



NEWS RELEASE

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**WISCONSIN IMPROVES NATIONALLY IN SCHOOL
BREAKFAST RANKINGS ON STRENGTH OF MILWAUKEE
BREAKFAST PROGRAM, KOHL GRANTS**

TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT INCREASE ENDS STATE'S NINE-YEAR, LAST-PLACE RUN

Milwaukee (Dec. 11, 2007)—Thanks to a 2006-07 program that fed free breakfasts to more than 20,000 students every day at 62 Milwaukee Public Schools, Wisconsin has jumped to 46th nationally in providing school breakfasts to its students, according to a study released today by the Washington, D.C.-based Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). Wisconsin had ranked dead last nationally for nine consecutive years.

The FRAC study examines the ratio of students who received free and reduced-price lunches to students who participated in the federal school breakfast program during the 2006-07 school year. **In 2006-07, 35.7 percent (85,326 total students) of low-income Wisconsin schoolchildren who qualified for free and reduced-price lunches were fed breakfasts in school, up from 26.5 percent (59,644 students) in 2004-05 and 29 percent (68,102) in 2005-06.** The national average for school breakfast service in 2006-07 was 45.3 percent.

Wisconsin's 25-percent increase in school breakfast participation last year—the biggest increase of any state—is largely the result of Milwaukee Public Schools' initiative to provide free breakfast in the classroom at qualifying schools to all students. In order to qualify for the universal free breakfast program, schools had to collect federal meal applications for at least 95 percent of enrolled students. Organizers have expanded the program this year to 72 Milwaukee public schools.

The universal free breakfast program is made possible due to a \$1 million annual appropriation provided by the Milwaukee Public Schools administration and board of directors. The program began in 2005-06 at six pilot schools.

Another contributing factor to the state's strong showing is federal school breakfast funding sponsored by Sen. Herb Kohl. These grants have brought about \$6 million of federal money to Wisconsin schools to help them start, maintain and expand breakfast programs. The funding has helped schools purchase equipment and supplies as well as to promote the program.

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Breakfast/ Add One

“There’s still a lot of work to be done to ensure that all of our state’s children have the nutrition they need to excel, but a 25-percent increase in school breakfast participation is something to be proud of,” said Jon Janowski, Hunger Task Force director of advocacy.

“Milwaukee Public Schools has recognized the importance of feeding breakfast to our children and we hope that commitment is expanded in future years. We also have to figure out how to expand the breakfast program to cover more Wisconsin schools outside Milwaukee.”

Numerous studies have shown that eating breakfast has a positive effect on students’ academic and social achievement, including increased class participation; improved standardized reading and math scores; reduced behavioral problems, absenteeism and tardiness; and decreased obesity problems.

The report “School Breakfast Scorecard 2007” is available at www.frac.org/pdf/breakfast07.pdf.

Improved Out-State Performance Crucial to Continued Development

If Wisconsin is to build on last year’s impressive increase, it will have to do so in districts outside Milwaukee, where breakfast is currently offered in all schools. There is much room to improve: despite the fact that 60 Wisconsin schools added breakfast programs between 2005-07, the state’s 60 percent of schools that serve both lunch and breakfast still lags far behind the national average of 85 percent. With its low number of available programs, Wisconsin continues to miss out on more than \$13 million of federal money that has been allocated to feed breakfast to schoolchildren.

Wisconsin is taking measures to rectify this imbalance. The budget recently signed into law by Gov. Jim Doyle adds additional funding for school breakfast programs, increasing the state’s reimbursement to schools from 6-7 cents for each breakfast served to approximately 13 cents.

In order to continue the state’s school breakfast improvement, Hunger Task Force recommends:

- A further increase in the state’s reimbursement to schools, from 13 cents to 15 cents per breakfast.
- Expansion of universal free breakfast programming in Milwaukee and other parts of the state where it makes fiscal sense.
- Continued school breakfast grant funding in the 2008 federal budget. Sen. Kohl’s breakfast grants have made a huge impact on breakfast participation in Wisconsin.

Hunger Task Force has been a driving force in efforts to expand breakfast service in Wisconsin. Hunger Task Force advocates have testified at school board hearings; lobbied for increases in the state’s school breakfast budget; and conducted outreach to concerned parents, teachers and students.

Additionally, Hunger Task Force has arranged for more than 1,500 students to hear about the benefits of eating a healthy breakfast from professional basketball players, athletic trainers and dieticians at “Breakfast with the Bucks” events at the Bradley Center in 2006 and 2007.