

AB 292 (Santiago) Time to Eat: Lunchtime Supports Learning

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Opportunity

School lunch is a critical resource that helps students learn, grow and achieve. Over 6 million California students can benefit from the school lunch program. For many students, school lunch may be the most nutritious meal of the day. However, millions of students miss out on the benefits of school lunch every day, often because they don't have enough time to eat. Time pressures at lunch can result in food waste and poor nutrition. Many factors impact students' time to eat:

- Busy lunch periods with too many students to serve in the allotted time
- Long lines from insufficient points of service for school meals
- Scheduling recess after lunch, causing young students to rush through their meal to play
- School schedules and activities that conflict with the lunch period

California has the opportunity to more effectively spend critical state and federal resources that support school lunches by ensuring students have time to eat during the school day.

Action

- ➔ CFPA requests the legislature to ensure that all students have time to eat lunch at school.

Why This Matters

The School Lunch Program is an essential component of the school day. Lunch periods provide a much-needed break for students to rest and refuel their bodies. California's implementation of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act has improved the foods served in schools, and districts are working hard to make school lunches more healthful and appealing to students. These efforts are hindered when students don't have enough time to eat during their lunch period!

The California Department of Education recommends that students have 20 minutes to eat after receiving their lunch, but the majority of schools are not meeting that recommendation. State labor law ensures workers an adequate meal break during the workday, while students have no guarantee.

California Students

- Mandated by law to attend school from age 6-18
- No required lunch break or meal time guarantee

California Workers

- Voluntary employment
- State law provides a minimum 30-minute, uninterrupted meal break for 5+ hour shifts

California students are missing out on school lunch because they aren't given enough time to eat. The State should ensure that schools fulfill their responsibility to meet students' most basic needs.