

Superintendent Jack O'Connell
School Meal Reimbursement Shortfall Press Event
Tuesday, December 2, 2008

- **THE RIPPLE OF THE NATION'S ECONOMIC MELTDOWN IS IMPACTING CALIFORNIA'S ECONOMY SIGNIFICANTLY AS EVIDENCED BY RECENT DECLARATIONS OF THE \$28 BILLION DEFICIT WE ARE FACING OVER THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR AND THE NEXT ONE.**
- **EDUCATION IS ALREADY COMING UNDER ATTACK AS CALLS FOR CUTS TO K-12 FUNDING ARE CIRCULATING AT THE CAPITOL.**
- **BOOKS, SCHOOL SUPPLIES, MUSIC AND ART PROGRAMS, TEACHERS AND PARAEDUCATORS COULD ALL BECOME VICTIMS OF THIS MOST RECENT FISCAL CRISIS.**
- **BUT NOW, UNFORTUNATELY, WE ARE CLOSE TO ADDING ONE MORE RESOURCE TO OUR BUDGET VICTIMS LIST: SCHOOL MEALS.**
- **THIS IS ESPECIALLY TROUBLING WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT A RECORD 770.6 MILLION CALIFORNIA SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE EATING NUTRITIOUS SCHOOL MEALS.**
- **IN FACT, SCHOOLCHILDREN ATE 28 MILLION MORE SCHOOL MEALS DURING 2007-08 THAN IN 2006-07...THIS INCREASE IS ABOUT 4 TIMES THE INCREASE WE SEE IN A TYPICAL YEAR.**
- **FURTHERMORE, WE ARE ESPECIALLY PLEASED TO SEE THAT THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS EATING A SCHOOL BREAKFAST INCREASED BY ALMOST 7 PERCENT.**
- **HOWEVER, WE RAN OUT OF STATE MONEY TO REIMBURSE SCHOOLS FOR THE MEALS THAT THEY PROVIDED IN MAY AND JUNE OF 2008, AND WE WILL RUN OUT OF MONEY AGAIN THIS FISCAL YEAR.**
- **EVEN THOUGH THE BUDGET ACT PROVIDED A COLA TO ALL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, CHILD NUTRITION DID NOT RECEIVE ANY SUCH APPROPRIATION...THIS MEANS THAT THE APPROPRIATION FOR 2007-08 DID NOT INCLUDE \$4.2 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR THE STATUTORY COLA THAT THE CDE WAS REQUIRED BY LAW TO APPLY**

TO THE MEAL REIMBURSEMENT RATE, AND THIS \$4.2 MILLION FUNDING GAP WAS CARRIED OVER INTO THE CURRENT YEAR.

- **NOT PROVIDING SUFFICIENT FUNDING FOR STUDENT MEALS MIGHT HAVE WORKED OUT IF THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING THESE MEALS HAD DECLINED, BUT, AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, WE SAW A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THESE NUMBER FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS.**
- **FOR INSTANCE:**
 - **THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN IS CAUSING MANY FAMILIES IN CALIFORNIA TO TURN TO SCHOOL MEALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN AS A WAY TO HELP STRETCH THEIR GROCERY DOLLARS;**
 - **WE'VE WORKED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF AND ACCESS TO SCHOOL MEALS;**
 - **WE'VE ENACTED SOME OF THE MOST RIGOROUS SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS IN THE COUNTRY;**
 - **WE HAVE ENCOURAGED SCHOOLS TO OPEN AND EXPAND SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS SINCE HUNGRY CHILDREN CANNOT LEARN; AND**
 - **WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED AN AWARD WINNING AUTOMATED SYSTEM WHERE STUDENTS ON FOOD STAMPS AND CALWORKS ARE AUTOMATICALLY DESIGNATED AS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE MEALS, SAVING FAMILIES AND DISTRICTS TIME AND PAPERWORK, AND INCREASING ACCESS.**
- **OUR RESPONSIBILITY IS TO ENSURE THAT ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS MEALS, BECAUSE HUNGRY CHILDREN DO NOT LEARN.**
- **I HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING AGAIN BY REQUESTING A STATE BUDGET AUGMENTATION OF AT LEAST \$31.1 MILLION (OVER THREE YEARS) TO ALLOW MY DEPARTMENT TO:**
 - **FULLY REIMBURSE SCHOOLS FOR THE MAY AND JUNE CLAIMS THAT ARE UNPAID; AND**

- **PAY FOR THE ANTICIPATED HIGHER NUMBER OF MEALS DISTRICTS WILL SERVE BOTH THIS YEAR, AND NEXT.**
- **AT A TIME WHEN DISTRICTS HAVE ALREADY ABSORBED \$3 BILLION IN CUTS AND MAY FACE AN ADDITIONAL \$2 BILLION IN CUTS IN K-12 FUNDING PROPOSED BY THE GOVERNOR, DISTRICTS COULD BE FORCED INTO MAKING SOME QUICK-FIX, HAPHAZARD DECISIONS, WHICH WILL NOT BENEFIT THEIR STUDENTS, INCLUDING:**
 - **DIPPING INTO THEIR OWN BUDGETS TO SUBSIDIZE MEALS;**
 - **DECIDING NOT TO COMPLY WITH CALIFORNIA'S NATIONALLY REKNOWNED NUTRITION STANDARDS;**
 - **OR REDUCING CAFETERIA STAFFING, WHICH CAN RESULT IN LONGER LINES AND REDUCED ACCESS.**
- **SO I WOULD LIKE TO STRONGLY URGE THE GOVERNOR AND THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO FIND REVENUES TO FULLY FUND NUTRITIOUS SCHOOL MEALS BECAUSE THEY PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING OF OUR STUDENTS.**