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Dole, McGovern push participation in school breakfast program

By Wayne Parry, Associated Press Writer
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NEWARK N.J.

Two former presidential nominees served meals to students in New Jersey's largest city Tuesday as they embarked on a national campaign to urge parents to take advantage of free school breakfasts for their children.

Former U.S. Sens. Bob Dole, R-Kansas, and George McGovern, D-South Dakota, visited the Belmont Runyon Elementary School on Tuesday, where administrators said every one of the nearly 500 pupils participates in the school breakfast program.

Dole, the Republican nominee in 1996, and McGovern, the Democrats' standard bearer in 1972, chose the school to kick off National School Breakfast Week because of its high participation rate. They urged a group of second and third-graders to eat breakfast each morning, telling them it would help them in class.

"You feel better, you respond better to your teachers," said Dole, 82. "You can't run a car without gasoline, and you can't run a body without food."

McGovern, 83, struck a similar theme.

"It's hard to be quiet in class when your stomach is growling," he said. "It's hard to learn."

The two former presidential candidates are the official spokesmen for the "**Got Breakfast?**" campaign, which is run by government agencies, food industry and anti-hunger groups.

Susan Kandell, the school's principal, said parents do not need to do anything in order for their children to get breakfast at school.

"It's an automatic thing: They enroll in school, they get breakfast," she said.

But Dole said other schools across the nation have flagging participation rates.

"The sad part about the lack of participation in this program is that money is out there to pay for it," he said.

The two ex-senators then served pre-packaged boxes of cereal and snacks, along with cartons of milk, to the students, who were confused about who they were.

"Do you know who these two men are?" the district's superintendent, Marion Bolden asked the children.

"The president?" one boy called out, as Dole grinned and pumped his fist in the air.

"We did run for president, but something happened," Dole said. "The other guy got more votes."

