

D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS BEGIN UNIVERSAL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

“Studies Show that Eating Breakfast Improves Student Performance”

A message from our friends at D.C. Public Schools

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Greetings!

Every child in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) who needs or wants breakfast will be offered it this year under the Universal Breakfast Program that started in schools, Monday, October 3, 2005.

“We couldn’t be more pleased that every child in our system will be offered breakfast if they want it,” said Dr. Clifford Janey, Superintendent of Schools. “Studies show that eating a nutritious breakfast helps improve student performance and provides them with real diet and health benefits. This is just one more thing we can do to increase our children’s chances of succeeding, both personally and academically.”

Students at both the elementary and secondary levels will be offered a free hot or cold breakfast choice everyday, regardless of family income. All food served in DCPS cafeterias meets or exceeds the nutritional requirements set by the United States Department of Agriculture.

An event to kick-off the free breakfast program was held in the cafeteria of Wilkinson Elementary School, 2330 Pomeroy Rd., SE, Washington DC, on October 5, at 8:00 a.m. Dr. Janey, members of the Board of Education, and representatives of D.C. Hunger Solutions, a project of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the Mayor’s newly-formed Commission on Food and Nutrition participated in the kick-off event.

Currently, some 13,800 DCPS students eat breakfast at school each day under the categories of free, reduced-price, or paid. This figure represents approximately 25 percent of the average daily school attendance. With the Universal Breakfast Program, DCPS food service officials project a significant increase in the number of breakfasts served each day. Many students nationwide who are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfasts do not participate because they do not wish to identify themselves as low-income by eating school breakfast. Providing breakfast at no charge to all students helps remove the stigma that is often attached to free meals at school.

"At a time when the nation is looking for positive signs of hope in our public schools, D.C. Public Schools is providing a shining example of leadership in education by expanding a premier academic tool that also fights hunger and obesity among children and adolescents -- a nutritious school breakfast for every student," said Kimberly Perry, Director of D.C. Hunger Solutions, a project of the Food Research and Action Center.

The Universal Breakfast Program, like the current breakfast program, will be subsidized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Evidence of the clear benefits of school breakfast programs is extensive. For example, an evaluation (December 2004) of the Universal Breakfast Program pilot nationwide done by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 153 elementary schools in six school districts showed that children who skip breakfast are slightly heavier than those who eat breakfast.

The evaluation also indicated that the program reduces breakfast skipping and improves student nutrition. In Universal Breakfast schools there were greater gains in academic achievement than in schools that serve the conventional breakfast choices on a free, reduced-price, or paid basis.

A study done by Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School likewise showed that students who participated in school breakfast programs increased their math scores, decreased their absences and tardiness, decreased their rates of psychosocial problems, and had noticeably improved behavior.

D.C. Hunger Solutions, a project of the Food Research and Action Center

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