



LACK OF PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST MEANS MISSED MEALS FOR CHILDREN AND MISSED FEDERAL DOLLARS FOR TEXAS

Annual Report Charts Texas' Participation in School Breakfast Program

Austin, Texas—The Center for Public Policy Priorities today highlighted a national report on school breakfast programs that showed Texas ranks higher than most states in providing school breakfast to low-income students, but still fails to reach many students. This caused Texas to lose out on more than \$30 million in related federal funds. According to the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) *School Breakfast Scorecard*, Texas ranks 5th among the states in missed federal dollars tied to the school breakfast program.

"The good news is Texas ranks 11th in the nation in the percentage of low-income children who participate in the School Breakfast Program. We know that eating breakfast at school helps children learn. If we increased our breakfast participation rate, we could improve academic achievement and bring more of Texas' taxpayer money back to our state," CPPP Senior Policy Analyst Celia Hagert said.

Texas students who received free or reduced-price lunches participated in the National School Breakfast Program at a rate of 53.8 percent in 2007-2008, 3.9 percent higher than in the prior year. This means for every 100 low-income children eating lunch, 54 also ate breakfast. **If Texas schools increased participation to 60 percent – a goal based on the performance of other states – 136,494 more low-income children would start the day with a healthy breakfast. The state would also gain an additional \$30,463,459 in federal funding.**

Nationally, 46 low-income children participated in the school breakfast program for every 100 that received a free or reduced-price lunch.

New Mexico and South Carolina demonstrate that a 60:100 participation rate is an achievable goal. New Mexico reaches 63 percent of eligible low-income children, and South Carolina reaches 60 percent.

CPPP pointed out that Texas could reach this goal even in difficult budget times, since the federal government reimburses states for nearly 100 percent of the breakfast costs for low-income children. Under federal law, students from families with income under 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) eat for free, while those from families with income between 130-185 percent of FPL eat at a reduced price. Higher-income students pay full-price.

On the school district level, CPPP noted that schools have improved participation rates in two major ways:

- **Providing breakfast free of charge regardless of family income.** 186 school districts in Texas have chosen to offer free breakfast to most or all of their students, regardless of family income. In predominantly low-income districts (with more than 60 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals), the breakfast participation rate is 80 percent in districts offering breakfast free of charge, compared to 59 percent in those districts that still charge for breakfast.

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- **Serving breakfast as part of the school day**, rather than before school starts, which can be a logistical barrier for many parents. For example, Houston ISD’s “first-class” breakfast program, which feeds students during their first period, increased participation among low-income students by 20.4 percent in its first year.

On the state level, CPPP highlighted legislation that could help boost school breakfast participation:

- **HB 275, by Rep. Eddie Rodriguez**, would provide grants to low-income school districts to help them increase breakfast participation by incorporating breakfast into the school day.
- **Sen. Eddie Lucio also plans to introduce legislation to boost breakfast participation.** His bill would provide funding to help school districts offset the cost of eliminating the charge for reduced-price breakfast in grades K through 8th, allowing all students with family income under 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) to eat for free. This legislation would also provide incentives to elementary schools for serving breakfast after the start of the school day.

CPPP also joined FRAC in calling for Congress to increase funding for school meals and other child nutrition programs. All of the child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast Program, are set to be reauthorized this year as part of Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Congress could start reviewing the programs as early as February.

County-level data on participation rates and background on the School Breakfast Program is available at: <http://www.cppp.org/research.php?aid=805>.

FRAC’s full report, *School Breakfast Scorecard*, is available at www.frac.org/pdf/breakfast08.pdf.

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