

Frequently Asked Questions

Improving Nutrition in Child Care – AB 627 (Brownley)

Why should we care about nutrition and activity in child care?

Nearly one in four children under the age of five is overweight or obese. These children are at great risk of developing a number of chronic diseases later in life, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and stroke. In addition, overweight kids are more likely to grow up to be overweight or obese teens and adults. Preventing obesity is the best, if not the only, means to combat the problem.

California has taken some important steps to combat obesity in schools, but with so many kids overweight before they even get to school, we must act at younger ages. Child care represents a great opportunity to do this. Early childhood is when kids' taste preferences and habits form. We can take steps to ensure that they form healthy habits for life.

Recent research in CA demonstrates that standards are needed. Some examples of the foods with poor nutritional quality that are commonly served are fried potatoes, whole milk, fruits canned in syrup, and processed foods. These all contain unnecessary fats, sugars, and salt. Simple, inexpensive alternatives exist for these foods and they should be promoted and encouraged.

What are the existing standards for nutrition and activity in licensed child care?

Currently, licensing standards for nutrition quality and activity are minimal. Licensed child care centers must follow the Child and Adult Care Food Program meal pattern, which means that foods must be served from certain basic food groups (milk, fruits/vegetables, grains/breads, and meat/meat alternates.) However, the standards are silent on nutritional quality, nor do they establish minimum amounts of activity time nor do they limit screen time.

Won't adding more licensing requirements to child care providers make things more difficult for them and discourage them from seeking licensure?

Excessive and onerous licensing requirements are certainly a concern. However, the nutrition and activity standards proposed in this legislation are simple, basic, and easy to implement. Recent research demonstrates that some child care providers already have adopted these practices. This legislation would ensure that all licensed child care adopts these best practices. In addition, this legislation would not result in penalties or fines for providers.

We hear that monitoring in licensing is already problematic. Won't these new standards burden the already stressed monitoring requirements? How will these new standards be monitored and enforced?

The proposed legislation does not call for more frequent monitoring or enforcement visits. Rather, monitors would simply have a few additional items to track on their existing visits.

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What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal nutrition program that is administered in California by the California Department of Education. The program is largely federally funded with a small reimbursement provided by the State of California. CACFP provides reimbursement to child care providers for the meals and snacks they serve that comply with the meal pattern described above.

I heard the Child and Adult Care Food Program is already a burden to run. Why should we make it even harder by requiring stronger nutrition standards?

Recent research conducted in California demonstrates that meals and snacks served by child care settings on CACFP are of a higher quality than those served by child care sites not on CACFP. However, even those foods and beverages served through CACFP could be of a higher nutritional quality. Because the CACFP meal pattern was devised in the 1960s before obesity prevention was a pressing concern, many foods and beverages are allowable even though they are of low or little nutritional value.

While some CACFP sponsors and providers cite problems with the program, their complaints largely revolve around excessive paperwork and insufficient reimbursement. The stronger nutrition standards proposed in this legislation would go into effect only upon the appropriation of a higher reimbursement. Moreover, these standards were formulated by a stakeholder group including representatives from the CACFP community. CACFP is being reauthorized federally in 2009, and advocates are encouraging Congress to reduce the paperwork and increase the reimbursement.

In addition, CACFP sites affected by this legislation would likely be volunteering to participate in a pilot program for which they will be reimbursed.

The state is facing a massive budget problem. Why should we distract the Legislature's time with this?

In addition to the fact that this bill does not call for higher state spending, acting now to prevent obesity is a strategy that can save the state massive costs in the long run. The economic consequences of overweight and obesity manifest themselves in higher state spending on health care costs as well as diminished economic productivity of the labor force due to poor health. A 2005 report found that physical inactivity, obesity, and overweight cost California over \$20 billion in medical care expenses, workers' compensation, and lost productivity.

The changes proposed in this legislation relating to licensing standards would not require additional state expenditure. Also, the CACFP pilot program would be funded by federal money. Moreover, these pilot program provisions would only go into effect should the Superintendent of Public Instruction determine that sufficient non-General Fund dollars exist to fund the pilots.

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What about the role of nutrition education and training?

Nutrition education and training are undeniably important. While not explicitly addressed in this legislation, many child nutrition advocates are working on projects throughout the state to promote nutrition education and training to providers, parents, and children in order to encourage that healthy eating and active lifestyles become a norm. Successful implementation of AB 627 includes furthering those efforts; this bill ensures that the nutrition education and training that occurs can promote a set of sound, data-driven standards.