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PRESS RELEASE

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Low Participation in School Breakfast Means Hungry Children and Lost Federal Dollars for Nebraska

Lincoln, NE – Only 38% of low-income children in Nebraska are participating in the School Breakfast program according to a new report released by the national Food Research and Action Center.

During the 2008-2009 school year, 40,466 low-income children in Nebraska participated in the national School Breakfast Program, compared to 106,598 low-income children in the School Lunch Program. This represents a slight increase over 2007-2008, but as a state Nebraska ranks 44th in the nation for the participation of low-income children in the school breakfast program.

The low participation of students is connected to the low participation of schools with 28.7% of schools in Nebraska not offering the program.

“While participation in Nebraska may have increased in the School Breakfast Program in 2008-2009, it is still reaching too few children. Lost jobs and wages in our state mean that even more children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, but this report shows that too many are missing out,” states Rebecca Gould, Executive Director of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest. “Nebraska must do a better job of reaching more low-income children with school meals, particularly in rural areas.”

Additional analysis of the nation’s urban areas found that the Omaha Public School District is fairing significantly better than the rest of the state, serving 48.8% of low-income children.

If, statewide participation in the School Breakfast program Nebraska rose to 60% of children receiving free and reduced priced lunch, 23,492 more low-income children would start the day with a healthy breakfast and the state would gain an additional \$5,352,551 in federal funding. Gould states, “This goal is reachable in Nebraska even in difficult budget times, since nearly 100% of breakfast costs for low-income children are paid by the federal government.”

In its national report, FRAC outlined a series of recommendations for the upcoming Congressional reauthorization of the child nutrition programs, including creating a start-up grants program, expanding “universal” programs that serve all children in low-income schools, and raising the income eligibility cut-off for free meals.

Nebraska Appleseed joins FRAC in calling for Congress to make needed and long-overdue improvements to the school meal programs. All of the child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast Program, are set to be reauthorized early next year as part of Child Nutrition Reauthorization. “Congress needs to make it easier for Nebraska’s children to participate in the school breakfast program and to support schools that want to expand participation. President Obama made it a goal to end childhood hunger by 2015, and expanding the reach of the School Breakfast Program is a critical part of achieving that goal,” said Gould.

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About the report:

The full report, School Breakfast Scorecard, is available at www.frac.org/pdf/breakfast09.pdf. To measure the reach of the School Breakfast Program, FRAC compares the number of schools and low-income children that participate in breakfast to those that participate in the National School Lunch Program. FRAC also sets a participation goal of reaching 60 children with breakfast for every 100 receiving lunch as a way to gauge state progress and the costs of underparticipation in the program. Nationally, the School Breakfast Program has grown to include 8.8 million low-income children.

About Nebraska Appleseed

Nebraska Appleseed, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest law project, is a national leader in addressing social problems facing vulnerable children without loving and permanent homes, low-income families working hard to make ends meet, and new immigrants seeking a better life. Nebraska Appleseed's current year action plan and description of its six program areas, significant litigation and policy reform successes, and broad-based accomplishments can be found at neappleseed.org.

Nebraska Appleseed is a part of the Appleseed network of independent state-based public interest law centers working to identify and address social injustices. The Appleseed network seeks to build a just society through education, legal advocacy, community activism and policy expertise by addressing root causes and producing practical, systemic solutions with broad implication. For more information visit appleseednetwork.org.

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