



Position Statement: School Breakfast Programs

The California School Nutrition Association (CSNA) supports legislative efforts to improve the well-being of the children of California. Child Nutrition Programs work as partners in the education community to provide healthy meals to all children in order to improve student health and academic achievement. It is the intent of CSNA to work to secure the best possible environment for learning, physical health and safety within the school setting.

Position Statement

It is the position of the California School Nutrition Association that participation in School Breakfast Programs has a positive impact on children's behavior and readiness to learn.

Rationale

Scientific research provides compelling evidence that under-nutrition negatively impacts behavior, school performance, and cognitive development in children.

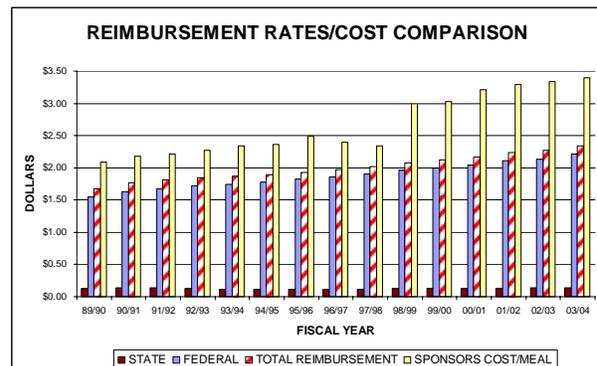
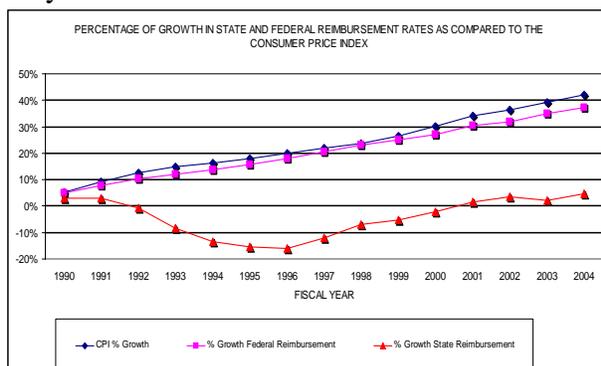
- In 2002, information was gathered from 97 inner-city students prior to the start of a Universal School Breakfast Program and again after the program had been in place for 6 months. Prior to the study, 33% of all study children were classified as being at nutritional risk. Six months after the start of the free school breakfast programs, students who decreased their nutritional risk showed significantly greater: improvements in attendance and school breakfast participation, decreases in hunger, and improvements in math grades and behavior than children who did not decrease their nutritional risk¹.
- The State of Minnesota Breakfast Study found that students who ate breakfasts before starting school had a general increase in math grades and reading scores, increased student attention, reduced nurse visits, and improved student behavior².
- Researchers at Harvard Medical/Massachusetts General hospital in Boston found that hungry children are more likely to have behavioral and academic problems than children who get enough to eat. At school, hungry children had more problems with irritability, anxiety and aggression, as well as more absences and tardiness³.
- The Tufts University Statement on the Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children states that "recent research provides compelling evidence that under-nutrition impacts the behavior of children, their school performance, and their overall cognitive development⁴."
- The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study I (SNDA-1) showed that School Breakfast Program Meals are nutritionally superior to other breakfasts, including breakfasts at home, on many key nutrients⁵.

- A 1995 literature review published by the American Dietetic Association states that “Breakfast contributes to the quality and quantity of a person’s daily intake. For children in particular, breakfast adds substantively to their total energy, protein, carbohydrate, and micronutrient intake and increases the likelihood of meeting nutrient requirements. In populations where children are nutritionally at risk, the availability of breakfast (eg, school feeding) may make it possible for a child to be well nourished over the long term and may prevent or reverse nutrient (eg, iron) deficiencies that affect cognition⁶”.
- In a 1998 study in three inter-city schools in Philadelphia and Baltimore that introduced universally free breakfast programs, researchers found that students who started eating significantly more breakfast (at least a 20% increase) were doing better at school, particularly in mathematics⁷.
- In 1999, the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion published data from the 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) assessing that children who ate breakfast had a statistically significantly better overall diet. Those children who consumed breakfast at school had an even better overall diet than those who ate breakfast elsewhere⁸.
- The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA-1) completed in 1992 suggested that the availability of the School Breakfast Program does not affect whether a student eats breakfast⁸. However, the Bogalusa Heart Study provides evidence to the contrary¹⁰.

Program Barriers

- *Funding*

Comparing the funding received for school meals to the cost of living over the past ten years shows that, while federal funding increases have kept up with the cost of living, state funding has fallen short. A lack of increase in funding causes schools to absorb the extra cost of providing meals to students. The cost to schools has more than doubled over the past ten years¹⁰.



