were poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-priced meals.

“This is strong evidence of the important role Texas policymakers can play in maximizing the benefits of federal funding to improve the nutrition, health, and academic achievement of our children,” said Celia Cole, a senior policy analyst at CPPP.

FRAC released a companion report comparing school breakfast participation in large, urban school districts across America. *School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010–2011* finds that the Houston Independent School District (Houston ISD) ranks 3rd among urban school districts in the percentage of eligible students eating breakfast at school. In the 2010-2011 school year, almost four out of five (78.1 percent) low-income students at Houston ISD participated in the school breakfast program, compared to just over half (56.2 percent) in the previous year.



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The success of Houston ISD’s “first-class” breakfast program is attributable to a two-pronged approach: the district offers free breakfast to all students (known as “universal breakfast”) regardless of family income, and makes breakfast part of the school day by serving meals to students during their first period rather than before schools begins. This model remove the stigma that school breakfast “is for poor kids,” as well as eliminates the obstacle of kids getting to school early enough to eat—the two primary barriers to increasing school breakfast participation. Houston schools attribute decreases in discipline and psychological problems, fewer visits to school nurses and tardiness, increases in student attentiveness and attendance, and improved learning environments to the first-class breakfast model.

Using a similar model, other predominately low-income school districts could boost breakfast participation and improve academic achievement.

Even with Texas’ strong track record, over 1 million eligible school children still miss out on breakfast at school. Future state legislative action could boost school breakfast participation further by providing incentives for low-income school districts to expand their breakfast programs and adopt an in-the-classroom model. Just a 10 percent increase in the number of low-income children eating breakfast at school would draw down an additional \$50 million in federal funds for school meals, according to FRAC’s calculations.

County-level data on school breakfast participation is available on our Web site: <http://www.cppp.org/research.php?aid=1169>.

Reporters who wish to schedule an interview with Celia Cole, senior policy analyst at the center, may do so by contacting Brian Stephens ([stephens@cppp.org](mailto:stephens@cppp.org) or 512.320.0222, ext. 112).

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