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CONTACT:
Sue N. Mitchem 717-233-6705
717-592-8139(c)
Berry Friesen 717-233-6705
717-471-9691(c)

PENNSYLVANIA LEAVES MILLIONS IN SCHOOL BREAKFAST MONEY UNSPENT
School-By-School Approach Not Working

Harrisburg (December 7, 2006) School districts are leaving millions of federal dollars unused and unspent because of poor utilization of the School Breakfast Program.

In a national report released today by the Food Research Action Center (FRAC), Pennsylvania was ranked 42nd among states in the effective use of the School Breakfast Program. As compared to high performing states (West Virginia, New Mexico, South Carolina, Kentucky, Oregon and Vermont), which served breakfast to nearly 60 percent of at-risk students, Pennsylvania provided breakfast to only 37 percent. Were Pennsylvania schools to utilize the School Breakfast Program as effectively as these others have, up to an additional \$25 million in federal funds would flow into school districts statewide.

During the 2005-06 school year, an average of 222,000 Pennsylvania students per day ate breakfast at school. That is 10,000 more than 2004-05 and an increase of 4.7 percent. Progress has been steady and continuous in recent years, averaging 5.3 percent since the decade began. Nevertheless, over that period Pennsylvania has fallen in the national rankings from 38th to 42nd. Meanwhile neighboring states, all of which mandate breakfast programs in their schools, have achieved much higher rankings; West Virginia is 4th, New York is 26th, Maryland 24th and Ohio 28th.

Sue Mitchem, child nutrition specialist with the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, attributes the modest progress to inaction at the state level. "State after state has made a commitment to integrate school breakfast into the school improvement agenda. To date, efforts to do that here in Pennsylvania have hit a brick wall. School breakfast is regarded as a local issue, even while nearly everyone has come to recognize that improving the performance of our schools is a statewide responsibility."

Working one school district at a time, Mitchem painstakingly describes the connections between eating breakfast and academic success. "Before a district will begin breakfast, the principals, the superintendent and the school board members all must be convinced. It's tedious, slow work and child nutrition advocates like me have been doing it for over 20

years. Meanwhile, in many other states, legislative assemblies have addressed the issue, grabbed the federal money and moved on."

The **Pennsylvania School Breakfast Report Card**, released today by the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, provides a comprehensive review and rating of school districts based on their participation in the School Breakfast Program during 2005-06. It includes five categories that feature exemplary schools as well as schools that are falling short. Highlights within each category follow. Also attached are the category tables from the **Report Card**.

Star Performers

"Star Performers" are school districts that integrate breakfast into the school day (much as they do lunch) and encourage all children to participate. Selected for recognition this year are districts in which average daily breakfast participation was at least 50 percent of average daily lunch participation. A new leader emerged in this category - the Midland School District in Beaver County with an 86 percent breakfast participation rate. Farrell Area School District in Mercer County, always a strong performer in this category, ranked second with breakfast participation 84 percent of lunch participation.

New to this category in this year's report are the following school districts: Lebanon School District (Lebanon) and Southmoreland School District (Westmoreland).

Getting the Job Done

Schools with many children from low-income families have a special responsibility because of the likelihood that some of those children come from homes where there was no food available for breakfast. Schools ranked high in this category do an excellent job at reaching these high-risk children.

Among school districts in which at least 29 percent of the children came from low-income families, eighteen stood out for serving breakfast to at least half of those students each day. Again topping this list of schools that are "Getting the Job Done" was Farrell Area School District; 80 percent of its low-income students had breakfast at school.

New to this category in the 2005-06 report are these districts: Purchase Line (Indiana), Towanda Area (Bradford), Southmoreland Area (Westmoreland), Lebanon (Lebanon), and the Sto-Rox (Allegheny) school districts.

Moving Up!

Fifteen school districts began offering the breakfast program last year including six that were written up as "Failing the Students" in the 2005 **Pennsylvania School Breakfast Report Card**. By starting breakfast, these fifteen districts joined others that have made the link between nutrition, health and academics.

Also meriting special recognition for making a change for the better are twenty-two districts that increased their breakfast participation by more than 60 percent. Leading that group was Penn-Trafford (Westmoreland) showing a 548 percent increase; Mifflinburg Area (Union) demonstrating a 283 percent increase and Central Bucks (Bucks) realizing a 232 percent increase.

Improvement Needed

Twelve school districts with at least 20 percent low-income students reached only a tiny fraction of those students with breakfast. Baldwin-Whitehall (Allegheny), with 1139 low-income students, tops this list; only 1 in 25 low-income children received school breakfast on a typical school day. At Kennett-Consolidated (Chester), which has over 1164 low-income students, the ratio was also very poor (1 in 6).

Failing the Children

Twenty-eight districts with a high ratio of low-income children did not participate at all in the breakfast program. Once again Pottsville Area School District, with 1,212 low-income children and no breakfast program, had the dubious distinction of leading this list in 2005-06. The good news is that Pottsville, along with Gettysburg Area (Adams) and Conestoga Valley (Lancaster) from the "Failing the Children" list, have begun breakfast in the current school year and won't be on next year's list of failures!

Multiple research studies have shown that children have the best chance for academic success if they start their day with a nutritious breakfast. Studies have also shown that a healthy breakfast minimizes children's consumption of junk foods, reduces the incidence of obesity and reduces the incidence of disruptive behaviors.

School breakfast should not be an economic issue for districts; many districts use the breakfast program to enhance the "bottom line" of their foodservice operations.

For more information about school breakfast call (717)233-6705 and ask for Sue Mitchem or email at info@pahunger.org .
