**AB 292 (Santiago) Sample Support Letter to the Senate Committee on Education**

**Bill status:** AB 292, the *Time to Eat* bill, passed the Assembly Floor on Thursday, June 4. Next, AB 292 will be heard in the Senate Committee on Education. In order to ensure that your support is on record in the Senate, you must resubmit a letter of support.

**Bill highlights**: AB 292, authored by Assemblymember Miguel Santiago, will:

* Ensure that all students have the time they need to eat lunch at school, which the California Department of Education specifies as 20 minutes after being served.
* Increase the likelihood that California students receive the full benefits of a nutritious school lunch, which improves student nutrition and learning.
* Emphasize the crucial role that nutrition and school meals play in supporting academic achievement and student health and well-being.

**Next Steps:** Organizations and individuals should submit a new or revised letter of support. You are welcome to customize this sample letter or write your own. Email or fax your letter to Assemblymember Santiago.

Send a copy of your letter as an email attachment to Marilyn.limon@asm.ca.gov and alexis@cfpa.net -OR - fax a copy to 916.319.2118 and 510.433.1131.

***Letters should be submitted as soon as possible.***

Questions? Contact Alexis Fernandez at alexis@cfpa.net or 510.433.1122 ext. 111

[Date]

The Honorable Assemblymember Santiago

State Capitol, Room 5119

Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: Support AB 292 (Santiago) as Amended on June 2, 2015**

Dear Assemblymember Santiago,

[Name of your organization] is writing in support of AB 292, legislation designed to ensure that California students have adequate time to eat lunch at school.

Lunch is an essential part of the school day. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) makes nutritionally balanced, low or no-cost meals available to all students. For many low-income students, school lunch may be the most nutritious meal of the day. California has invested significant resources in improving school meals, but many students miss out on the benefits of school lunch due to time pressures, such as long lines and wait times, insufficient points of service, and scheduling constraints. When students do not have enough time to eat a complete lunch, they throw away portions of their meal, buy less nutritious snacks instead, or skip lunch entirely. When students are not given enough time to eat during the school day we fail in meeting our responsibility to support student health and achievement.

Since 2006, the California Department of Education (CDE) has recommended that schools provide all students with at least 20 minutes to eat lunch after being served. Yet, a 2013 CDE survey on lunch time, conducted with over 1,000 schools, found that only 28.1% of elementary principals and 44.8% of middle/high school principals reported meeting this recommendation. Research shows that the length of lunch periods and the amount of time students spend waiting in lunch lines can impact participation in the school lunch program. Decreased participation in the lunch program also leads to decreased revenue to districts.

We support AB 292 because [choose one or more of the following reasons or add your own]:

* **Nutrition plays a critical role in supporting academic achievement and student behavior.** Research definitively links nutrition with student behavior and performance. Common sense points to a wide range of benefits for students who are properly nourished throughout the school day. When students don’t have enough time to eat, the health and academic benefits of nutritious school meals are lost.
* **AB 292 would improve student nutrition and reduce food waste.** California’s implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 has greatly improved the nutritional quality of school food. School districts are working hard to make meals more healthful and appealing to students. These efforts are hindered when students don’t have enough time to eat during their lunch periods. Research shows that when students are given sufficient time to eat, they consume more nutrients and less food is wasted.
* **AB 292 would more effectively spend critical resources that support school meals.** Existing funds from the NSLP and the supplemental State Meal Program support the costs associated with providing students school lunches. When students don’t have enough time to eat, these valuable resources are lost. Increased participation in school lunch brings the health and academic benefits of school meals to more students, while drawing additional federal funds in per-meal reimbursements into California.
* **AB 292 would strengthen the existing CDE recommendation that students have at least 20 minutes to eat after being served**, which is consistent with evidence-based recommendations from numerous nutrition experts, including USDA. The CDE guidelines provide schools with a variety of strategies for providing more time for students to eat at minimal or no-cost to schools. While AB 292 would require schools to provide students with adequate time to eat lunch, it allows local schools the flexibility to pursue different strategies that best fit each school’s unique characteristics.
* **AB 292 would establish a reasonable and achievable requirement that schools are able to meet.** While research has shown that many California students are missing out on lunch time, many schools throughout the state are already providing students with adequate time to eat by ensuring that lunch service moves efficiently and school bell schedules are allow sufficient time to serve all students within the lunch period.
* **AB 292 would bring California up to speed with the nine other states and the District of Columbia that have policies in place requiring adequate time to eat at school.** California currently has no state statute that guarantees an adequate meal break for students; however, state labor law ensures a minimum 30-minute, uninterrupted meal break for employees. California should ensure that its hard-working students are given the time they need to eat during the school day.

[If you prefer, insert your own reason here] I believe my community could benefit from AB 292 because…

For these reasons, [I/we] we support AB 292 and thank you for introducing this important legislation

Sincerely,

Your name and title

CC: Alexis Fernandez, California Food Policy Advocates (sponsor)