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School Breakfast Reaching More Children in Virginia State on the Right Track to Grow Participation Even Further

Richmond, VA – February 10, 2015 – The annual national school breakfast report released today by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) finds that 221,414 low-income children in Virginia participated in school breakfast on an average day during the 2013-2014 School Year, an increase of 5,000 from the previous year.

“This is a step in the right direction,” said Virginia Hunger Solutions Director LaTonya Reed. “Virginia is on the right track to make sure even more children have a healthy meal to start their day.”

The *School Breakfast Scorecard* measures the success of the School Breakfast Program at the national and state levels. The FRAC report finds that 52 low-income children in Virginia ate school breakfast on an average day for every 100 that received free or reduced-price lunch during the 2013 – 2014 school year, placing the state just under the national average of 53:100.

“Good progress is being made, but there are still too many children in Virginia who are missing out on school breakfast and its benefits for health and education,” said Reed.

A companion analysis by FRAC, *School Breakfast – Making it Work in Large School Districts*, examined school breakfast participation rates in 2013-2014 and policies in 62 school districts across the country, including Richmond. For every 100 low-income children eating school lunch in Richmond Public Schools, nearly 68 also ate school breakfast. This ratio places Richmond incredibly close to FRAC’s goal of 70:100.

The report highlighted several strategies which continue to demonstrate their ability to contribute to higher participation rates. The top 10 performing districts all offer breakfast at no charge to all students and extensively utilize alternative school breakfast service models such as breakfast in the classroom throughout all or most of their schools. It also showed the benefits of Community Eligibility, a recent provision that allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. This has been a key driver of school breakfast participation in early adopting states and school districts, and will continue to spur growth as more and more schools are attracted to the many benefits of the program. Richmond Public Schools currently are operating Community Eligibility, but this program has been slow to spread across the state.

“It’s not too late for school districts in Virginia to adopt Community Eligibility. This is a successful program that is contributing to more school meals for hungry children,” said Reed. “Virginia must seize this opportunity to make a difference for children in the state.”

Low participation means missed meals for hungry children and missed federal nutrition dollars for Virginia. Increasing participation to 70 low-income children receiving breakfast for every 100 who eat lunch – a goal some states and school districts have met – would lead to more than 78,000 low-income children in Virginia eating breakfast each day, and an additional \$20.2 million in federal child nutrition funding. For Richmond Public Schools, reaching that goal would mean breakfast for nearly 300 more low-income children.

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About the reports:

FRAC measures the reach of the School Breakfast Program by comparing the number of low-income children that participate in breakfast to those that participate in school lunch. The *School Breakfast Scorecard* contains **national** and **state** data for breakfast participation. *School Breakfast – Making it Work in Large School Districts* surveys 62 large **urban** school districts across the country on school breakfast participation rates and policies during the school year. Both reports are available at www.frac.org.