

2004 State Legislative Agenda

Feeding Hungry Minds in All of California's Public Schools

AB 2200

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► Issue

Research from around the country proves that a nutritious breakfast improves 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 at school.

Currently 25 states mandate a variation of the School Breakfast Program. Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia require school breakfast in all public schools, while Florida and New York require school breakfast in all public elementary schools. Educators, parents, and politicians in these states realize the importance of good nutrition for educational success and see mandating school breakfast programs as key to achieving academic goals.

Once a school breakfast program is implemented, there are new, financially sustainable tools to increase participation. One model is universal classroom breakfast in which schools provide breakfast to all children free of charge, regardless of income. School districts in 40 states are putting universal classroom breakfast into practice. Los Angeles Unified School District recently adopted another model called second chance breakfast," which allows students to eat breakfast in late morning. As these examples demonstrate, the federal school breakfast program allows schools and states to be creative as they design a breakfast program that will best meet the needs of students and schools.

► Need

The national School Breakfast Program began as a pilot in 1966 and was made permanent in 1975. Since this time, California schools have had the opportunity to receive federal funding to serve breakfast to low-income children. While 79% of schools in California that participate in the National School Lunch Program have opted to serve breakfast, 1,400 have not—despite the strong evidence that breakfast is critical to children's academic success and that breakfast programs can be financially viable for all schools.

In California, more than 2.5 million children are eligible for free and low-cost breakfast, yet only 877,281 students participated in the school breakfast program during the 2002-2003 school year. This ranks California 32nd in the nation. If all children eligible for free and low-cost meals participated in the school breakfast program, California could bring in close to \$340 million in additional federal resources over the course of a school year.

► Request

Require a federally funded breakfast program in the public schools not currently offering breakfast.

► History

California requires schools to serve one meal a day, either breakfast or lunch. In 1999, SB 1041 was introduced to broaden the school food mandate by requiring approximately 800 schools with a significant number of low-income students to serve both breakfast and lunch. Then-Governor Davis vetoed the bill. In 2002, Governor Davis vetoed AB 2395, a watered-down breakfast bill originally targeting low-performing schools.

► Outcomes

- Increase access to school breakfast for low-income children.
- Improve performance on standardized tests, behavior, and attendance.
- Increase parent and teacher awareness of the essential role breakfast plays in meeting daily nutritional needs, maintaining a healthy diet, and promoting children's overall good health, development, and performance.
- Bring in massive amounts of federal funding into California by increasing participation.