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Ongoing effort aims to end child hunger by serving healthy breakfast at school

BERWYN – October 12, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today visited Irving Elementary School to emphasize the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and to participate in the school's "breakfast in the classroom" program as part of the 2012-2013 Illinois School Breakfast Challenge. A partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Midwest Dairy Council and the Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign, the effort challenges every school in the state to make school breakfast a top priority. Governor Quinn sent a letter to superintendents throughout Illinois encouraging them to participate in the challenge earlier this year.

"No child should begin their school day with an empty stomach," Governor Quinn said. "The Illinois School Breakfast Challenge will help children across the state have a nutritious start to their day, so they are ready to learn, grow and play."

Serving breakfast in the classroom is a proven way to eliminate child hunger and help students succeed in school. Studies indicate that children who come to school hungry report headaches and stomachaches more frequently, have trouble focusing in class, make more errors and have slower memory recall. Researchers have also found that just by serving breakfast at school, students perform better on standardized tests and show a general increase in reading and math scores. "Breakfast in the classroom" programs also help children develop healthy habits for life.

The state of Illinois offers a federally funded School Breakfast Program for children who come from households that struggle with hunger; however, less than 40 percent of the students who qualify participate. The Illinois School Breakfast Challenge encourages schools to take advantage of this program and prevent children from coming to school hungry. Schools with the largest percentage increases in average daily breakfast participation rates for August-December 2012 compared to January-May 2012 will receive awards. There are four tiers of awards, with each tier awarding three prizes of $5,000, $3,000 and $1,000. The Challenge kicked-off in Illinois in April 2012 as part of a nationwide effort to close the school breakfast gap.

Since Irving School introduced their classroom breakfast program, students' standardized test scores have dramatically improved. In 2010 – before the program was implemented – only 79% of third graders at the school met or exceeded state standards in math, but in 2011 – the first year of the program – 92% of third graders met or exceeded this standard. In 2012, it went up to 98%. As of Thursday, October 11, 2012, Irving School has served 9,271 breakfasts since the first day of school.

The Breakfast Challenge is part of the Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign to end childhood hunger in Illinois. Governor Quinn launched the Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign earlier this year with the Illinois Commission to End Hunger and Share Our Strength, the nation's leading child anti-hunger organization. The campaign is one of the key recommendations made by the Commission to eliminate hunger throughout Illinois.

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