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Governor and First Lady Award Nearly \$60,000 to 16 Montana Schools to Expand School Breakfast

HELENA – Sixteen Montana schools are about to take a very important step for the health and future of their students and their communities – and it all starts with making sure that every day starts with a healthy breakfast.

Governor Steve Bullock and First Lady Lisa Bullock announced today that a total of \$59,600 in privately funded grants have been awarded to 16 schools across Montana to assist them in starting new breakfast programs and expanding participation in existing programs. All of these schools have pledged to adopt innovative approaches to school breakfast, such as serving breakfast in the classroom or offering a “grab-and-go” style that appeals to teens on the go. These grants will help make healthy school breakfast accessible to the 7,000 Montana students who attend these schools, more than 60 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-priced meals.

“Every Montana student should start the school day with a healthy breakfast that ensures they’re ready to learn. We are thrilled to see that so many Montana educators are recognizing the value of making breakfast a part of their school day, and that private businesses are stepping up to make this a reality for Montana students,” said Governor Bullock. “Breakfast at school is an important step we can take in our fight against childhood hunger.”

These schools are about to join more than 90 other Montana schools that make breakfast a part of the school day, whether they serve it in the classroom at the start of the day, or from a hallway kiosk between school periods. Participation in these innovative, accessible breakfast programs is more than twice as high, on average, than when breakfast is served before school in the cafeteria. Montana teachers are already seeing the difference in their students’ behavior, attendance and ability to pay attention during morning lessons.

“More kids are coming to school, and they are coming for breakfast,” said Nicole Heintzelman, a sixth grade teacher at West Elementary in Great Falls. “Before we started Breakfast in the Classroom, some kids found it easier to stay home, even if they weren’t getting food there, just to avoid being hungry at school.”

“It has positively changed the behavior of our student body – we have had a significant drop in office disciplinary referrals during morning class time since we started breakfast in the classroom – very significant. It really was the right move for our students,” says Lori Dust, Assistant Principal of Hardin High School.

These observations align with national studies that have found that school breakfast is associated with lower rates of tardiness, fewer referrals to the school nurse, and fewer disciplinary incidents. Research also shows that students who eat breakfast at school perform 17 percent better on math tests compared to those who eat at home or do not eat breakfast at all.

The 16 schools that were awarded grants in this grant round are:

- Browning Middle School (Browning) - \$3924
- Browning High School (Browning) - \$5000
- Washington Middle Elementary (Miles City) - \$2711
- Longfellow Elementary (Great Falls) - \$5000
- Whittier Elementary (Great Falls) - \$5000
- Cornelius Hedges Elementary (Kalispell) - \$5000
- Elrod Elementary (Kalispell) - \$2129
- Lakeside Elementary (Somers) - \$4998
- Columbia Falls High School (Columbia Falls) - \$1000
- Troy Junior-Senior High (Troy) - \$5000
- Stevensville Elementary (Stevensville) - \$2675
- Billings West High School (Billings) - \$2600
- Riverside Middle School (Billings) - \$4964
- Elysian Schools (Billings) - \$4000
- Canyon Creek School (Billings) - \$666
- Custer School District (Custer) - \$4910

The grants were made possible through generous donations from the Walmart Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Share our Strength, AT&T and a personal donation from Harald Herrmann with Round It Up America. Award funds are intended to help schools to pay for essential equipment and infrastructure such as grab-and-go kiosks or carts for delivering meals to classrooms; programs are expected to be self-sustaining thereafter. This is the second round of school breakfast grants. Last November, the Governor and First Lady [awarded \\$55,000 to 20 Montana schools](#).

The Bullocks launched the Montana Breakfast after the Bell initiative to increase participation in school breakfast and make it a part of the school day by serving it after the school day begins. The initiative aims to ensure that all kids can have a healthy start to the day by helping schools adopt proven breakfast models that increase participation, such as breakfast in the classroom and grab n’ go breakfasts. One of the most effective ways to significantly boost school breakfast participation is to make it part of the school day.

Schools interested in starting a new breakfast program and/or making breakfast part of the school day can contact the Montana No Kid Hungry School Breakfast Coordinator, Rosie Cody at RCody@mt.gov or by phone at 444-3925.

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