



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 5/18/2019

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Worcester, Ma. – State Representatives Kimberly Ferguson, David LeBoeuf, and Hannah Kane, school and district officials, and representatives from Worcester County Food Bank (WCFB) and Project Bread, convened May 17 on the campus of Woodland Academy in Worcester, to discuss expanding access to school breakfast for children in need. Legislators in attendance are members of the Food System Caucus for which breakfast is a priority area.

Woodland Academy, the site of the day’s meeting, has witnessed marked success with an innovative classroom breakfast program in a district where 100% of students receive free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision, a section of a 2010 law aimed at eliminating the need for household applications for free or reduced-price meals in schools with a high number of low-income students.

The Rise and Shine Coalition, a group led by the Food Bank Coalition of Massachusetts, which includes WCFB, has been at the forefront of supporting legislation calling upon schools with a high percentage of students at or below poverty, to serve “Breakfast After the Bell,” with emphasis on breakfast in the classroom, to all students.

A bill introduced in January and co-sponsored by State Senator Sal DiDomenico (S. 267) and State Representatives Aaron Vega and Andres Vargas (H. 591) would require schools with 60% or more of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to implement a Breakfast After the Bell program model, such as the one at Woodland Academy, that operates after the start of the school day. Grants and federal reimbursements up to \$2.04 per breakfast served, are available to offset schools’ expenses. The Joint Committee on Education has scheduled a hearing on Breakfast After the Bell for Monday, June 3. A similar bill passed unanimously in the Senate right before the end of last session but never made it to the House for a vote.

Anti-hunger advocates maintain that making school breakfast available to everyone for free in the classroom works to uniformly decrease stigma and increase access to healthy food choices for children.

At Woodland Academy, where breakfast is available to all students in their classroom for free after the start of the school day, 80% of students currently participate, and teachers and administrators

have observed marked improvement in attendance and behavior and decreased hunger-related visits to the school nurse.

Principal Patricia Padilla said “Having the program provides an opportunity for all students to have breakfast and start the day off right. Having access to food in the classroom ensures equal access.”

Presently, Woodland Academy is one of over 20 schools across Worcester County voluntarily offering Breakfast After the Bell.

Massachusetts ranks 33rd of 50 states in the percentage of low-income children who eat a school breakfast each day. If all 625 high-poverty schools statewide reached 80% participation in breakfast, then 159,000 more low-income students would receive a nutritious meal daily.

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*Worcester County Food Bank (WCFB) is the region’s leading anti-hunger organization, distributing enough food annually for 5.4 million meals in partnership with food donors, financial supporters, and volunteers. WCFB provides donated food to a network of 118 Partner Agencies that have food assistance programs, including food pantries, community meal sites, and shelters. This past year, WCFB and its Partner Agencies served 81,000 people in the community. WCFB also advocates within the community and at the state and federal levels for systemic and sustainable solutions to the problem of hunger. WCFB’s mission is **to engage, educate, and lead Worcester County in creating a hunger-free community**. 94 percent of all donated resources go directly towards creating a hunger-free community. See: www.foodbank.org.*