

Frequently Asked Questions: Feeding Hungry Minds in All of California's Public Schools AB 2200

Why should breakfast be served at school?

Hunger: Many children in California are hungry. California has one of the highest child poverty rates among states, ranking 45th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia. According to data from USDA, over 2 million children in California experience food insecurity, with one half million children experiencing the physical pains of hunger.

Academic Performance: Research confirms the importance of breakfast in children's academic performance. Children who eat breakfast at school have higher test scores, are tardy and absent less often, have fewer visits to the school nurse, and are better behaved than those who do not eat breakfast.

Health, including obesity prevention: Children who eat breakfast at school also eat more nutritious foods (such as fruit and milk) and less fat than those who do not eat school breakfast or who have breakfast at home. In fact, girls who eat school breakfast are less likely to be overweight than those who do not.

Shouldn't parents feed their children breakfast, not schools?

Many families just don't have adequate resources to feed their children. Other families find it difficult to prepare or sit down for a nutritious family breakfast due to early morning school bus schedules, long commutes to jobs or nontraditional work hours. In addition to busy family schedules, some children have long periods of time between an early breakfast at home and a late lunch at school, making school breakfast an important tool for avoiding the distractions of an empty stomach and preventing unhealthy snacking.

What do schools serve for breakfast?

Schools must serve nutritionally balanced meals that follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The meal must include a half pint of milk and either a fruit or vegetable or fruit or vegetable juice. In addition, the meal must include one of the following:

- ✎ 2 servings of bread or cereal
- ✎ 2 servings of high protein food (meat, eggs or peanut butter)
- ✎ 1 serving of bread and 1 serving of a high protein food

Where will schools get the money for start-up costs and continuing a breakfast program?

Most schools find that adding a school breakfast program actually expands their revenue base and offsets some of the overhead costs of the lunch program. Currently, the Department of Education provides start-up funds and ongoing costs for food and staff are paid by state and federal reimbursement per meal. Schools receive the following federal reimbursement per breakfast meal:

- ? Free: \$1.20 (children living in families at or below 130% of the poverty level)
- ? Low Cost: \$0.90 (children living in families at or below 185% of the poverty level)
- ? Paid: \$0.22

The state provides additional reimbursement of \$0.13 per meal.

In addition, nutritionists and program staff from the California Department of Education are available to provide free technical assistance and guidance on how to operate a School Breakfast Program. Assistance is available on such topics as menu planning, proper food storage and preparation, record keeping and reporting, and clarifying federal and state regulations.

Aren't schools already required to serve breakfast?

No. California only requires public schools to serve children one meal a day, either breakfast or lunch. Only 8,301 schools participated in the school breakfast program during the 2002-2003 school year. This ranks California 32nd in the nation.

Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia have mandated school breakfast in all public schools, and 20 other states have passed variations of this requirement. Some school districts have implemented district-wide universal classroom breakfast programs, providing breakfast to all students free of charge. California too must utilize all the resources available to ensure that our children are healthy and well-prepared to learn at school.

Why don't some schools serve breakfast now?

Schools have identified a variety of reasons for not implementing the School Breakfast Program, such as a lack of time in the school day and inadequate facilities. However, as is clear from the accelerating growth in the number of schools and students participating in the program nationwide, schools have overcome perceived problems to operating the School Breakfast Program or found them not to be real barriers. With the array of school breakfast delivery models, each school can assess how best to implement its breakfast program.

How many kids are eating breakfast now?

In the 2002-03 school year, only 877,281 out of the more than 2.5 million eligible children ate a free or low-cost breakfast, in part because only 8,301 out of over 10,000 schools offered it. If all children eligible for free or low-cost meals had access to and participated in the School Breakfast Program, California schools would bring in close to \$340 million of federal funding over the course of a school year. Starting programs in unserved schools is a step toward that goal. Estimates of the amount federal funds that would flow to the state due to a new requirement that non-participating schools offer the breakfast program are under development.

Isn't participation at schools that already have breakfast programs the bigger problem?

Participation in the school breakfast program in California is low and it is essential for our state to do better. Less than 40% of low-income children who eat free or low-cost lunches also eat breakfast at school. Schools across the state and nation have used creative strategies to increase participation rates.

The first step in reaping the educational and health benefits of the School Breakfast Program is to make sure that all schools participate. A breakfast mandate will do just that. Moreover, states with school breakfast mandate generally have higher participation rates than those without.

The second step is to build participation by promoting various breakfast options, which allow schools to develop programs that meet their unique needs. Breakfast options include, but are not limited to, *Universal Classroom Breakfast*, *Grab and Go*, brownbag, and *Second Chance Breakfast*.

Furthermore, students and parents can be involved in choosing the food offered. Schools that survey students as to what foods they prefer, and adjust the menu accordingly, find better participation and less waste.

Given the state's fiscal crisis, is now the time to increase access to breakfast?

Yes. The School Breakfast Program is a cost-effective program that will both feed our children and bring much-needed federal resources into California. The School Breakfast Program requires a small initial investment, which will yield huge benefits. Simply increasing participation to 50% can bring in an additional \$67 million in federal funds, while having 100% participation can bring in as much as \$340 million. It would be foolish for California to turn away available entitlement federal funding that can:

- ? Reduce hunger
- ? Improve academic performance
- ? Improve health status, including obesity prevention

Having the School Breakfast Program in all our schools is critical to our children's academic success and lifelong health. Continuing to overlook the importance of breakfast will have long-term, unnecessary costs for all Californians. Our state can't afford to miss opportunities to improve academic performance, reduce classroom behavioral disruptions, and strengthen the health status for our children. Mandating breakfast in all our schools is a sound investment in our children and in our educational system.

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