

# Los Angeles Times

## Most Californians support serving breakfast to students during school day

*Teresa Watanabe*

**California voters strongly support serving breakfast to students during the school day, with most linking a nutritious morning meal to improved academic achievement, according to a new statewide poll.**

The Field Poll found that two-thirds of California registered voters surveyed supported a proposal to require campuses to serve breakfast during class hours rather than before, as most schools currently do. Three-fourths said breakfast would improve academic performance and favored using existing federal funds to pay for the meals.

Support was strong across age, gender, ethnicity and geography in the telephone poll of 1,251 registered voters.

“Californians see breakfast as essential to a child’s ability to learn in school,” Mark DiCamillo, senior vice president of the Field Research Corp., said in a statement. “What’s striking in this poll is the magnitude of voter support for schools to proactively offer all kids an opportunity to eat breakfast, and this includes a breakfast after the bell requirement.”

Los Angeles Unified launched a “breakfast in the classroom” program in 2011 and now serves 340,000 students daily at 614 elementary, middle and high schools.

The initial rollout prompted hundreds of complaints from teachers about an increase in vermin, food spills, wasted class time and student rejection of the food. In a 2013 United Teacher Los Angeles survey, 88% of 729 educators said they wanted to shift the program from their classrooms to the cafeteria.

Those concerns have not been entirely addressed, according to union spokeswoman Suzanne Spurgeon. But at Stanley Mosk Elementary in the northwest San Fernando Valley, the program has been a huge success,

said Principal Barbara Friedrich. She said up to 90% of the schools’ 562 students eat the classroom breakfast every day, compared to far lower participation when the meal was served before school or during the first recess. She credited the program with increasing student focus and sharply reducing complaints of headaches and stomachaches from as many as 20 a day to nearly none today.

Friedrich said it takes only about 15 minutes to get through breakfast and that teachers direct students to use the time productively by watching educational videos, write in journals or work on other assignments while eating. Food not consumed is shared at the school’s parent center, reducing waste, and vermin has not been a problem since trash-filled bags are removed and replaced daily, she said.

Even the menu has improved over last year, she said. Responding to parent and student requests, the district has added more egg, yogurt and other protein offerings and cut back on muffins and other products heavy on carbohydrates and sugar, according to Laura Benavidez, the district’s deputy director of food services. (Still, Friedrich said the district’s famous coffee cake is still served weekly and is by far the most popular item.)

“At Stanley Mosk, the program works,” Friedrich said. “It’s been wonderful.”

Two state legislators have introduced a bill that would require lower-income schools to serve breakfast. Campuses with at least 60% of students eligible for federally subsidized meals would be required to offer breakfast after the school day begins under AB 1240 by Assemblyman Rob Bonta (D-Oakland) and Tony Thurmond (D-Richmond).

The bill is sponsored by the California Food Policy Advocates, an Oakland-based nonprofit that also sponsored the four Field Poll questions on breakfast.