



New Mexico Public Education Department

300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501-2786
ped.state.nm.us

Dr. Veronica C. García
Secretary of Education

Beverly Friedman and Danielle Montoya
Public Information Officers
505-827-6661 505-476-0393

Bev.Friedman@state.nm.us Danielle.Montoya@state.nm.us

NEWS RELEASE

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New Mexico's School Breakfast Program Receives Top National Ranking for Third Year

Santa Fe, NM - New Mexico has been ranked 1st in the nation for the third year in a row for low-income student participation in the school breakfast program, according to the *School Breakfast Scorecard*, released this week by the Food Research and Action Center.

Statewide, 62.8 percent of eligible low-income children participated in the school breakfast program, the top ranking in the country. The national average was 46.7 percent. In the 2008-09 school year, 103,463 New Mexico children participated in the program on an average day.

"New Mexico's school breakfast program is a crucial investment to help boost student performance and close the achievement gap," New Mexico Secretary of Education Veronica C. García said. "School leaders from around the state have done a good job enrolling eligible children in this valuable program. We must continue our efforts to maximize enrollment for eligible children, and continue serving all students attending those schools that are currently receiving the additional funds authorized by the Legislature."

The Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org) measures the reach of the school breakfast program by comparing the number of low-income children receiving school breakfast to the number participating in the free and reduced price lunch program.

The *School Breakfast Scorecard* also shows that New Mexico's ranking has been 1st in the country for three school years in a row, 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09.

Governor Richardson and the Legislature have appropriated funds to support universal breakfast to all children regardless of income at low performing elementary schools which are any school not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). New Mexico supports school breakfast to all children at 223 elementary schools, and funding for the school year 2009-2010 is \$3.43 million. These state-appropriated funds are supplemented by federal funds, which means the higher the participation rate, the greater the reimbursement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Secretary García said.

"Enrollment in this program is a simple but powerful tool that can help New Mexico families in the current economic downturn," Dr. García said. "School leaders should do everything they can to reduce bureaucracy that can hinder enrollment."

"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 Jim Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center. "Nationally, we've seen a real increase in breakfast participation among low-income children both because of the recession and because states generally have slowly been increasing breakfast use."

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