

Detroit Free Press

National effort targets school breakfast programs

Groups encourage more schools to offer it

By Lori Higgins, Free Press Education Writer
December 21, 2005

Before the kids at Guyton Elementary School in Detroit can get down to the lessons of the day, many of them take care of important business: breakfast.

"It's really important for our kids to start off the day with breakfast. It helps stimulate their minds," said Debra McGill, principal at Guyton, which provides a daily breakfast for between 200 and 300 of its 430 students.

Many studies have shown that children who eat breakfast do better in school. But nationwide -- and in Michigan -- some schools aren't taking advantage of federal money that would allow them to provide a morning meal for children.

And that's why a group of federal agencies, former senators and advocacy groups have banded together in a national campaign, called "Got Breakfast?" that they hope will boost awareness about the need to provide breakfast.

"Unfortunately, millions of kids go without breakfast every day," said Patricia Nicklin, managing director of Share our Strength, a Washington, D.C.-based group that works to fight hunger in America and abroad.

Michigan law requires school breakfast be served in schools where 20% or more of the population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

But in a report issued last week, the Food Research and Action Center, a national group that works to end hunger, found that Michigan schools could receive \$13 million more in federal funds if they served breakfast to eligible kids.

The Food Research group found that in Michigan, just 40.6% of the students eligible for a free or reduced-price breakfast were getting it, and that 76.5% of schools eligible for federal funds to offer breakfast were participating.

Schools do face financial, logistical, even emotional barriers, said Miriam Nettles, school meals consultant and a registered dietician with the Michigan Department of Education. "You have all these things that can work against school breakfasts."

Yet some districts find a way to make it work.

In Southfield Public Schools, breakfast includes things such as sausage, fruit, juice, cereal, bagels and breakfast bars.

"Students who eat breakfast are better learners," said Martha Ritchie, purchasing and food service manager for the district.

Contact **LORI HIGGINS** at 248-351-3694 or higgins@freepress.com.

Copyright © 2005 Detroit