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**News Release
May 12, 2022**

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**UAMS Researchers Find Student Behavior Improves
When Schools Serve Breakfast after Class Begins**

LITTLE ROCK — A research team, which included Andres Cuadros-Menaca, Ph.D., and Michael Thomsen, Ph.D., from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' (UAMS) Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, discovered that schools providing breakfast after the school day begins (Breakfast After the Bell) experienced a decrease in student behavior issues.

The study, published by the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, revealed that because of Breakfast after the Bell, more than 1.3 million additional breakfasts were served to Arkansas students in grades 3-7 during the 2018-2019 school year. That was the final year of the study and the last school year before the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools across the state.

Currently, there are over 400 schools in Arkansas that provide Breakfast After the Bell, which helps students get breakfast once class begins. Traditionally, schools serve breakfast in the cafeteria or a designated area on campus before school starts for the day.

“Breakfast After the Bell creates a better learning environment,” said Thomsen, director of the UAMS Center for the Study of Obesity in the College of Public Health. “If you haven’t eaten anything, it’s easier to become irritated at someone or just not care about school. Breakfast After the Bell ultimately leads to students having a better educational experience because they’re not hungry.”

The data used in the study dates back to the 2008-2009 school year and continued through 2018-2019. Breakfast After the Bell resulted in almost 18,000 fewer documented behavioral disturbances in Arkansas during the 2018-2019 school year.

Breakfast After the Bell, which was first used in Arkansas in 2013, also helps to address adolescent health. All meals provided by the schools must meet nutrition standards set by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture. Schools where a high percentage of students reside in food deserts are most likely to provide Breakfast After the Bell.

Additionally, the impact of Breakfast After the Bell is even more pronounced among minority children and those eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

“Our findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that children from economically or socially disadvantaged families are more likely to be food insecure, which may contribute to psychosocial dysfunction,” said Cuadros-Menaca, a postdoctoral fellow in the obesity center.

The increased access to a healthy meal for all students, especially ones from low-income households, enhances the value of the program.

“If a student lives in an environment where breakfast isn’t offered at home, then eating breakfast at school gives them food, and it’s a healthy meal option, too,” Thomsen said. “If children are at risk of a poor diet because their family does not have access to nutritious foods, the school can make a difference. Having Breakfast After the Bell means even more children will enjoy nutritious meals during the day.”

There are several initiatives, ministries, and nonprofits that address child hunger in Arkansas. One of those groups is the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. Vivian Nicholson is the breakfast program director for the organization.

“Another benefit of Breakfast After the Bell is that teachers have less distractions from students saying they don’t feel well and want to go to the nurse’s office because their stomach hurts when they’re actually just hungry,” Nicholson said.

“Several principals have shared with us that when a child has a discipline issue in the morning, it’s often because they have not eaten breakfast,” Nicholson said. “Teachers have told us that they have fewer discipline issues in the morning when all their students eat breakfast.”

Economic difficulties or the loss of sleep in order to get to school early enough for breakfast are a few of the common occurrences that result in a student not eating in the morning.

“Some children may miss breakfast because the school bus arrives late,” Cuadros-Menaca said. “Some kids choose not to get breakfast before the bell because of the negative stigma of school meals being only for students from low-income families.”

School administrations constantly seek ways to help their students. That’s a reason why more Arkansas schools are converting to Breakfast After the Bell and distributing breakfast in ways that will benefit their students.

“Some schools are doing breakfast in the classroom,” Nicholson said. “Some are doing a grab and go in the hallway. At the high school level, some places are doing a second chance breakfast after first period class is over.”

Researchers suggest that potential issues such as kids making a mess in the classrooms or staff finding efficient ways to distribute meals keeps some administrators from implementing the program.

“There are schools where the child nutrition department does not have the manpower to deliver breakfast to the classroom or in the hallways,” Nicholson said. “Some child nutrition staffs don’t have the equipment to offer Breakfast After the Bell.”

Overall, Breakfast After the Bell helps to create a situation that’s ideal for Arkansas’ kids to get a good education.

“With Breakfast After the Bell, the obvious main benefit is that teachers have fewer behavioral issues to address,” Thomsen said. “Fewer behavioral issues result in a better learning environment for all children.”

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* recognized UAMS Medical Center as a Best Hospital for 2021-22; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide for the third year; and named five areas as high performing — colon cancer surgery, diabetes, hip replacement, knee replacement and stroke. UAMS has 3,047 students, 873 medical residents and fellows, and six dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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