

## White Paper - Virginia Universal School Breakfast Act

Enclosure (1) – *Breakfast After the Bell – Policy Solutions from Across the United States*

Enclosure (2) – *Effective Policies for Increasing Participation in School Breakfast Programs*

**PROBLEM:** Each day, over 300,000 children across the Commonwealth of Virginia are anxious about the amount and quality of food available for them to eat. Each day, many of our children – our future leaders – arrive at school hungry and ill-prepared to learn and grow.

**DISCUSSION:** All school children need to have nutritious meals in order to achieve their potential. Providing the best schools and teachers alone does not ensure a child is mentally present and able to learn. A growing body of research establishes that hungry children are less able to process the information provided and less likely to be attentive to the lessons being taught. Enclosures (1) and (2) provide additional background information summarized below:

(1) Students who eat school breakfast are more likely to perform better on tests, attend more days of school, and graduate from high school. Despite this, only half of the low-income students who eat school lunch are also eating school breakfast. Recognizing the connection between school breakfast and academic achievement, policymakers across the country are rethinking how and where school breakfast is served, in order to close this participation gap and ensure kids have the nutrition they need to succeed.

(2) President Harry S. Truman began the national school lunch program in 1946 as a measure of national security to safeguard the health and well being of the nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food. The Virginia Department of Education reports that 42% of our children are eligible for free and reduced meals, that 120.6 million school lunches are served to students annually in public schools, but that only 45 million breakfasts are served (VDOE School Nutrition Program Statistics & Reports 2014-2015).

(3) Research shows that healthy eating, proper nutrition and regular physical activity result in students who have: (a) Increased standardized achievement test scores; (b) improved attendance; (c) reduced tardiness; (d) improved academic, behavioral and emotional functioning; and (e) improved nutrition. For many students, the nutritious breakfast at school is an essential part of their daily nourishment. In April, 2013, the West Virginia Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 663, the West Virginia Feed to Achieve Act. Executive Director, Richard Goff, from the Office of Child Nutrition, sent a memo, October 23, 2013, to each County Food Service Director in West Virginia. Within the note he writes, "successful breakfast programs can be an essential part of student well-being and academic success. Research consistently shows that children who eat a well-balanced breakfast perform better on standardized tests, have higher math scores, and lower rates of absenteeism and tardiness. Therefore, the Legislature is placing the nutritional needs of its WV children at the forefront by declaring that an effective school breakfast program is not an interruption of the school day, but an integral and vital part of that day."

(4) Schools that provide universal breakfast programs also report: (a) decreases in discipline and psychological problems; (b) decreases in visits to school nurses; (c) decreases in tardiness; (d) increases in student attentiveness; (e) increases in attendance; and (f) improved learning environments, and these positive attributes are furthered through comprehensive healthy schools

policies that include quality nutrition, integrating physical activity during the school day, and teaching children about the importance of a healthy active lifestyle (Share Our Strength's Breakfast Report 2013).

(5) As determined in West Virginia, universal breakfast can be an integral and vital part of the school day (USDA School Breakfast Program and [nokidhungry.org](http://nokidhungry.org) School Breakfast Programs)

(6) The participation rate for the school breakfast program varies greatly among our districts. Those districts which have made a determined effort to increase participation by offering programs to best meet student needs, such as Grab-And-Go Breakfasts, providing Breakfast in the Classroom, or providing Breakfast After First Period, feed higher percentages of their students (VDOE School Nutrition Program Statistics & Reports 2014-2015).

(7) Despite the provisions of §22.1-207.3 (School Breakfast Program), many students are currently not eating breakfast -- either at home or at school.

(8) In order to maximize each child's potential to learn and develop, the Legislature, schools and communities must partner to provide the most basic support for learning: nutritious meals both breakfast and lunch.

(9) In order to maximize student participation in breakfast, and to reduce the secondary adverse impacts of poverty, it is important that schools provide nutritious meals without risk to students as being stigmatized as poor.

(10) The opportunity for all students to break bread together in the classroom as part of the normal homeroom routine provides all teachers and children an opportunity to not only receive nourishment, but in the act of sharing a meal to build the habit and discipline of healthy living in community. Teachers should view the breakfast learning opportunity as a time to teach and share life experiences over a shared meal.

(11) Private and nonprofit sectors have shown a willingness to commit significant resources to addressing hunger in America, leveraging federal programs and enlisting their employees, customers and clients to improve the availability and accessibility of affordable, healthy food for those school districts in need of assistance.

(12) Public schools in this state and others have adopted continuum of policies to implement low cost, effective programs that include physical activity, physical education, proper nutrition and the promotion of healthy eating habits, along with involvement by school staff, families and communities. A variety of resources to assist schools in adopting and implementing these programs are easily accessible on the internet through the Virginia Department of Education.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Legislature and the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia together plan, craft, enact, and implement a Virginia Universal School Breakfast Act in order to provide breakfast for all children enrolled in schools throughout the Commonwealth.