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# MEDIA RELEASE

## Governor Declares March School Breakfast Month

*Arkansas continues making progress in increasing the number of students participating in the school breakfast program*

**LITTLE ROCK, AR (March 6, 2017)**— Governor Asa Hutchinson proclaimed March as *School Breakfast Month* in Arkansas at a press conference in Little Rock. “I was able to go to the National Governor’s Association and talk about the fact that the child food insecurity rate in Arkansas declined 2.1% in 2016,” said the Governor. “Arkansas now ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation in percent of students participating in programs, and almost one half of our schools participate in Breakfast After the Bell programs,” the Governor continued.

There is an overwhelming body of national [research](#) showing that students who start their days with breakfast do [better in school](#), have fewer behavioral issues, fewer health problems and fewer absences per year. Since 2010, Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign stakeholders have focused on helping Arkansas schools increase breakfast participation by adopting Breakfast After the Bell programs that make breakfast part of every school day. Since 2010, more than 500 Arkansas schools have started Breakfast After the Bell programs.

“When breakfast moves from the cafeteria into the classroom and into students’ daily schedules, it removes barriers that keep students from participating, like the *low-income* stigma of eating in the cafeteria, as well as transportation and family scheduling conflicts,” said Patty Barker, Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign director. Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab & Go and Second Chance Breakfast make it easier for students to get the benefits that a nutritious breakfast provides.

### Progress Continues in Arkansas

This year we are celebrating the progress Arkansas continues to make in providing more students with the opportunity to start their days with a nutritious school breakfast. According to a new [School Breakfast Scorecard](#) report from the Food Research & Action Center on the 2015-2016 school year, Arkansas ranks #7 in the nation in low-income student participation in the school breakfast program with 63.5 percent of those students who ate a school lunch also eating school breakfast; an increase of 2.8 percent from the previous school year.

Free/reduced price students eating school <a href="#">lunch</a>	244,295
Free/reduced price students eating school <a href="#">breakfast</a>	155,102

Figures from the Arkansas Department of Education also show that school breakfast is on the rise in Arkansas with 3.6 million more meals being served to students in the 2015-2016 school year than in the 2011-2012 school year. This increased breakfast participation also means more federal reimbursement dollars are supporting child nutrition department budgets. This increased focus on breakfast participation has resulted in \$10.4 million additional federal reimbursement dollars in the 2015-2016 school year over the 2011-2012 school year.

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### Still Work To Do

Despite Arkansas's above the national average participation in school breakfast, there are still low-income students missing out. The Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign stakeholders are committed to narrowing this gap even further by continuing to encourage the adoption of Breakfast After the Bell programs and to assist school districts with proven strategies like the Community Eligibility Provision to increase their breakfast participation figures.

### Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

High-poverty schools can adopt CEP, which allows eligible schools to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. Since implementation began in school districts and schools in Arkansas, CEP has become a key driver of school breakfast participation for many school districts large and small. In the 2016/2017 school year, 139 schools in 45 school districts are utilizing CEP to serve healthy meals to all of their students.

### What Are Educators Saying ?

**Becky Head, child nutrition director for the Jonesboro school district** told the Governor today, "the biggest increase in our participation has been Breakfast After the Bell. We rolled out our first Breakfast in the Classroom back in the 2014-2015 school year. The principal was on board and actually came to me and said 'I want to be the first one.' He was feeding about 130 - 180 students for breakfast. Since then, we average 640 students eating breakfast at that school – a huge increase. That tells me there were students that were hungry every day that did not get breakfast or lunch because of the stigma that was attached to their free and reduced lunch status. After we rolled that one out, we continued to roll out Breakfast in the Classroom in our elementary schools. "

**Clint Walker, child nutrition director for the Jacksonville North Pulaski County School District,** told the gathering of legislators, educators, advocates and others, "Our district is the size of about four thousand kids. Last year we fed about 37% of the kids breakfast. This year we're feeding about 67% of those kids breakfast. That's an extra 1,050 meals per day out of 4,000 kids. That's incredible.

**Cory Biggs, associate director, Forward Arkansas,** told the audience, "From just two years ago, four schools in two districts in the state were doing CEP. Today, almost 139 schools in almost 45 districts are participating. That's 51,000 children who are getting breakfast and lunch now that weren't getting those meals every day just two years ago. I want to say that we consider the Hunger Relief Alliance a key partner, and we are happy to partner with them in getting Breakfast After the Bell, and the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision to any school for whom that works/who wants. We are happy to help in that effort.

### For help in starting or expanding a Breakfast-After-the-Bell program, contact:

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 Breakfast Program Director  
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\*According to the Arkansas Department of Education Data Center Arkansas has 238 school districts, 1,064 K-12 schools and 24 open enrollment charter school. <https://adedatabeta.arkansas.gov/Ark12>

Watch [Breakfast After the Bell: An Everyday Part of Learning](#)

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**About The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance**

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, lead partner in Arkansas for the No Kid Hungry campaign, is a non-profit collaborative network of more than 480 hunger relief organizations across Arkansas. Our founding members include the Arkansas Food-bank in Little Rock, the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas in Jonesboro, Harvest Regional Food Bank in Texarkana, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas in Norfolk, Northwest Arkansas Food Bank in Bethel Heights and River Valley Regional Food Bank in Fort Smith. The Alliance is dedicated to reducing hunger through direct relief, education and advocacy. We invite you to visit [www.ARhungeralliance.org](http://www.ARhungeralliance.org) for details on hunger relief programs, donor and volunteer opportunities.

**About the No Kid Hungry campaign**

The No Kid Hungry campaign connects kids in need with effective federal nutrition programs like school breakfast, summer and afterschool meals and teaches their families how to cook healthy, affordable meals on a budget. The campaign works across the nation and in Arkansas to surround children with healthy food where they live, learn and play.



(From left:) No Kid Hungry Campaign Director Patty Barker; Associate Director of Forward Arkansas Cory Biggs; Ruth Whitney, Alliance board member; Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson; Alliance Executive Director Kathy Webb; Jonesboro School District Child Nutrition Director Becky Head; and Jacksonville/North Pulaski County School District Child Nutrition Director Clint Walker.

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