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### **Breakfast Participation in Baltimore Fails to Make the Grade School Breakfast Reaching Barely 4 out of 10 Low-Income Students**

Washington, D.C. – August 7, 2007 – The first day of school is approaching fast, but breakfast is not on the schedule for too many Baltimore students. Only 39 percent of eligible low-income students participated in the School Breakfast Program in Baltimore City schools during the 2005-06 school year, according to a report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). This placed Baltimore eighteenth among the 23 cities studied

In *Breakfast in America's Big Cities*, FRAC surveyed 23 large school districts, which were selected based on size and geographic representation. The survey found that nearly half of the urban districts profiled were failing to serve breakfast to a majority of their low-income students. But, schools that adopted strategies to make breakfast part of the school day – such as breakfast in the classroom or taken into the classroom from “grab and go” carts in the hallways – were more effective in reaching children. While Baltimore began to offer universal breakfast (where all children are offered breakfast for free) over the previous school year, still too many low-students are missing out.

“Baltimore needs to reach more children with breakfast. It’s a fast and long-lasting way to improve children’s learning and behavior, foster healthy eating habits, reduce school nurse visits, and end childhood hunger,” said Jim Weill, FRAC president. “By making breakfast an essential part of the school day, more children participate and have a healthy start to their learning day.”

Several Baltimore City schools are offering more flexible serving options. Schools that participate in the Maryland Meals for Achievement program, which provides in-classroom breakfast free to all students in selected schools, saw an average daily breakfast attendance of 71 percent. Schools are eligible for state support for this program (which supplements the substantial federal funds) based on the number of low-income students enrolled. But, it remains underfunded, so the state only reaches a minority of schools. Of the 600 schools eligible across the states, only 189 received state funding to operate the program.

“Maryland needs to help more Baltimore schools move toward in-classroom breakfast,” said Weill. But, he added that the city’s schools should be moving ahead with their federal breakfast reimbursement, not wait for state money. “Breakfast is a magic elixir for schools – for learning, health, and nutrition. Baltimore’s school should be moving as quickly as possible to integrate breakfast into the school day.”

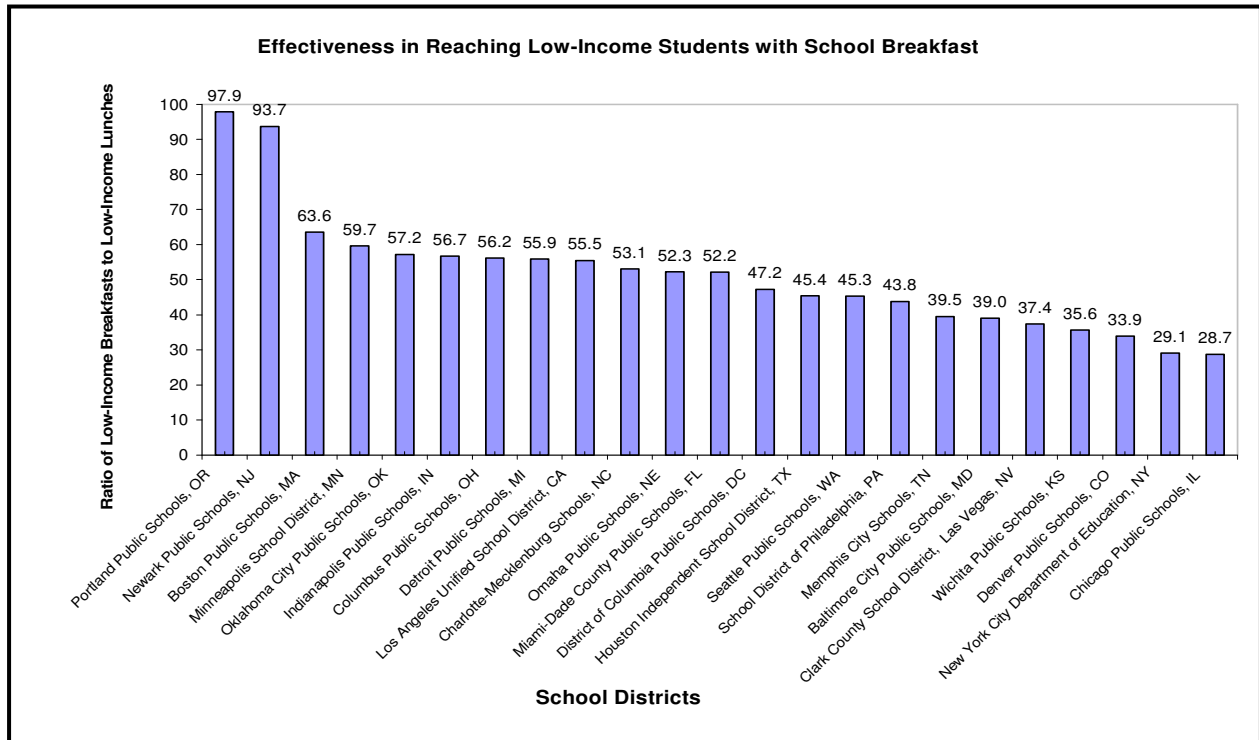
Numerous studies have shown that breakfast improves learning and attendance, lifts test scores, and reduces behavior problems and visits to the school nurse. Beyond the positive impact on learning, breakfast improves children’s diets and helps build healthy habits. Over the past 20 years, obesity rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents. Children who start the day with breakfast are less likely to be obese.

FRAC measures participation in the school breakfast program by comparing the number of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch to those receiving breakfast. In Baltimore, just 39 low-income students received breakfast for every 100 that received lunch. The low participation also translates to lost federal dollars. If Baltimore schools were able to reach 70 with breakfast for every 100 that receive lunch, more than 13,000

additional students would have eaten breakfast daily, and the city would have accessed an additional \$2.9 million in federal funding.

**About the report:**

For this report, FRAC surveyed 23 large urban school districts across the country on school breakfast participation rates and policies. FRAC measures the reach of the School Breakfast Program by comparing the number of low-income children that participate in breakfast to those that receive free and reduced-price school lunch. The full report can be accessed at [www.frac.org/pdf/urbanbreakfast07.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/urbanbreakfast07.pdf).



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The **Food Research and Action Center** ([www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.