- *Lack of Program Accessibility*

Many children are not on campus when school breakfast is served, limiting the availability of the program to all students.

- *Negative financial impact to schools*

Low program participation will result in expenses that exceed revenues. Eligibility for school meal programs does not guarantee that students will take advantage of the program opportunity. Lack of adequate revenue will cause an economic hardship for schools.

- *Lack of adequate time for pupils to eat*

Many students ride school busses or use public transportation to travel to school in the morning, and may not arrive on campus in time to participate in the School Breakfast Program.

- *Lack of adequate food service facilities, equipment and supervision*
Many schools have inadequate facilities to prepare and serve meals. Adequate supervision of children participating in meal programs is essential for student safety.

California Statistics of Use

In the 2005-06 school year, **(need this number)** California school sites served over 188 million breakfasts. Over the past five years, the number of breakfasts served has increased by 13.4 percent¹¹.

Description of School Breakfast Programs

The School Breakfast Program was authorized by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 as a pilot program and provides federal funds to schools and residential child care institutions to offer nutritious meals to students. Children from households with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level receive meals at reduced rates; students from households with incomes 130 percent of poverty and below receive meals free. The School Breakfast Program is administered by the Child Nutrition Division of the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the national level. Most of the support USDA provides to schools for the School Breakfast Program comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each breakfast served. Schools may qualify for higher “severe need” reimbursements if a specified percentage of their lunches are served free or at reduced price. Schools may charge no more than 30 cents for a reduced-price breakfast. Schools set their own prices for breakfasts served to students who pay the full meal price, though schools must operate their meal services as a non-profit program¹². In California, as in most states, the state Department of Education administers the program, and provides an additional reimbursement rate for free and reduced-price meals only in addition to administrative support and oversight.

School breakfasts are required to conform to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* which recommends no more than 30 percent calories from fat and 10 percent or less saturated fat. In addition, breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C and calories for the appropriate age group served.

Recent California Legislation Related to Breakfast

AB569 (Garcia-2006) School Meals: School Breakfast Study

This bill requires the California Department of Education to conduct a study by March 31, 2007, relating to the feasibility of requiring schools that meet the qualifications for the federal severe need reimbursement to offer breakfast. The results of the study must be reported to the Legislature by April 30, 2007. The bill appropriated \$170,000 to fund the study.

AB1916 (Garcia-2006) Pupil Nutrition: School Meals

This bill would have required each schoolsite that meets the qualifications for federal severe need reimbursement to offer breakfast beginning with the 2007-08 school year. Held in assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB281 (Maldonado-2006) California Fresh Start Pilot Program

This bill established the California Fresh Start Program which is a voluntary program that requires an additional serving of fruits and vegetables to be served as part of the School Breakfast Program. Public school districts and charter schools may apply for reimbursement of ten cents (\$0.10) per breakfast meal, to be paid in quarterly installments.

AB2395 (Goldberg-2002) School Breakfast Program

The Governor vetoed AB2395 which would have required schools meeting specified criteria, including low API scores and 20% or more enrolled needy students to hold a public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to discuss items relating to offering breakfast to their students through the federal School Breakfast Program. In his veto message, the governor stated his strong support for breakfast programs but clearly asserted that schools should provide breakfast programs based on the need of their students, not academic performance measures.

SB 1041 (Vasconcellos-1999) School Nutrition

The governor vetoed SB1041 which would have required all schools in which at least 75 students qualified for free or reduced price meals to offer a school breakfast program during or before the 2001-02 school year, to the extent funds were available. In the governor's veto message, he stated that the decision to offer breakfast programs should be based on local needs and priorities.

Conclusion

Children who eat breakfast, regardless of the source – home or school, have better behavior and are more ready to learn at school. The literature clearly shows that children who consume breakfast have superior overall diets, are more likely to pay attention in class, visit the school nurse less often, have better test scores, as well as less absences and tardiness. School Breakfast Program meals are nutritionally superior to other breakfasts, but there are mixed reports as to whether the availability of breakfast at school affects whether a student eats breakfast or not.

A number of barriers can prevent schools from offering breakfast programs including inadequate funding, lack of program accessibility, lack of adequate time for pupils to eat, and the unavailability of adequate food service facilities, equipment and supervision. Therefore, schools must choose at the local level whether or not to provide breakfast programs after carefully considering all aspects of program implementation.

The California School Nutrition Association believes that participation in the School Breakfast Program has a positive impact on children's behavior and readiness to learn, therefore, participation in School Breakfast Programs should be encouraged.

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