



## Massachusetts Department of Education School Breakfast Program

### School Breakfast Participation Leads to *Academic* and Behavior Improvements

According to a recent study conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital and published in the September 1998 *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, students who participate in school breakfast perform better academically, are absent less and have less behavior problems.

The study was conducted in public schools in Baltimore and Philadelphia prior to and after the implementation of a universally free (UF) breakfast program. For each school, rates of participation in the school breakfast program, school record data and interviews with parents and children were collected. Prior to the study's onset, 15 % of all students participated in school breakfast, all of which offered breakfast according to the conventional payment system: free, reduced or full-price meals depending on family income. Participation increased to 27 % with the implementation of the universal breakfast program.

**After 4 months, students who increased their participation in the school breakfast program had significantly greater increases in their math grades and decreases in the rates of school absence and tardiness,** compared to those students whose participation remained the same or decreased. Teacher ratings of psychosocial (depression, anxiety, hyperactivity) problems also decreased in those students who increased their breakfast participation at school.

Additionally, Dr. Ronald Kleinman, one of the study's authors, notes that "this series of studies shows that those children who are consistently hungry are most likely to do poorly in school and in other aspects of their lives." According to hunger statistics for Massachusetts compiled in the 1995 Food and Research Action Center Study, one in five school-age elementary student faces hunger today.

If you are interested in improving your student's academic performance, make nutrition a priority!

J. Michael Murphy, Maria Pagano, Joan Nachmani, Peter Sperling, Shirely Kane, Ronald Kleinman. The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 1998;152:899-907.

According to Dr. Murphy, an author of this study,

"What we find particularly exciting is that this is a relatively simple intervention that can significantly **improve children's academic performance** and ... well-being."

#### Resources & Special points of interest:

- The Massachusetts Department of Education and our contractor, Project Bread, Child Nutrition Outreach Program, are committed to helping you with your programs. Call: (781) 388-3300 x 498 or (617) 371-0918
- \$1.5 million was awarded to schools in Massachusetts for Universal Free Breakfast and Breakfast Demonstration Project Grants. October 1998.
- The School Breakfast Program in Massachusetts helps ensure that some 98,815 children in 1046 schools get a healthy, smart start to their school day and their lives.
- 55 % of Massachusetts Schools serve breakfast. However, fewer than 20% of students enrolled participate.
- Check out our web site to see a list of schools mandated to serve school breakfast.



*For more information, please contact:*

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