



**Massachusetts
APPLESEED** | Center for
Law & Justice

44 School Street, Suite 415 Boston, Massachusetts 02108
Tel: 617.482.8686 | www.massappleseed.org

May 28, 2019

Representative Alice Peisch, House Chair and
Senator Jason M. Lewis, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in Support of S.267/H.591, *An Act regarding breakfast after the bell*

Dear Chairwoman Peisch, Chairman Lewis, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Massachusetts Appleseed respectfully submits the following testimony in support of S.267/H.591, *An Act regarding breakfast after the bell* and requests that the Joint Committee on Education give a favorable report for both bills.

The mission of the Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice (MA Appleseed) is to promote equal rights and opportunities for Massachusetts residents by developing and advocating for systemic solutions to social justice issues. Through in-depth research, community problem-solving, and consensus building we develop powerful solutions to pressing social justice challenges.

Central to this mission is ensuring that all children in Massachusetts, especially those from disadvantaged and historically marginalized communities, have access to opportunity and quality public education. Poverty and historical marginalization mean that it is not only the quality of schools but also the socioeconomic barriers that impact students' ability to achieve. Among these barriers, hunger plays a major role in limiting the academic achievement and social mobility of youth in Massachusetts. According to Feeding America, 1 in 9 children in Massachusetts deals with hunger as a common issue in their life.¹ Going without breakfast and other meals causes students to lack concentration, perform poorly on tests, and come into conflict with other students.² As a result, receiving or not receiving a meal before the school day begins can determine whether or not a student is successful in the classroom.

¹“What Hunger Looks Like in Massachusetts.” Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/massachusetts>.

² “Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning.” Food Research & Action Center. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>.

Providing breakfast, on the other hand, has been shown to increase test scores, boost academic performances, and improve behavioral outcomes in students.³ In addition to improved achievements in the classroom, low-income students who receive breakfast at school also experience improved “concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning.”⁴ Since students receive a meal to start the day, free breakfast programs also encourage arriving on time and have been shown to decrease tardiness rates.⁵ Although many low-income students in Massachusetts receive free breakfast through the federally-funded School Breakfast Program, the current provision of breakfast in our schools is not doing enough to ensure that hunger is not the barrier blocking our most vulnerable students from succeeding.

Current free breakfast programs for low-income students in Massachusetts do not reach all the eligible or at-need students. Currently, nearly 150,000 eligible students in Massachusetts do not participate in the free School Breakfast Program.⁶ Students may not participate because their families have not completed the required paperwork, since they cannot arrive to school early enough to get a breakfast, or because they feel a stigma attached to receiving free breakfasts.⁷ Similarly, many low-income students from food insecure families may just be above the income eligibility lines for the School Breakfast Program and thus unable to receive free breakfast.

These bills would directly address these barriers to student success and ensure that breakfast after the bell is provided to all students in all schools where 60% or more of students are eligible to receive free or reduce-priced meals. Breakfast after the bell allows ~~students~~ all students to receive a meal after the school day begins either in the classroom or to-go on the way to class. This system ensures that students do not have to arrive early to receive a meal and that there is no stigma attached to having a free breakfast at school. Since federal policies allow for additional reimbursements in schools where there is a large proportion of students receiving free meals, the Commonwealth’s school districts could be fully reimbursed for Breakfast After the Bell programs.

S.267/H.591 would ensure that no students in low-income school districts will go to school hungry all at no extra cost to Massachusetts’ school districts. This legislation has the chance to increase the academic success rates for low-income students and take an important step towards closing the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier school districts. **Massachusetts Appleseed urges you to issue a favorable report for S.267/H.591** so that no student starts their day hungry. Thank you for considering this testimony, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any questions or require additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

³ “Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning”; “Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms: Expanding ‘After the Bell’ Breakfast to Fuel Student Learning.” EOS Foundation. . <http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MA-School-Breakfast-Report-Card-2018.pdf>

⁴ “Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning.”

⁵ “Research Brief; Breakfast for Learning.”; “Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms.”

⁶ “Breakfast After the Bell Legislation.” Rise and Shine Massachusetts. http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BreakfastAfterTheBell_LeaveBehind_RSMACoalition_01.22.19.pdf

⁷ “Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms.”

Deborah M. Silva,
Executive Director
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice

Due to current district policies, 153,000 low-income students start their day off hungry. “Behavioral, emotional, mental health, and academic problems are more prevalent among children and adolescents struggling with hunger.”⁸ This makes academic success a struggle for children without stable access to food. But when kids do eat breakfast, they score better on tests, attend class more often, and experience fewer behavioral issues.⁹ Students experience improved “concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning.”¹⁰

Breakfast also ensures that students get the necessary nutrients to maintain a healthy diet.¹¹ This decreases the risk of obesity and prevents other negative health outcomes “including higher blood cholesterol and insulin levels, smoking, alcohol use, physical inactivity, disordered eating, and unhealthy weight management practices.”¹² Food-insecure students receive “half of their daily calories at school.”¹³ Since most of their meals are from school, providing breakfast in class is essential to preventing health problems.

The differences between students who eat breakfast and those who do not show that poverty does not prohibit success. Rather, it makes barriers that can be overcome with help from communities. Currently, Massachusetts school districts are creating serious learning disparities based on food insecurity. Breakfast improves education and health outcomes for students. Consequently, school breakfast programs promote equity in education, putting students on similar footing.

Despite the availability of federal funding, Massachusetts' high poverty schools are missing out on free, federally-funded breakfast. “Of Massachusetts’ 638 high poverty schools, an estimated 215 operate after the bell breakfast programs, leaving 423 that do not.”¹⁴ And “less than 85 percent of the schools that offered lunch also offered breakfast in the 2017–2018 school year.”¹⁵ And yet, this money has already been set aside to fund school breakfast and would profoundly help low-income students achieve academic success.

⁸Christy Mach Dubé and Elizabeth Brodbine Ghoniem. “Ending Hunger in our Classrooms: Expanding ‘After the Bell’ Breakfast to Fuel Student Learning.” EOS Foundation. <http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MA-School-Breakfast-Report-Card-2018.pdf>; “Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning.” Food Research & Action Center. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>.

⁹ http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BreakfastAfterTheBell_LeaveBehind_RSMACoalition_01.22.19.pdf (“[O]ne study reports increase by 17.5 percent in math scores”).

¹⁰ <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf> at 1

¹¹ <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforhealth-1.pdf> at 1 (“An improvement in dietary quality also may extend to the family members of children with access to the breakfast program.”)

¹² <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforhealth-1.pdf> at 2

¹³ <http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MA-School-Breakfast-Report-Card-2018.pdf> at 3

¹⁴ <http://riseandshinema.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MA-School-Breakfast-Report-Card-2018.pdf> at 4

¹⁵ <http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/school-breakfast-scorecard-sy-2017-2018.pdf> at 9

Breakfast After the Bell legislation would access available federal funds to establish school breakfast programs statewide.¹⁶ In doing so, it would not only reduce hunger but also the stigma attached to free school meals. The bill would make breakfast available to any student attending schools below a certain income threshold. This strategy keeps burdensome paperwork, strict-income eligibility standards, and fear of stigma from impacting vulnerable students' access to breakfast.

Poor students experience a host of barriers to academic achievement including food insecurity. This impacts the ability of low-income students to access/obtain social mobility. The *Act regarding breakfast after the bell* would take advantage of earmarked federal funds to alleviate that insecurity. Historical marginalization should not continue to block the mobility of our youth.

¹⁶ "Breakfast After the Bell Legislation"