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Food Bank of Delaware, Delaware Department of Education release *Breakfast First, a statewide school breakfast report*

Wilmington, Del. (May 12, 2014) – Educators and anti-hunger advocates gathered this afternoon at Highlands Elementary School for the release of the Food Bank of Delaware and Delaware Department of Education’s *Breakfast First, a Statewide School Breakfast Report*.

The report identifies that only 52.1 percent of Delaware’s children who receive free or reduced-price lunch also participate in school breakfast programs at their school.

In Delaware, children experience food insecurity in more than one in four households. With just more than half of eligible children receiving breakfast at school, tens of thousands of children who could benefit from a healthy start instead reach their school desks with empty stomachs.

“Guided by innovative and compassionate superintendents, principals, teachers, custodians and nutrition staff, schools throughout Delaware are rising to the challenge through a simple, yet effective strategy: moving breakfast into the classroom,” said Food Bank of Delaware President and CEO. “We know that breakfast in the classroom works. Seaford Middle School has increased breakfast participation by 481 percent just by serving breakfast to all in the classroom.”

The Red Clay Consolidated School District has embraced increasing breakfast accessibility by implementing a Grab and Go model where children “grab” their breakfast in the cafeteria and head to class to eat and receive instructional time.

“The reality is some of our children leave school and will not have another meal until they come back the next morning,” said Red Clay Superintendent Mervin Dougherty. “There are too many obstacles for our children today. When our kids don’t have to worry about things we take advantage of, they excel.”

Highlands Elementary Principal Robert Farr shared a story to explain why school nutrition programs are so important, “One day a student was misbehaving. I asked him to come to my office. I sat him and down and asked him, ‘why do you come to school?’ The little boy replied, ‘I come to school to eat. We don’t have any food to eat.’ This reminded me how important it is that our kids have nutritious meals here at school.”

The Delaware Department of Education and the Delaware State Teachers Association support increasing access to school breakfast for children.

“A whole school buy-in leads to success for breakfast,” advised Aimee Beam, Education Associate, School Nutrition Programs for the Delaware Department of Education. “Valid research shows that school meals have a significant impact on student performance. Kids who eat breakfast have higher test scores, decreased visits to the nurse and fewer behavioral issues.”

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“Educators may be leery about breakfast in the classroom, but anecdotal evidence shows that it’s virtually mess free and increases instruction time,” said Delaware State Teachers Association President Frederika Jenner. “Breakfast is more than just the most important meal; it’s the gateway to school success.”

The report delves into school and district-level data to highlight success, as well as identifies common barriers and opportunities for improvement. It shares best practices from successful schools, including Wilbur Elementary School in the Colonial School District and Seaford Middle School in the Seaford School District.

Dan Reyes, Coordinator of the Food Bank of Delaware’s Coalition to End Hunger and co-author of the report, encouraged attendees to use the report as an advocacy tool. “Review the report and identify schools where improvement is needed,” he said. “Encourage educators to take the steps needed to make breakfast free and accessible to all children.”

To read the report in its entirety, visit <http://www.fbd.org/school-breakfast-challenge/>.

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The Food Bank of Delaware distributes between seven and 10 million pounds of food and grocery products each year through its network of 477 hunger-relief program partners throughout the state and also provides thousands of meals a month for children through the After-School Feeding Program, the Summer Food Service Program and the Backpack Program. The Food Bank’s hunger-relief programs directly provide for 241,600 Delawareans at risk of going without meals each year. For more information about the Food Bank of Delaware, visit www.fbd.org or call (302) 292-1305.