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AFTERSCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS FEED HUNGRY CHILDREN, HELP SCHOOLS

Washington, DC, September 18, 2012 – With millions of families struggling as the economy slowly recovers, more students than ever are lining up for school breakfasts, school lunches, *afterschool* meals and suppers. Afterschool programs are vital in stemming childhood hunger because they provide nutritious meals to millions of children who might otherwise go hungry. While fulfilling this crucial need, school districts, too, can benefit from federal reimbursement.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit organization that promotes afterschool programs, more than 15 million school-age children (26%) are on their own after school. And while 8.4 million K-12 children (15 percent) participate in afterschool programs, an additional 18.5 million would participate if a quality program were available in their community, their parents say.

Congress recently improved the federal child nutrition programs to make it easier for programs serving children after school, on weekends, and during school holidays to serve a meal in addition to -- or instead of -- a snack. The federally-subsidized meals and snacks help encourage families to enroll their children in out-of-school-time programs, where they can be active, engaged, safe and learning while their parents are at work. The food also helps keep hunger at bay so children can fully participate in the activities their programs offer.

“Comprehensive afterschool programs combine education and youth development by offering hands-on, fun, creative learning activities – and also giving young people the meals that give them the energy to engage,” explains Jodi Grant, Executive Director of the Afterschool Alliance. “At back-to-school time, we want to remind communities that afterschool meals are one more reason to support the afterschool programs that do so much for children and their families.”

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides federal funds to afterschool programs to serve meals to children up to age 18 during the school year. The meals can be served at any time during the afterschool program, either at a traditional dinner time or immediately when the students arrive after school.

Many school districts are opting for shelf-stable, thaw & serve meals, like Meal Breaks from E S Foods. “The afterschool enrichment program is usually not administered by the foodservice department, and providing portable meal solutions allows students to remain in their typical rooms or areas -- food is not a significant distraction from the afterschool curriculum and is very easy to run,” explains Jeff Rowe, Chief Operating Officer, E S Foods.

While after school “snacks” were originally the only food items served by afterschool programs, more and more schools are that children benefit from meals. “Based on responses we’ve seen, in many communities there is a need for full meals rather than just a snack,” notes Grant. “Providing these essential food services helps children immeasurably and also helps fund the programs they need.”

The Anchorage School District in Alaska, for example, had high praise for the meals they recently added to its afterschool program. Said Elizabeth Hornbuckle, principal of Russian Jack Elementary School, “The afterschool meals are great! I walked in to check on 21st Century and

the students were all sitting and eating. I wondered what was different and saw the new meals. What a difference – kids were eating it up!”

The CACFP provides cash payments and USDA foods. It gives afterschool programs a steady source of funds, and frees up resources that can be used for other activities. In most states a supper is reimbursed at \$2.86 while a snack is reimbursed at \$0.78.

All meals served through the CACFP must meet USDA nutritional guidelines. Suppers (and dinners) must include all of the following: one serving of milk, two servings of fruits and/or vegetables, one serving of grains, and one serving of protein. Meals are low in added sugars and many are whole grain. By providing healthy food, afterschool programs can play a critical role in preventing obesity and improving overall health.

In ten states across the nation, AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers participating in a unique Afterschool Alliance project are working to ensure afterschool programs remain a vital part of communities. Several VISTA volunteers are working to expand afterschool program participation in the USDA’s At-Risk Afterschool Meals and Summer Food Service programs. “Through partnerships with food banks, the State Department of Education, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs and other interested organizations, I have been able to create awareness about the afterschool and summer meal programs. With more afterschool programs participating, we are able to provide more children with healthy nutritious meals that they might not receive otherwise,” says Rashidah Settles, a VISTA member working with the Oklahoma Afterschool Network.

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

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Source: Afterschool Alliance