



For more information on the
PA School Breakfast Challenge, visit
www.paschoolbreakfast.org.

Why School Breakfast Matters

The role of school breakfast in reducing hunger and improving health is critical and growing. Hunger has remained stubbornly high in recent years, even while unemployment has slowly declined during the ongoing economic recovery. In 2013, more than 17.5 million (14.3%) American households, including almost one in five (19.5%) households with children, struggled with hunger. Here in Pennsylvania:

- **1 in 7** PA residents are food insecure (1.8 million people)
- **1 in 5** PA children are food insecure (564,440 children)

Many families struggle to make ends meet and have difficulty regularly affording nutritious foods for meals at home every day. In other households, parents and children have such tight and complicated schedules that they do not have time to sit down for breakfast. Yet it is well known that it is difficult, if not impossible, for hungry students to learn.

The federal School Breakfast Program helps to fill this need for millions of low-income children across the country each day. Participation in school breakfast programs does not just reduce student hunger; it also has been linked with: improved overall dietary quality; a lower probability of overweight and obesity; fewer incidences of tardiness, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems; fewer visits to the school nurse; and better grades in math, reading, and science.

While the recent implementation of new healthier meals standards caused some initial challenges, the vast majority of schools have adjusted – and students have, too. There is considerable evidence that enhanced meal quality leads to increased student participation. A positive feedback loop is created as children are drawn to more appealing food choices, while expanded participation levels allow school nutrition departments to take advantage of economies of scale and reduce per-meal costs. Schools then can reinvest those savings in further meal quality improvements.

Despite the known benefits of school breakfast, far too many low-income students in Pennsylvania aren't getting the nutrition they need to support school success. School breakfast can help! When kids have a healthy breakfast, it not only supports good health but also enhances their ability to learn and succeed. In Pennsylvania, there are an average 602,000 low-income children eating school lunch each day, but 55% of those students are not getting school breakfast. This low level of participation places PA 42nd in the country in terms of student access to school breakfast.

Together, we can address this problem. By ensuring more students have access to school breakfast, we can help to improve health and learning outcomes for all children in Pennsylvania.

¹ Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), *School Breakfast Scorecard: 2013-2014 School Year*, 2015, accessed June 2015, http://frac.org/pdf/School_Breakfast_Scorecard_SY_2013_2014.pdf

¹ David E. Frisvold, "Nutrition and cognitive achievement: An evaluation of the School Breakfast Program," *Journal of Public Economics* 124 (2015).