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Fighting Hunger in New Mexico Schools State HSD, PED Pursue Low-Cost Solutions to Child Hunger



(Albuquerque, NM) – New Mexico’s Human Services Department (HSD) and the Public Education Department (PED) have already agreed to and begun implementing many of the specific policy recommendations that address both child hunger and school budget constraints offered by New Mexico Appleseed in its’ groundbreaking report **“Full Stomachs ~ Full Minds: How New Mexico Public Schools Can Feed More Children for Less Money.”** Developed by the non-profit, non-partisan think tank, the report provides state schools with specific policy changes that will secure larger amounts of federal funding for free and reduced-price meal programs, and state officials have begun to act on these recommendations.

Based on the report and the urging of New Mexico Appleseed, for example, HSD and PED will begin automatically enrolling poor children into the National School Lunch Program on a monthly basis to enable them to get free or reduced price lunches at school, if their families are participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program. HSD and PED will also now include and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in their matches. Prior to the report, HSD and PED matched only a few times a year and did not include TANF.

"Thanks to HSD and PED agreeing to New Mexico Appleseed’s recommendations, many more poor and hungry New Mexico children will be ensured at least one meal a day," said Jennifer Ramo, executive director of New Mexico Appleseed. "Now, the most an eligible child will have to wait to be automatically enrolled in the free and reduced price lunch program is a few weeks, when before they were having to wait up to six months. This is a big improvement. We look forward to working with HSD, PED and the School Districts to implement the remaining recommendations that will truly feed more children for less money."

Hunger is a huge problem in New Mexico. Food stamp participation is soaring, more families are on the brink and too many children in the state do not know where their next meal will come from. The school breakfast and lunch programs provide a unique opportunity to give these kids two solid meals a day, when they might not get a third one at home.

"Ensuring that our students have proper nutrition is fundamental to student success. If they are hungry, they can't focus in the classroom," said PED Secretary Veronica Garcia, who has convened a task force to study and implement the remaining Appleseed policy

recommendations. “The collaboration of Appleseed, PED and HSD is a win for the children of New Mexico.

HSD Secretary-designate Falls added, “We are very entrenched in combating the hunger problem in New Mexico. HSD is always ready to be a part of the solution and the small amount of work for us this requires yields huge rewards for our children and families. A monthly match of new children participating in the SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs will allow more New Mexico children access to nutritious meals during the school day when they need energy the most.”

The report's recommendations revolve primarily around maximizing student enrollment in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and expanding the pool of eligible students in order to secure higher federal reimbursement rates for meals. Improving direct certification using techniques such as marrying NSLP eligibility to enrollment in Medicaid or SNAP would help would help qualify children more easily and at a lower administrative cost.

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NM Appleseed is a nonpartisan organization that seeks to provide objective analysis, public policy and answers to the most pressing poverty-related problems and to choreograph change with the purpose of creating maximum community impact. New Mexico Appleseed's mission is to create systemic solutions problems impacting the poor and underserved in New Mexico. New Mexico Appleseed leverages the work pro bono attorneys and consultants to create maximum impact on the problems it addresses.