



Testimony from Share Our Strength to the House Education Committee
In Support of Breakfast After The Bell

Submitted by Billy Shore, Founder and CEO of Share Our Strength

In partnership with Hunger Free Colorado and the Office of Governor John Hickenlooper, Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign is connecting kids in need to effective nutrition programs like school breakfast and summer meals. This work is accomplished through the No Kid Hungry network, made up of private citizens, public officials, nonprofits, business leaders and others providing innovative hunger solutions in their communities. We are pleased to submit testimony for the record to the House Education Committee.

Study after study shows that breakfast is critical to a child's health, education and economic outcomes. If this legislation has the estimated impact, more than 84,000 additional children would receive breakfast every day. According to research developed for the No Kid Hungry campaign that analyzed publicly available data and academic findings, this could have an annual potential impact of as much as: 125,000 fewer absences; 84,000 students achieving higher math test scores; and, 21,000 more high school graduates.

Innovative programs like Breakfast After the Bell legislation this Committee is considering go a long way in breaking down barriers and making it easier for children to start their day with a healthy meal. Recently, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent a letter to the nation's education community urging them to consider alternative breakfast programs like Breakfast After the Bell.

Teachers know that students who struggle with hunger can't learn and that that starting the school day with breakfast can make all the difference. A 2012 nationwide survey of K-8 teachers by Share Our Strength found that teachers credit breakfast with increased concentration (95%), better academic performance (89%) and better behavior in the classroom (73%). Additionally, students who eat breakfast consistently show improvement in verbal fluency, arithmetic, tests of attention, memory, creativity, physical endurance, and general tests of academic achievement and cognitive functioning.¹ The findings among programs where breakfast is served free to all students, as the Breakfast After the Bell legislation would do, also have compelling findings. Students in these programs have lower rates of absence and tardiness.² In addition, children who eat a good breakfast develop healthy eating habits, visit the school nurse less frequently and are less likely to be obese.

The National School Breakfast Program is paid for entirely by the federal government, however states do not receive the funding until students are participating in the program. During the 2011-2012 school

¹ Taras H. "Nutrition and Student Performance at School." *Journal of School Health* 2005; 75(6): 199-213.

² Cook JT, Ohri-Vachaspati P, Kelly GL. "Evaluation of a Universally-Free School Breakfast Program Demonstration Project, Central Falls, Rhode Island." Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, Tufts University, Medford, MA, 1996.

year, if Colorado had at least a 70 percent participation in the school breakfast program, the state could have brought more than \$14.5 million in already allocated federal funding to pay for school meals.³ By increasing funding in this program, Colorado will bring in federal funding.

School breakfast programs have historically had strong bipartisan support at the federal and state level. Anti-hunger programs like school breakfast are among the very few programs that have maintained federal funding support in recent years. Congressional committees and the President's bipartisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform have recognized the importance of these programs and exempted them from deficit reduction strategies, including sequestration. This action demonstrates the breadth of support for the National School Breakfast Program and the benefits it brings to millions of children across the country. The No Kid Hungry campaign has also partnered with both Republican and Democratic governors across the country, signaling that child hunger is an issue that both sides of the aisle can agree on.

However, we know that despite these clear benefits, millions of students across the country are missing out on school breakfast programs. Nearly half of all students who participate in the free and reduced-price school lunch program are not receiving breakfast at school. Two of the main reasons cited for this are timing and students' difficulty arriving at school for breakfast before classes begin and the stigma associated with eating a free or reduced-priced breakfast in the cafeteria before school.

By passing Breakfast After the Bell legislation, Colorado would become a leader in ensuring that children have access to the food they need to start their days ready to learn. As we know from research and evidence at the state and federal level, school breakfast can have a critical impact on a student's ability to learn and taking measures to increase access to this program – as this legislation would do – would place Colorado at the forefront of policy on children's welfare and educational attainment. I urge you to pass this legislation.

For any questions or comments on this testimony, please contact Summer Gathercole, Colorado State Director, at sgathercole@strength.org.

³ School Breakfast Scorecard, 2011-2012, Food Research and Action Center