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Governor Steve Bullock, First Lady Lisa Bullock Announce Breakfast After the Bell Grants for Montana Schools

Helena, MT – Today, Governor Steve Bullock and First Lady Lisa Bullock announced the availability of \$55,000 in mini-grants to help Montana schools start or expand participation in breakfast programs. These grants will be disbursed in amounts up to \$5,000 per school, and can be used to cover start-up costs, such as additional coolers, food carts, and other equipment.

"If we want our children to succeed in the classroom, we need to ensure that they start the day off right with a nutritious breakfast," Governor Bullock said. "Through these grants, and partnerships with Montana businesses, we'll help schools overcome the obstacles that might prevent them from increasing breakfast participation."

Schools can apply online by going to www.BreakfastAfterTheBellMT.com. Schools have until September 5th, 2014 to apply. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis after the initial deadline. Preference will be given to schools using evidence-based alternative models like "breakfast after the bell," grab-n-go, and other alternative breakfast models.

"No kid in Montana should be hungry," First Lady Bullock said. "As a mother of three kids, I know that when my kids have a healthy breakfast, they can focus on learning and are better able to pay attention in the classroom."

These grants were made possible through generous donations from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana, Neptune Aviation, and the No Kid Hungry Campaign of Share our Strength.

"Nothing is more important to the future of our state than our children," Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana Plan President said Mike Frank, Plan President of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana, who donated \$20,000 to the program.. "Our mission is to do everything possible to stand with Montanans in sickness and in health. That includes giving children every opportunity to live a healthier lifestyle and succeed in the classroom. Blue Cross is proud to partner with Governor Bullock to provide these essential meals to Montana children."

“One of Neptune Aviation’s core values is ‘family.’ The company has always had an interest in the welfare of children in Montana. In line with this value, we are pledging \$10,000 toward Governor Bullock’s Breakfast After the Bell Grant Program,” Ron Hooper, CEO of Neptune Aviation said. “We are looking forward to working with the Governor in this effort, and I challenge other business leaders in Montana to take similar action to support this very important effort.”

Research has shown that serving food after school starts (“after the bell”), can dramatically increase breakfast participation. As a result, more kids are fed and ready to learn. Teachers and principals who have implemented breakfast after the bell models say they’ve seen improvement in student behavior.

Research shows that on average, students who eat breakfast perform 17.5 percent higher on mathematics standardized tests, have higher attendance, and are more likely to graduate high school. Students who eat school breakfast have increased attentiveness, improved behavior, and less sick and tardy days. These kids also have fewer disciplinary referrals.

Currently, less than half of Montana kids who rely on free or reduced-priced lunches are also receiving breakfast. One of the reasons for this dismal breakfast participation rate is that traditional school breakfast models can be inconvenient to access and stigmatizing for children from low-income families.

In Montana, one in five children faces food insecurity.

Earlier this year, the Governor and First Lady were joined by actor Jeff Bridges as they visited Darby Elementary school. This school has implemented a Breakfast After the Bell program, increased breakfast participation from 30 percent to 76 percent, and was awarded the First Lady’s School Breakfast Champion Award. Through the generous support of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana, Neptune Aviation, and No Kid Hungry, more Montana schools will be able to follow the lead of innovators in Darby Elementary and other schools across the state that have moved to alternative breakfast models and dramatically increased participation.

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