

Frequently Asked Questions

AB 569

Assembly Member Bonnie Garcia has amended legislation, AB 569, to assess the viability of a promising solution to the school breakfast gap in our state. Here are some Frequently Asked Questions and answers about the bill. For more information, please contact Jessica Reich at 415-777-4422 x129 or George Manalo-LeClair at x103.

What would AB 569 do?

AB 569 (Garcia) would set the stage for California to take an affordable, sensible and significant step towards solving the “school breakfast gap” in our state. Approximately 1,200 schools in California currently don’t offer the school breakfast program, leaving hundreds of thousands low-income children without access to this critical nutrition support despite their eligibility and need. At the same time, more than 8,000 schools *do* offer school breakfast, a clear indication that the program is feasible and seen as academically beneficial in the full diversity of California schools. The bill would require the Department of Education to report to the Legislature (1) the number of schools currently not offering breakfast that would be eligible for the regular state and federal breakfast reimbursement *plus* a federal supplement for certain higher-need schools; (2) the cost and feasibility of implementing breakfast in those schools; and (3) the changes to California law that would be needed to require these schools to offer breakfast. The deadline for this report to be presented to the Legislature is April 2007. With this deadline, the Legislature would be able to act on the study findings during the 2007-08 session.

What is that supplemental federal reimbursement?

Federal school breakfast reimbursement is structured to encourage schools whose low-income students participate heavily in school lunch to offer breakfast. The idea is that if a lot of low-income kids need the midday meal, they’re likely to need a free or low-cost healthy breakfast, too. The incentive (known as the “Severe Need” rate) provides schools \$1.56 for each free breakfast served, instead of the usual \$1.31.

Why is the bill needed?

AB 569 would fill an information void that limited legislative action on school breakfast. Earlier this year, the breakfast expansion bill AB 1916 (Garcia) died in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, despite having no opposition on record. AB 1916 would have required all schools eligible for the extra federal reimbursement to provide breakfast, unless the school demonstrated a financial hardship from doing so; however, there was confusion about how many schools would be affected by AB 1916 and at what cost to the state. AB 569 would provide the data needed to answer these questions in a timely way, equipping the Legislature to move forward to address this serious problem next year.

Hasn't the increase in the School Breakfast Start-Up & Expansion Fund solved the breakfast gap problem?

This year's budget includes a one-time increase in the School Breakfast Start-Up & Expansion grant fund. Some have suggested that this additional money will solve the breakfast gap problem. In fact, it's an apples & oranges situation: the bill is studying whether the *highest-need schools with the most high-need students* offer breakfast, while the fund can be used for schools at which just 20% of the students are low income. Moreover, while the fund may be used to expand access to breakfast, it may also be used to increase participation, help launch the new breakfast fruit program and even support the Summer Food Program. We applaud the increase in the fund, but recognize that it is a one-time increase that doesn't target the very specific and important problem of low-income children's lack of access to school breakfast.

Why is low breakfast access a problem?

Breakfast equals brain power: research shows that eating breakfast improves test scores. Breakfast also improves the school environment by reducing problem behavior and decreasing visits to the nurse's office. Finally, emerging research suggests that eating breakfast is a healthy habit that helps prevent obesity and overweight. All California children, regardless of where they live, should have access to the benefits of breakfast. For low-income children whose family budgets are tight, breakfast at school can mean the difference between starting the day ready to learn or being distracted by hunger.

Why is the bill an “urgency” measure?

As an “urgency” measure, AB 569 would take effect immediately upon the Governor’s signature and not January 1 of next year (as is usually the case). This jumpstart would give the Department of Education more time to conduct the breakfast analysis and provide the Legislature with the results in time to act on next year.

How does this bill fit in with California’s obesity prevention strategy?

Research shows that breakfast is an effective obesity-prevention strategy—yet some 1,200 California schools don’t offer school breakfast. As a result, hundreds of thousands of low-income students are left without access to the program, which has been shown to be healthier than other breakfast options. Plus, California’s new Fresh Start Pilot Program has strengthened breakfast even further by providing additional reimbursement to expand or improve fruit and vegetable offerings. The benefits of breakfast have already been recognized by the Governor and Legislature, who approved a \$3 million increase in the School Breakfast Start-Up & Expansion Fund this year.