

Dole, McGovern hawk free school breakfasts

By Erin Einhorn, Daily News Staff Writer
December 20th, 2005

Former presidential contenders Bob Dole and George McGovern are teaming up to encourage more kids to take advantage of free school breakfasts - and more schools to take advantage of federal dollars to pay for them.

"The money is right on the table and they just leave it on the table," Dole told the Daily News yesterday. "It's not a question of whether the administration will give them the money. The administration supports it. Congress supports it."

Yet millions of kids who qualify for the free meals are not getting them. In New York City, only 20% of the more than 800,000 kids who qualify for free or reduced breakfasts show up to receive them, costing city schools \$133 million a year, according to the Food Research Action Center. Many more - some 600,000 - receive free lunches.

Nationally, of 29 million kids who qualify for the breakfasts, only 9 million take part, federal stats show.

School nutrition experts blame poor awareness among parents, the logistics of getting kids to school early and the perceived stigma of needing a handout for the low numbers.

Dole, the 1996 Republican nominee for President, and McGovern, the Democrats 1972 nominee, plan to launch their "Got Breakfast" campaign today. They're sponsoring an essay contest and encouraging schools to try boxed meals instead of hot breakfasts to get more kids involved.

A spokeswoman for Schools Chancellor Joel Klein said the city schools had not been contacted about the program but would review its recommendations.