

## School Breakfast at "Severe Need" Schools: AB 1966

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### »» ISSUE

Research has shown that school breakfast can make a strong contribution to a child's good health and academic success. For low-income students, access to school breakfast may mean the difference between going to school well-fueled for learning and going to school with a stomach that is empty or full of junk food. Yet participation in school breakfast remains stubbornly low. One barrier to greater participation is access. Despite local, state, and national efforts, not all California schools with a clear need for the School Breakfast Program offer it. As a result, thousands of kids in California don't get the meals they need to learn and thrive.

### »» NEED

The federal government defines schools that serve more than 40 percent of their lunches to low-income students as "severe need" and provides them with an extra reimbursement for school breakfast. This policy reflects the federal government's belief that these schools have a special responsibility to serve breakfast, given the high demand among low-income students for lunch. Despite these incentives, and the availability of start-up funds to defray initial school breakfast infrastructure costs, hundreds of schools in California are not serving breakfast. Given the links between good nutrition and academic success, the Legislature has a role in responding to this gap in service.

Legislation passed in 2006 resulted in a recent report commissioned by the Department of Education. This report found that over 500 severe need schools do not offer breakfast. AB 1966 would require many of these schools to participate in the School Breakfast Program. Most schools in California offer the School Breakfast Program and many have found innovative ways to boost participation. These "severe need" schools should do the same. AB 1966 would help this happen.

### »» REQUEST

CFPA requests the legislature take the following action:

Action: Improve access to school breakfast, contingent upon sufficient funding.

If the Superintendent of Public Instruction determines that there is sufficient funding, this bill would require most schools identified as "severe need" to serve school breakfast.

### »» HISTORY

Numerous bills have aimed at requiring all, or a subset, of California schools to offer the School Breakfast Program. This bill seeks to overcome the obstacles experienced in past efforts. By hinging the decision to act on the existence of sufficient funding, the bill overcomes a fiscal barrier. AB 1966 also addresses the mandate issue by allowing for a waiver from the requirement if a school can demonstrate that operating a breakfast program would be financially infeasible.

### »» OUTCOMES

Schools that have a demonstrated need among low-income students for school meals will now offer both breakfast and lunch. With mounting evidence suggesting a positive impact of school breakfast on academic performance, truancy, tardiness, and health, this bill could have a number of beneficial impacts for California's students.