



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

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To members of the education community:

As your students headed back to school this fall, more than 16 million children in this country struggled with hunger. A new study shows that three out of five K-8 public school teachers say they see students regularly coming to school hungry. Teachers and schools are on the front lines of the fight to end childhood hunger, and I often hear stories of teachers who spend their own money on food for their students. Teachers do this because they know that hungry students have trouble learning when they are focused on their empty stomachs rather than classroom activities. These students often lack concentration and struggle with poor academic performance, behavior problems, and health issues.

Research has demonstrated that eating breakfast helps students pay attention, improves academic performance, and leads to better behavior in the classroom. Additionally, students who eat breakfast demonstrate higher quality nutrient intakes than students who do not eat breakfast. However, of the more than 22 million students who ate a free or reduced-price lunch in 2011, fewer than half also ate breakfast at school. We have an opportunity to reduce student hunger by narrowing this gap.

Lack of participation in the School Breakfast Program is often due to barriers including timing and stigma. Students often arrive to school too late to consume breakfast, and there can be a stigma associated with receiving free and reduced-price breakfast in the cafeteria. Fortunately, many innovative methods of serving breakfast are being implemented across the country that help address these barriers by making breakfast a part of the school day. When schools serve breakfast after the bell during regular school hours, they help address the timing problem because students no longer need to arrive early to school in order to participate in school breakfast. Additionally, when breakfast is offered to all students, it helps eliminate the stigma associated with going to the cafeteria in the morning before the school day starts.

Schools across the country have successfully increased participation in breakfast programs through innovative breakfast delivery programs like Breakfast in the Classroom and Grab N' Go. Breakfast in the Classroom allows students to eat breakfast in their classroom after the official start of the school day. When breakfast is served in the classroom it can coincide with appropriate educational activities to get the school day started. Grab N' Go breakfasts are picked up by students when they arrive at school or between morning classes. The food is packaged and available on mobile service carts in areas such as hallways or entryways. Information and resources on expanding school breakfast can be found on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service Web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm>.

Today, I am encouraging schools, school administrators, and teachers to seek out these and other innovative ways to increase participation in the school breakfast program. In doing so, we can ensure students are starting the school day with the food they need to enable them to be successful in the classroom.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arne Duncan