

RE: FY 2013 MSDE Budget – Funding for Maryland Meals for Achievement

Dear Governor O'Malley,

In the wealthiest state in the country, home to six of the wealthiest jurisdictions nationwide, 1 in 5 households with children had difficulty affording enough food to feed their family in 2010.ⁱ At the same time, the USDA estimated that food costs will rise between 3.5-4.5% in 2011.ⁱⁱ Families are having more difficulty than ever before making ends meet. Reliable sources of healthy meals, through programs like the School Breakfast Program, are more important than ever.

As you consider the FY 2013 Maryland State Department of Education - Aid to Education budget (.R00A02), we respectfully request that you expand the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program so fewer children in Maryland go hungry and more children start the school day well-nourished and ready to learn. We commend you for making ending childhood hunger one of your top 15 priorities. As you know, the Governor's Partnership to End Childhood Hunger supports your belief that increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program is critically important to eradicating hunger and to achieving the State's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. We recognize that you must make many difficult decisions as you prepare your FY 2013 budget. However, increasing funding for MMFA is not only necessary to meet your goal of eradicating childhood hunger; it is also the right thing to do at a time when so many Maryland families are struggling to provide enough food for their children. Additionally, we strongly support the work of the MSDE School and Community Nutrition Programs Branch (SCNPB) as it works to ensure that Maryland's children receive adequate nutrition as they grow and learn.

MMFA allows participating schools to provide breakfast free to all students in the classroom and reduces stigma and other barriers to participation. The program addresses the hunger and nutritional needs of students in schools where 40 percent or more students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. The benefits of MMFA are clear – higher school breakfast participation has a positive impact on the educational performance, health and behavior of Maryland's children. It is noteworthy that, during the 2011-2012 school year, only 228 of the 780 schools that are eligible to participate in the MMFA program are actually participating because of budget limitations.ⁱⁱⁱ As more families are struggling to make ends meet, it is essential that eligible schools receive the resources needed to provide free school breakfast to all of their students through the MMFA program.

Children who eat school breakfast increase their math and reading scores as well as improve their speed and memory in cognitive tests and perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.^{iv} Additionally, schools that offer breakfast free to all students in the classroom report decreases in discipline problems, visits to school nurse and tardiness; and increases in student attentiveness and attendance. A 2001 evaluation of Maryland Meals for Achievement Program, conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education, revealed a 5 point increase in percentage of students who scored at or above satisfactory levels on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program Composite Index scores, an 8% decline in tardiness, a 45% decrease in suspension length, and a 72% average increase of breakfast participation.^v

As Maryland families struggle with increased food insecurity, unemployment and poverty rates, we ask that you continue to support critical anti-hunger programs. We respectfully request that you increase funding for the Maryland Meals for Achievement program. Your support of essential anti-hunger programs, like MMFA, brings us closer to Maryland's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015, and

helps ensure that children have access to healthy and nutritious meals where they learn, live and play. Thank you for being a champion for Maryland's children and their families.

Very truly yours,

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CC: Bernard J. Sadusky, Interim State Superintendent of Schools

CC: T. Eloise Foster, Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management

ⁱ *Food Hardship in America: Households with and without Children*. August 2011. Food Research and Action Center. http://frac.org/pdf/aug2011_food_hardship_report_children.pdf

ⁱⁱ *Food CPI and Expenditures: CPI for Food Forecasts*. October 25, 2011. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/CPIFoodAndExpenditures/Data/cpiforecasts.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eligibility based on 2010-2011 school year data.

^{iv} *Breakfast for Learning*. Fall 2011. Food Research and Action Center. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf>.

^v J. M. Murphy et al., *Maryland Meals for Achievement Year III Final Report*, October 2001. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED460784.pdf>.