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## Addressing Hunger in Schools

**One in four children in Oklahoma suffers from hunger.** While hunger impacts every aspect of a young person's life, the systemic impact that childhood hunger has on schools and school systems is substantial. Hunger can negatively impact school funding, test scores, and culture and climate. Youth who are hungry are more likely to suffer from behavioral, emotional, mental, and academic problems. By taking advantage of existing programs and implementing best practices in school and other nutrition programs, Oklahoma could improve outcomes for all students and schools. Below are four powerful tools available to combat hunger in our schools resulting in improved outcomes for both students and schools.

### **Community Eligibility Provision**

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools with 40% or more “identified students” to provide breakfast and lunch **free to all students** without collecting school meal applications. Identified students are directly certified through programs that pre-qualify them for free meals including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

### ***Community Eligibility benefits students, schools, and administrators.***

- **Reduces Paperwork** – Schools no longer have to collect and verify school meal applications.
- **Increases Participation** – In pilot schools, breakfast participation increased by 9.4% while lunch participation increased by 5.2%.<sup>i</sup>
- **Reduces Stigma** – By removing applications and payments, CEP reduces the stigma associated with receiving free or reduced meals.
- **Increases School Nutrition Departments' Financial Viability** – Schools with increased participation benefit from economies of scale and schools with 62.5% “identified students” or higher will receive full reimbursement for **100% of meals served**.<sup>ii</sup>

### ***Oklahoma utilizes CEP less than the vast majority of states.***

- In the 2015-16 school year only 15% of Oklahoma School Districts participated in CEP (the 5<sup>th</sup> poorest participation in the nation)<sup>iii</sup>
- Only 21% of Oklahoma's highest poverty schools are implementing CEP ranking 47<sup>th</sup> amongst other states<sup>iv</sup>

### **Breakfast in the Classroom**

Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) is an alternative way to feed students breakfast. In a Breakfast in the Classroom model students either pick up their breakfast on the way to class or it is delivered to class. Students eat breakfast at the beginning of school during attendance, announcements, or while working on classwork. Breakfast in the classroom has been shown to substantially increase breakfast participation, which helps schools bottom lines.

### ***Breakfast in the Classroom produces better outcomes for students.***

Children who participate in breakfast in the classroom benefit in many ways including:

- **Better Academic Performance** – larger improvements in math scores than youth who eat breakfast at school “before the bell”;
- **Improved Behavior and Mental health** - lower likelihood of depression, anxiety, and hyperactivity and fewer office referrals;
- **Better Attendance** - lower tardy rates and higher attendance; and
- **Improved Physical Health** - fewer visits to the school nurse and reduced likelihood of chronic disease such as juvenile diabetes.<sup>v&vi</sup>

### ***Oklahoma could increase funding to schools by adopting Breakfast in the Classroom.***

Currently, across the state, only 58.5% of eligible free and reduced price lunch students participate in the school breakfast program. In Oklahoma City, our largest school district, only 9 classes participated in Breakfast in the Classroom ranking 47<sup>th</sup> out of 73 of the nation’s largest cities. If Oklahoma met the nationally recognized 70% benchmark, our schools could bring in an additional **\$9.5 million** in federal funding next year.<sup>vii</sup>

Dallas Independent Schools implemented Breakfast in the Classroom in half of its elementary schools in 2011. In the first year alone breakfast participation increased dramatically. Dallas also saw Improvements in scores on the state’s standardized test and reduced tardiness. By the end of the study Dallas realized a 43% increase in breakfast participation by implementing Breakfast in the Classroom.<sup>viii</sup>

### **USDA’s Summer Food Service Program**

The USDA Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) allows children under age 18 to receive up to two meals per day (most often Breakfast and Lunch) at no cost. Children must receive and eat the meal(s) at a congregate site. Schools are a natural fit for SFSP because they have the facility and equipment and a staff trained in preparing meals that meet USDA standards. Furthermore, schools are a known gathering point in the community and are often open for at least part of the summer for summer programming.

