

**EMBARGOED UNTIL  
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### **More Maryland Children and Schools Participating in the School Breakfast Program**

Washington, D.C. – More than 95,000 low-income Maryland children benefited from the national School Breakfast Program during the 2005-2006 school year, a 4.2 percent increase from the previous school year. However, the state is forgoing \$7.8 million in federal funds due to low participation, according to The Food Research and Action Center's *School Breakfast Scorecard 2006*.

In Maryland, for every 100 low-income children that participated that year in the National School Lunch Program, 43 received free and reduced-price breakfasts. This lagged behind the national ratio (44.6:100) and behind neighbors District of Columbia and Virginia. In the District, 46 children are eating breakfast for every 100 eating lunch, with 45 per 100 in Virginia.

The first prerequisite for getting breakfast to children is having schools participate in the breakfast program. From 2004-2005 to 2005-2006, the share of Maryland schools offering lunch that also offered breakfast dropped from 94 percent to 90 percent.

On the more positive side, the state is taking steps to encourage more participation in the program. The state legislature increased the budget for the "Maryland Meals for Achievement" (MMFA) program, the state's universal breakfast program, from \$1.9 million in 2005-2006 to \$3.1 million for 2006-2007. The boost in funding means that an additional 57 schools will receive state support for universal classroom breakfast.

Universal breakfast programs provide free breakfast for all children, regardless of income. Schools that offer universal breakfast often see an immediate increase in student participation. Some children who are eligible for free and reduced price breakfasts are reluctant to participate because they do not want identify themselves as low-income. Providing breakfast at no charge to all students removes the stigma for participation in the program.

The School Breakfast Program began as a pilot program in 1966 with the intent of making sure children started the school day with the boost breakfast can give. Studies continue to demonstrate the links between breakfast and learning, making the case stronger for more schools to expand breakfast participation and make sure all children participate.

"Reaching a lot more children with breakfast in schools is probably the most cost-effective and fastest way to improve children's learning and health, improve attendance and, of course, reduce hunger," said Jim Weill, president of FRAC. "It's essential that more schools serve breakfast, adopt steps like breakfast in the classroom and reach out to more children."

Nationally, the program has grown to include 7.7 million low-income children. The full report is available online at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

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