### ***Providing Summer Meals reduces “Brain Drain” and obesity in our most vulnerable students***

Low-income students are shown to retain less information over the summer than their higher income peers.<sup>ix</sup> Proper nutrition is proven to reduce cognitive decline, which can aid in preventing the loss of learning over summer months.<sup>x</sup> Furthermore, a recent study in the American Journal of Public Health found that students gain weight three times faster in the summer.<sup>xi</sup> USDA’s Summer Food Service Program provides nutritious food on a regular schedule which can reduce summer learning loss and weight gain, both of which have detrimental effects on student outcomes in school. In addition, schools have found that participating in summer meals allows them to generate income year round and employ staff year round which can attract higher quality staff and reduce staff turnover.

### ***Oklahoma ranks 51<sup>st</sup> in the nation in summer meal participation***

- Only 6.4 out of 100 free and reduced price eligible students participated in the summer meal program in Oklahoma last year.

- Increasing participation to the benchmark 40% would bring in an additional \$7.8 million in federal funds.<sup>xii</sup>

Over the past ten years Texas has seen substantial improvements in SFSP. In Texas, if a school system has greater than 50% Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility it is mandated to provide summer meals for at least 30 operating days of summer. This has resulted in increased number and consistency of sites, benefiting Texas students.

### **Afterschool Meal Program**

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) allows schools in low income areas to serve hot suppers to their students in conjunction with after school programs. Programming can include afterschool childcare, tutoring or study hall, and even extracurricular activities.

#### ***Only 24,000 children in Oklahoma received afterschool snacks or suppers***

The vast majority of the 24,000 meals served afterschool in October 2015 were snacks. Afterschool meals and snacks are the only guaranteed source of food between lunch and breakfast for about one-third of low-income students.<sup>xiii</sup> However, snacks alone do not provide enough nutrition for many children to make it until breakfast without going hungry.

#### ***Providing supper at afterschool programming increases revenue and student outcomes***

- **Increases Participation** - Afterschool meals increase interest in afterschool programming;
- **Increases Student Engagement** - Kids who eat afterschool meals are more focused and show improved performance in afterschool activities;
- **Increases Revenue** - Afterschool meals are reimbursed at 3 times the rate of afterschool snacks (\$3.07 per meal); and
- **Improves Lunch Participation** - Afterschool meals have been shown to increase school lunch participation.<sup>xiv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> FRAC. "Community Eligibility Provision Facts." [http://frac.org/pdf/community\\_eligibility\\_amazing\\_new\\_option\\_schools.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/community_eligibility_amazing_new_option_schools.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Center of Budget and Policy Priorities. "The Community Eligibility Provision: What Food Service Management Companies Need to Know." <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-community-eligibility-provision-what-food-service-management-companies>

<sup>iii</sup> Tulsa Public Schools is currently rolling out Community Eligibility in 16 of its elementary schools

<sup>iv</sup> FRAC. "Report on Community Eligibility Participation." <http://frac.org/pdf/take-up-of-cep-report.pdf>.

<sup>v</sup> Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). "Breakfast for Learning." <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> FRAC. "Breakfast for Health." <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> FRAC's School Breakfast Scorecard SY 14-15, [http://frac.org/pdf/School\\_Breakfast\\_Scorecard\\_SY\\_2014\\_2015.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/School_Breakfast_Scorecard_SY_2014_2015.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> Texas Hunger Initiative. "Texas Shool Breakfast Report Card." <http://www.baylor.edu/texashunger/index.php?id=930469>

<sup>ix</sup> Cooper, H. et al. 1996. "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores."

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<sup>x</sup> Summer Learning Association. 2016. "The Achievement Gap" <[www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org)>

<sup>xi</sup> Summer Learning Association. 2016. "Summertime and Weight Gain." <http://summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SummertimeAndWeightGain.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> FRAC. "Oklahoma Profile." <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/ok.pdf>

<sup>xiii</sup> Share Our Strengths Center for Best Practices. "Three Meals a Day: A win win win." [file:///C:/Users/rcomeau/Downloads/three\\_meals\\_a\\_day\\_-\\_win\\_win\\_win.pdf](file:///C:/Users/rcomeau/Downloads/three_meals_a_day_-_win_win_win.pdf)

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.